

EXODUS 21:12-27 (KEEPING VIOLENCE IN CHECK)

Today, we will continue on with the Law of Moses and the many fine points which it details. They were given to a people to keep them as a properly functioning society. But of course such laws are only as good as the obedience of the people. And the obedience of the people can only be expected *if* the punishments for infractions are detailed and executed.

And so we will see what was expected of Israel concerning some things which may still apply today and some things which we think might not only be outdated, but even barbarous. But such is not the case. In the end, I think you will see the logic behind each precept that we examine.

Text Verse: "But we know that the law *is* good if one uses it lawfully, ⁹ knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for *the* lawless and insubordinate, for *the* ungodly and for sinners, for *the* unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, ¹⁰ for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine, ¹¹ according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to my trust." 1 Timothy 1:8-11

Paul says the law is good *if* one uses it lawfully. And in fact, it is *only* good if it is used in this way. The trouble with us is that we often use it in unintended ways - be it the Law of Moses or the law of our land. When this occurs, societal breakdown is inevitable.

Let us remember this and attempt to use common sense as we evaluate the Bible and as we apply it to our own lives in the place where we live and under the government which we are obligated to. Everything in context... just as the Bible would teach us.

It's all to be found in His superior word. And so let's turn to that precious word once again and... May God speak to us through His word today and may His glorious name ever be praised.

I. Punishable by Death (verses 12-17)

¹² "He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death.

The law concerning violence committed to another follows directly after the law concerning slaves. This is not haphazardly stuck here, but intent is seen in this placement. As Keil notes -

"Still higher than personal liberty, however, is life itself, the right of existence and personality; and the infliction of injury upon this was not only prohibited, but to be followed by punishment corresponding to the crime."

And, as we will see, there is a difference in how a slave is treated and how a free man is treated. Thus, the law of the slave from the previous section is further refined here in this section concerning violence to another.

For now though, the section begins with just a general statement concerning the striking of another which leads to death. From it, various distinctions will be made between murder, manslaughter, etc., which will all be detailed.

There are two main verses concerning killing another which have already been seen in the Bible's pages. The first came just after the flood of Noah. In Genesis 9, we read these words which make a distinction between the animal life and the human life which is found in the world -

"So God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them: 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. ² And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be on every beast of the earth, on every bird of the air, on all that move *on* the earth, and on all the fish of the sea. They are given into your hand.

³ Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs. ⁴ But you shall not eat flesh with its life, *that is*, its blood. ⁵ Surely for your lifeblood I will demand *a reckoning*; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From the hand of every man's brother I will require the life of man.

⁶ 'Whoever sheds man's blood,
By man his blood shall be shed;
For in the image of God
He made man.

⁷ And as for you, be fruitful and multiply;
Bring forth abundantly in the earth
And multiply in it.'"

What is implied in Genesis 9 is that the killing of an animal is not murder. Words concerning the care of animals are found within the Bible, but the killing of animals cannot be considered murder. Unfortunately, in religions of the world, and in the minds of even many weak or uninformed Christians, confusion over this exists.

It is for the care of man that the Bible's attention is directed. And so, once again in Exodus 20, we read these words -

"You shall not murder." Exodus 20:13

That is explicit, and yet it leaves as much unsaid as it reveals. What the definition of murder is still requires more analysis from the Bible, including the verses of

today's passage. Further, though the command is given, it doesn't detail any penalties for violating the command.

Laws which are not enforced by penalties are rather pointless. They remain inoperative because there is no accountability for a violation of the law. All we need to do is look at obama's America today and this is more than evident. Only anarchy can result. Now the penalty for murder is given - the murderer shall be put to death. The reason for this is explicitly stated in Numbers 35 -

"So you shall not pollute the land where you *are*; for blood defiles the land, and no atonement can be made for the land, for the blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it." Numbers 35:33

Murder is bloodshed and bloodshed defiles the land. Without taking the life of the offender, there is no atonement for the bloodshed and when there is no atonement, then the Lord will respond in judgment. What is implied is that this is an eternal standard of God. This means that when we fail to punish capital crimes in our nations, even today, we heap up guilt upon ourselves.

But Numbers 35 gives more details concerning the murderer -

"Whoever kills a person, the murderer shall be put to death on the testimony of witnesses; but one witness is not *sufficient* testimony against a person for the death *penalty*.³¹ Moreover you shall take no ransom for the life of a murderer who *is* guilty of death, but he shall surely be put to death." Numbers 35:30, 31

More than one witness is required in order to find a sentence of guilt concerning murder, and if a person is found guilty of murder, no amount of ransom is sufficient to redeem the offender from the penalty of death. His life is forfeit. As

you can see, there are protections and there are prohibitions associated with the crime.

¹³ However, if he did not lie in wait,

It would be inappropriate to have the same punishments for different levels of homicide. The willful murder of another bears one type of penalty, the unintentional killing of another is to be handled in another way.

The word for "lie in wait" here is *tsadah*. It is used for the first of just three times in the Bible and this is exactly what it means. It means that someone willfully and with preplanning came to destroy another person.

^{13 (con't)} but God delivered *him* into his hand,

In contrast to a purposeful action, it says *v'ha'elohim innah l'yadow* - "but the God allowed into his hand." It is an interesting set of words. First, there is an article in front of "God." This is speaking of the One true God who has divinely purposed all things.

The article is important because *elohim* can mean more than just God. *Elohim* can be judges or spirits or even false gods. *Ha'elohim* is "the God." He is the One who has predestined all things according to His will. In this case, the tragedy was allowed to occur by Him for His own sovereign reasons.

The rare word translated as "deliver" is *anah*. It is the first of just six times it will be used and it means "to befall." The Creator God allowed the person to die at the hands of another. The implication is that this *was a part* of his purposes from creation itself.

¹³ (con't) **then I will appoint for you a place where he may flee.**

The one guilty of unintentional manslaughter will have a place appointed to where he may flee. Such a place is known as a city of refuge, and the law concerning it is detailed in Numbers 35:9-28.

These cities of refuge were placed throughout Israel so that the offender could flee quickly to such a city and have his life spared. Because he had killed, even though unintentionally, the near kin of the deceased had the right, and even the obligation to kill him based on Genesis 9.

However, if the offender were to reach the city of refuge, the near kin had no right to take his life. If at anytime he left the city of refuge, the near kin could pursue him and take him. However, at the death of the high priest of Israel, all cases of manslaughter were forgiven and the near kin no longer had a right to kill the offender. He instead could return to his home without fear.

What a picture of Christ, our true High Priest, who removes our guilt through His death! It is a lesson that only through death can the guilt of the shedding of blood be atoned. Thank God for Jesus!

¹⁴ **“But if a man acts with premeditation against his neighbor,**

This verse stands in contrast to the previous one. Instead of not lying in wait in order to kill, this person acts with premeditation. The word is *zud* and means arrogantly, or proudly, or rebelliously. *Zud* is the word which describes the sound of boiling (*zud zud zud*) and so it is a metaphor for being boiled up and thus prideful. Instead of the previous example of innocent intent, this example is one of true guilt.

14 (cont't) **to kill him by treachery,**

The word for "treachery" is *ormah*. This is its first of only five uses in the Bible. It indicates craftiness or prudence and comes from the verb *arom* which means "to act craftily." This then is set in contrast to the words of verse 13 which said, "...but God delivered him into his hand."

14 (cont't) **you shall take him from My altar, that he may die.**

The altar is the place of mercy. When one first came into the tabernacle, they would come to the altar of burnt sacrifice. The altar is where sins were expiated, where mercy was granted, and from which a propitious relationship was re-established with God. Charles Ellicott, citing several ancient sources, says that -

"In most parts of the ancient world a scruple was felt about putting criminals to death when once they had taken sanctuary, and those who did so were regarded as accursed ... The Mosaic Law regarded this scruple as a superstition, and refused to sanction it." Charles Ellicott

A person who had willfully and intentionally killed another was not to find mercy, even at this place of mercy. Thus this is the antithesis of the words of verse 13 which said, "... then I will appoint for you a place where he may flee."

If the place where restoration with God was not available, then there would be *no other place* that he could flee to. He was to be taken from the altar and put to death. To understand this from an actual account in the Bible, we will take a brief diversion and go to the account of Joab, the commander of David's armies to see this precept come to life.

In 1 Kings 2:5 & 6, David gave Solomon his final instructions before his death. This included a charge to bring the misdeeds of Joab back upon his own head -

"Moreover you know also what Joab the son of Zeruiah did to me, *and* what he did to the two commanders of the armies of Israel, to Abner the son of Ner and Amasa the son of Jether, whom he killed. And he shed the blood of war in peacetime, and put the blood of war on his belt that *was* around his waist, and on his sandals that *were* on his feet. ⁶ Therefore do according to your wisdom, and do not let his gray hair go down to the grave in peace."

The killing of Abner and Amasa were exactly what this verse in Exodus is describing. He acted on his own accord, and in a prideful manner against David's orders, *zud zud zud*. He used the death of his own brother, Asahel, as a pretext for killing these two men. Because of his actions which brought a stain on David's name, David so charged Solomon. After David's death, Solomon took the requested action against Joab -

"Then news came to Joab, for Joab had defected to Adonijah, though he had not defected to Absalom. So Joab fled to the tabernacle of the LORD, and took hold of the horns of the altar. ²⁹ And King Solomon was told, 'Joab has fled to the tabernacle of the LORD; there *he is*, by the altar.' Then Solomon sent Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, saying, 'Go, strike him down.'
³⁰ So Benaiah went to the tabernacle of the LORD, and said to him, 'Thus says the king, 'Come out!'

And he said, 'No, but I will die here.' And Benaiah brought back word to the king, saying, "Thus said Joab, and thus he answered me."

³¹ Then the king said to him, 'Do as he has said, and strike him down and bury him, that you may take away from me and from the house of my father the innocent blood which Joab shed. ³² So the LORD will return his blood on his head, because he struck down two men more righteous and

better than he, and killed them with the sword—Abner the son of Ner, the commander of the army of Israel, and Amasa the son of Jether, the commander of the army of Judah—though my father David did not know *it*.³³ Their blood shall therefore return upon the head of Joab and upon the head of his descendants forever. But upon David and his descendants, upon his house and his throne, there shall be peace forever from the LORD.'

³⁴ So Benaiah the son of Jehoiada went up and struck and killed him; and he was buried in his own house in the wilderness. ³⁵ The king put Benaiah the son of Jehoiada in his place over the army, and the king put Zadok the priest in the place of Abiathar." 1 Kings 2:28-35

Joab died without mercy at the horns of the altar for the willful murder of innocent men - *zud zud zud*. Thus, the command of Exodus 21:14 was fulfilled in him with the exception of first removing him from the altar. As the Geneva Bible states -

"The holiness of the place should not defend the murderer." Geneva

¹⁵ "And he who strikes his father or his mother shall surely be put to death.

Some scholars try to define this striking as one that *leads* to the death of the parents. This is incorrect. When death is associated with such an action, it is explicitly stated. This command can mean nothing less than a willful strike against the parents is a capital crime, regardless if they are seriously harmed, or die, or not.

In fact, Keil notes that, "The murder of parents is not mentioned at all, as not likely to occur and hardly conceivable." Such an act would be regarded as so vile

that it is left out of Scripture entirely. The reason for the harshness of this command is that, "The parents are God's vicegerents for the children" (Lange).

As they have been placed in this position, an attack against them is an implicit attack against God who has placed them there.

¹⁶ "He who kidnaps a man and sells him, or if he is found in his hand, shall surely be put to death.

This law is general in nature and appears to apply to any kidnapping of a man. However, in Deuteronomy 24, it is said to apply explicitly to fellow Israelites -

"If a man is found kidnapping any of his brethren of the children of Israel, and mistreats him or sells him, then that kidnapper shall die; and you shall put away the evil from among you." Deuteronomy 24:7

In this verse in Deuteronomy, instead of a "man" being kidnapped, it says *nephesh*, or soul. Thus it is inclusive of women. Therefore, the kidnapping of any man is explicitly forbidden in all circumstances while the kidnapping of any male or female Israelite is forbidden.

Paul in 1 Timothy 1, brings this law back to mind without regard to Jew or Gentile. Therefore, it appears that the intent is that kidnapping was not to be condoned in any form. However, in the kidnapping of an Israelite and mistreating them or selling them off, an especially grievous thing would occur.

The Israelites were free people unless they were sold into slavery. To force them into slavery without regard to the law would then deprive them of their freedoms which the law itself gave to them.

¹⁷ "And he who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death.

Cursing one's parents is placed on the same level as striking a parent because it stems from the same attitude of the heart. God's appointed authority and His personal majesty are violated when the parents are violated. He ordained the parents of the child and therefore He is cursed implicitly in the curse. Thus it is seen in the Bible that the cursing of parents and blaspheme against God are the two sins of the tongue which are to be punished with death -

"Then you shall speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'Whoever curses his God shall bear his sin. ¹⁶ And whoever blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall certainly stone him, the stranger as well as him who is born in the land. When he blasphemes the name *of the LORD*, he shall be put to death.'" Leviticus 24:15, 16

The Lord's care of the honoring of the parents is so prominent, that in the book of Proverbs, we read these ominous words -

"Whoever curses his father or his mother,
His lamp will be put out in deep darkness." Proverbs 20:20

*Man is filled with violent tendencies
And when acted upon he must be corrected
Whether through punishment or tender mercies
If he isn't restrained, all of society is affected*

*To kill another is to deprive him of his life
A son will be left fatherless when his dad is killed
A woman who loses her husband is no longer a wife*

When someone takes him away; when his blood is spilled

And so we are given laws in order to restrain

And punishments to ensure the laws we do obey

With these measures peace in society we maintain

And the people are free to enjoy life from day to day

II. When Punishment is Due (verses 18-21)

¹⁸ “If men contend with each other, and one strikes the other with a stone or with *his* fist,

People fight as people do. In this verse, there is no sense of premeditation like there was in verse 14. There was simply a quarrel which resulted in a fight. The term "with a stone or with *his* fist" is intended to show this. A person always has a fist available and stones are likewise everywhere.

Having a knife or some other weapon could imply premeditation (*zud zud zud*), but the fist or a stone are not considered things you would use if you had evil intent in advance. And so, unless death resulted, which would then be considered murder under any circumstances, another avenue would be pursued in executing justice.

The word "fist" here is used in a surprisingly sparse manner in the Bible. It is *egroph* and this is the first of but two times it will be seen. The other is in Isaiah 58:4.

18 (con't) and he does not die but is confined to *his* bed,

There is a reason for this specificity. The law required an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. However, in this case, such a law was neither practical nor feasible. *Practically*, it would serve no useful purpose for the offended person.

Feasibly, it could not be guaranteed that an in-kind punishment would result. To punch the offender or crack him over the head with a stone could kill him. Thus the punishment would not fit the crime. Instead it would be greater than the offense.

Or, instead of being confined to his bed, he may only be knocked out for 10 minutes and wake up with a headache. Thus the punishment would be less than the offense.

19 if he rises again and walks about outside with his staff,

A second damage is recorded. The first is being confined to the bed; this is rising but needing a staff. The word for staff is *mish'edah*. This is its first of 12 uses in the Bible, the most famous certainly being the comforting staff of the 23rd Psalm. It is a literal staff which he must use to support himself, but despite this...

19 (con't) then he who struck *him* shall be acquitted.

What this means is that he would be acquitted of *blood guilt*. The man may die sometime afterwards, be it soon or in many years, but the bloodshed was not to be imputed to him. He had healed sufficiently to prove that any *later* death was not connected to the incident. In such a case, justice would be served in another way...

¹⁹ (con't) **He shall only pay *for* the loss of his time, and shall provide *for him* to be thoroughly healed.**

This was such a noble idea that since it was prescribed within the law of Israel, it has spread out to many other societies. A society does not benefit from the death of its people, and so rather than executing a citizen for such a crime, but to ensure that he is restrained in the future and that the offended party is taken care of, this marvelous provision was commanded.

²⁰ **“And if a man beats his male or female servant with a rod, so that he dies under his hand, he shall surely be punished.**

This verse, on the surface, and to our modern sensibilities, may seem harsh or even inappropriate, but it is actually a protection for the slave which had not been seen before and continued to not be seen in the ancient world.

According to the Dictionary of Roman and Greek Antiquities, for the slaves in Rome, "the master could treat the slave as he pleased, could sell him, punish him, and put him to death." However, this was not the case in the Hebrew society.

First, the beating is noted for male and female alike. Both sexes were expected to be treated with equal fairness. Secondly, the word for "rod" here is not the same as the previous verse. It is *shevet*. This is literally a stick used for punishing, writing, fighting, ruling, walking, and so on. In this context, it is what is used for discipline. In the proverbs, it is used in exactly this manner -

"He who spares his **rod** hates his son,
But he who loves him disciplines him promptly." Proverbs 13:24

The striking of a slave with such a rod was used for correction. In fact, a rebellious slave could be corrected no other way. Therefore, if a slave were to die from such punishment, it wasn't handled as a case of murder. The punishment is not specified, but if death were mandated, it would have said that death was due. It does not.

The intent of a master to kill his slave could not be readily assumed, because there was a monetary value associated with such a slave. It would be contrary to assume that a slave owner intended to kill his slave and thus destroy his own wealth. Therefore, the law sided with the slave owner. Having said this, the law here will be defined further in Leviticus and it will show that Hebrews were to be exempt from such harsh service -

"And if *one of your brethren who dwells* by you becomes poor, and sells himself to you, you shall not compel him to serve as a slave. ⁴⁰ As a hired servant *and* a sojourner he shall be with you, *and* shall serve you until the Year of Jubilee. ⁴¹ And *then* he shall depart from you—he and his children with him—and shall return to his own family. He shall return to the possession of his fathers. ⁴² For they *are* My servants, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as slaves. ⁴³ You shall not rule over him with rigor, but you shall fear your God. ⁴⁴ And as for your male and female slaves whom you may have—from the nations that are around you, from them you may buy male and female slaves. ⁴⁵ Moreover you may buy the children of the strangers who dwell among you, and their families who are with you, which they beget in your land; and they shall become your property. ⁴⁶ And you may take them as an inheritance for your children after you, to inherit *them as* a possession; they shall be your permanent slaves. But regarding your brethren, the children of Israel, you shall not rule over one another with rigor." Leviticus 25:39-46

²¹ Notwithstanding, if he remains alive a day or two, he shall not be punished; for he *is* his property.

The slave is the property of the owner. If his slave needed a beating in order to become submissive, even if that meant lost productivity, then the punishment was to be the loss of the productivity for the owner, and a painful lesson for the slave.

The word for "property" here is *keseph*. It literally means "silver" and thus implicitly "money." The owner's wealth is tied up in the slave and therefore, the slave rights are tied up in the rod of the owner; they go no further unless death results.

In all, the laws given here are not only fair and just, they are exceptional for a world which had no such prescriptions before. They protected the rights of both master and slave with fairness while maintaining human dignity and established lines of authority.

How often have we hurt another without evil intent?

A sudden angry burst which sets our soul on fire

And we lash out with our fists, until our rage is spent

We live our lives walking on such a tightened wire

The law is good, for it reminds us to keep our cool

Without it, many would be unrestrained in society

But even the law is rejected by many a fool

And they act towards their fellow man with great impropriety

*For them, punishment is necessary, this is certain
For some it might be forty lashes or five years in jail
But for others it might be time to draw the in the curtain
And then to put the top on the box and secure it with the final nail*

III. Justice in the Face of Harm (verses 22-27)

²² “If men fight, and hurt a woman with child, so that she gives birth prematurely, yet no harm follows, he shall surely be punished accordingly as the woman’s husband imposes on him; and he shall pay as the judges *determine*.”

This is one of the most important verses in the Bible for understanding the nature of the unborn. In our world today, almost no consideration is given to the rights of the unborn, and those that are given are both convoluted and often manipulated.

Within just the past few weeks, the supreme court of New York determined that an unborn child has no rights at all because the law doesn't consider them as people. Their law may not, but God's law does, explicitly.

Of first note is that the woman is said to be with child. The word is *harah* and it means exactly that, she has conceived. The attention is given to the fact that she has a baby in her womb, not to her. She is already alive and protected by the laws of Israel. The focus is on the unborn.

Secondly, it notes that the woman is hurt and gives birth prematurely. Again, the focus is not on the woman, but on the child. What will happen to the child?

The term "yet no harm follows" is speaking of the child in the womb, not the mother who bears the child. This is obvious on the surface because if it was concerning the wife, it would be superfluous to have mentioned the fact that she was pregnant.

The word for prematurely is *yeladeha*. The word *yeled* means "child" here - whether born or unborn. No distinction is made between the two. But the word is plural *yeladeha* or "children." And thus it is an indication of indefiniteness.

Could there be more than one child? If so, then the death of *either or both* carries the same offense. Thus it cannot be speaking of the woman, but of the unborn.

To add to the emphasis here, three words have to be noted. The word "harm" is *ason*. This verse and the next have the last two of five times it will be seen in the Bible. Then there is the word "punished" which is *anash*. In this verse are the first two of nine times it will be used in the Bible.

And finally there is the word for "judges" which is *palil*. This is a rare and poetic term used for the first of just three times. But as others note, this word doesn't make sense because the fine was imposed by the husband. Unless we are being told that judges must arbitrate the claim.

However, the Greek Old Testament doesn't mention judges. It just says that he shall give by means of what is fit. Therefore, it is more probable that instead of the Hebrew word for judges, the word for untimely birth, which is very similar, is what is being referred to.

As Jewish Rabbinical sentiment unfortunately and incorrectly has been that this harm is only referring to the woman and not the unborn, it makes all the sense in

the world that they would find the word judges more satisfactory than the word for "untimely birth."

Regardless of this final word, the context and intent is clear. The child in the womb is considered a human and the focus is on the harm it receives. Thus verse 23 provides the penalty when harm follows...

²³ But if *any* harm follows, then you shall give life for life,

The focus has been on the child - was it born alive and in good shape or did the child die? We must remember that this entire section has been based on the words of verse 12 -

"He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death."

From that point on, what constitutes a capital offense has been outlined. In the same way, the same words are found in Leviticus 24:17 which are given based on the stoning of a blasphemer who was the son of a Jewish mother and an Egyptian father.

Thus the tenets are given for Jews and Gentiles, men and women, and those out of the womb and those in the womb. The Lord's protections and His judgments follow through to all, including what today we so arbitrarily call a "fetus." When the unborn is harmed and it dies, the offender's life is forfeit. A life is demanded for the loss of the life.

²⁴ eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,

These words form the earliest known record of the *lex talionis*, or "law of like-for-like," known to man. It was later incorporated into other societies. Though seemingly harsh, they are actually as much a curb on retribution as they are a means of punishing an offender.

No greater punishment was to be meted out than that which had been inflicted. Thus the punisher was not unduly or overly punished. After life itself, these first three are each parts of the body which can either be lost or ruined.

If the baby were born with the loss of a foot, the one who struck the woman would forfeit his own foot - into no shoe could he it put. If a fight between two men resulted in the loss of an eye, then the offender was to lose his eye. However, that would be a difficult pill to swallow for a man with but one eye. Especially if his name were one-eye Guy.

If a tooth was knocked out by another child at school, the offending child was to have his matching tooth knocked out. But that wouldn't be so bad if his name was Keith and he still had his baby teeth.

And if a woman purposely dropped a millstone on another woman's hand, then her hand would be forfeit. One would hope she wasn't also mute, or sign language would be rather difficult. She would be Deaf-Beth with no hand for us to understand.

²⁵ burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.

These three don't deal with specific body parts, but rather what can happen to the body through the abuse of another. The word for "burn" is *keviyyah*. It is only

used twice and both are here in this verse. It means a burning or a branding. It would be a painful lesson for the offender to also face what he had done to another.

The word for "wound" is *petsa*. It hasn't been seen since Genesis 4:23 and it will only be used eight times total. It comes from the verb *patsa* which means bruising or even emasculation. If one were to harm another in this way, it was to also be done to him.

And the word for stripe is *khabburah*. It was also last seen in Genesis 4:23 and will only be used seven times total in the Bible. It indicates blueness or a bruise or some other similar type of wound.

These punishments were intended as judicial measures for actual wrongs perpetrated against another. They allowed like-punishment to protect the rights of the people and to keep people restrained within the confines of society.

However, by Jesus' time, they were taken as a moral precept and imperative. They missed the spirit and the intent of the law. Because of this, Jesus corrected them on the purpose of the very law that He had given 1500 years earlier -

"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'³⁹ But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.⁴⁰ If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have *your* cloak also.⁴¹ And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two.⁴² Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away." Matthew 5:38-42

Jesus would rather that the law be upheld, while at the same time mercy would be given when it was right to give it. And even more than mercy would be grace added on top of it.

²⁶ “If a man strikes the eye of his male or female servant, and destroys it, he shall let him go free for the sake of his eye.

Once again, the rights of the slave are highlighted. Though they are in a different category because they are the property of their owners, they were to be given freedoms if the owner abused the rights the same law granted to him.

Even more, the laws applied equally to male and female. No hint of inequality can be found in these words. However, rather than the law of like-for-like for the free members of the society, the slave is an exception. Because the master was a free man, it would be a social injustice to allow for an in-kind retaliation.

And so rather than like-for-like, they were to go out free. It is the same word which was first used in verse 2 when speaking of the freed Hebrew slave in the seventh year of their service. They were granted unconditional release because of the loss of their eye.

*** ²⁷ And if he knocks out the tooth of his male or female servant, he shall let him go free for the sake of his tooth.**

Of this verse, the Geneva Bible says -

"So God revenges cruelty in the even the least things." Geneva

What do they mean by this? The answer is that the previous verse and this verse are set in contrast to one another. The eye is looked at as the most precious of the organs. The loss of the eye is considered especially trying and difficult to deal with.

On the other hand, the loss of a tooth is almost normal and was commonly expected. And if you lost one, there were still thirty some others to use, until they too fell out. And how quickly that occurred in times past before modern dental care came about!

They didn't have Oral B supersonic toothbrushes and Crest fluoride-enhanced, peroxide whitening, sensitivity eliminating, and minty-fresh flavored toothpaste in every store in town. Rather, they suffered with the degradation of their teeth even from youth.

In the Song of Solomon, the king praises his young bride with these words -

"Your teeth are like a flock of newly shorn sheep
coming up from washing,
each one having a twin,
and not one missing. " Song of Solomon 4:2

He praises her for her beautiful teeth, comparing them to a flock of newly shorn sheep that have just been washed, but he also praises her for having *all* of them. It is something that would have been unusual, and so he highlights the fact for us to know.

In other words, the contrast between the eye of verse 26, and the tooth of verse 27, is given as an all encompassing thought concerning the slave - from the most

precious to the least valued. If they received harm beyond what was considered normal, they were to be set free.

Now that our verses are done for the day, let us remember Jesus' words concerning the law of murder that we looked at earlier -

"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.'²² But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment." Matthew 5:21, 22

Has anyone here ever been angry with his brother without a cause? It is as if you have committed murder to God. Has anyone ever looked at another in lust? It is as if you've committed adultery in His presence. God looks beyond the externals to the very inner parts of man, to things that we don't even know are there.

And in His holiness, He must judge our sin. Can anyone here say that they are without guilt? I dare say that none of us can. But though a law was given that condemns us, a Son was given to forgive us. The law and all of its associated punishment is there to show us of our need for something else... mercy. Let me tell you about God's mercy in the giving of His own Son...

Closing Verse: "Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more,²¹ so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Romans 5:20, 21

Next Week: Exodus 21:28-36 *What happens if an ox gores your husband or your wife?* (The Price of a Life) (59th Exodus Sermon)

The Lord has you exactly where He wants you. He has a good plan and purpose for you. Even if a deep ocean lies ahead of You, He can part the waters and lead you through it on dry ground. So follow Him and trust Him and He will do marvelous things for you and through you.

Keeping Violence in Check

He who strikes a man so that he dies, understand
Shall be put to death surely
Yet, if he did not lie in wait, but God delivered him into his hand
Then I will appoint for you a place where he may flee

But if a man acts with premeditation
Against his neighbor, to kill him by treachery
You shall take him from My altar, that he may die
This is how it is to be

And he who strikes his father or his mother, so I say
Shall surely be put to death; it shall be this way

He who kidnaps a man and sells him
Or if he is found in his hand
Shall surely be put to death
This is what My law does demand

And he who curses his father or his mother, as I tell you
Shall surely be put to death; this is what you are to do

If men contend with each other
And one strikes the other with a stone or with his fist
And he does not die but is confined to his bed
Yes, if the pain of death was missed

If he rises again and walks about
Outside with his staff
Then he who struck him shall be acquitted
He is not to receive capital wrath

He shall only pay for the loss of his time; as my word has revealed
And shall provide for him to be thoroughly healed

And if a man beats his male or female servant
With a rod, so that he dies under his hand
He shall surely be punished
As the law does demand

Notwithstanding, if he remains alive a day or two
He shall not be punished; for he is his property
It is his right to so punish as he did do

If men fight, and hurt a woman with child
So that she gives birth prematurely
Yet no harm follows
He shall surely be punished accordingly

As the woman's husband imposes on him
Such terms as he will set
And he shall pay as the judges determine
Whatever sentence is rendered, it shall be met

But if any harm follows, then you shall give life for life
Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot
Burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe
This law of the talion is the one upon the offender you shall put

If a man strikes the eye of his male or female servant
And destroys it, he shall let him go free
For the sake of his eye
The poor fellow with that eye can no longer see

And if he knocks out the tooth of his male or female servant
He shall let him go free for the tooth's sake
Because he now talks with a whistle or a lisp
He shall go free, because of the funny sound he does now make

God is not unfair in His commands

They are set for the protection of both the offended and offender

Israel would have done well to comply with these demands

They would have remained in the land, guarded by His splendor

But they, like us, have failed to live in a right manner

And they were punished in exile from their sweet land

Until He whistled for their return to His highly raised banner

And once again they are nourished from His loving hand

Let us learn though from the lesson of Israel

That the law can never save us, instead it can only condemn

This is the message that the Bible does tell

And so for the coming of Jesus, we must surely cry "Amen!"

Yes Lord, You freed us from the bondage and have set us free

And now, we in freedom can praise You for all eternity

Hallelujah and Amen...