Written Sermons and Exegesis from Exodus 21

"Is Slavery Always Wrong?"

Read Exodus 21:1-6 :: Well that's a text to start a sermon off with huh? Lol… You know I was thinking about this particular month that America now calls "Pride Month." They've designated the month of June to lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, queer and questioning pride. It's celebrated, and all these ways are considered an acceptable choice of life and behavior.

What makes all of these acceptable in the eyes of some? Who is deciding what is right and what is wrong? Are we allowed to just think about things, and if we get enough people to stand behind something (and it becomes popular) does that somehow make a behavior okay all of a sudden? Who is calling the shots here? Who decides what's okay?

I've pondered on this (this week) because of the text we are about to delve into; a text about slavery laws. We just read a minute ago, "When you buy a Hebrew slave" and we have verses 2-6 explaining the process of obtaining and working a male slave, regulating the practice of slavery. This law makes a lot of people uncomfortable, including the promoters of the LBGTQ+ Pride Month. They would actually use a text like this in Exodus as a launching pad to tell us: "The Bible is outdated and perverse."

So who is right? They get to pick what they deem to be acceptable practice, and then there are certain other practices they condemn. They condemn all slavery and yet promote practicing homosexuality (among other things). I condemn practicing homosexuality, but yet I promote the laws of Yahweh, one of which is found here regulating slavery.

A key difference between them and me is that I am reading this holy book, given to the great, old patriarchs, prophets, and servants of Yahweh (by Yahweh), and I am trusting that the Creator of mankind knows what is best for us. I'm not sitting at my desk each day trying to think up what is good or bad behavior. I let the Almighty decide that… they on the other hand will often tell you, "There is no Almighty. You are your own god. If it *feels* right, do it." I reject that thinking, and I rebuke that thinking today.

Yahweh is Still Speaking

What we have here, beginning in Exodus 21:1 is a continuation of Yahweh speaking His commandments. Now, He's been speaking to Moshe alone since Exodus 20:22. Remember, the people trembled when they witnessed the thunder, lightning, trumpet blast, and smoke surrounding the mountain. They requested that Moshe speak to them, because they thought if Yahweh spoke to them they would all die. So 20:21 says that "the people remained standing at a distance as Moshe approached the thick darkness where Elohim was. Then Yahweh told Moshe…" and then we have the commands against making mighty ones out of silver and gold, and the command to make an altar of earth or un-hewn stone, to offer burnt offerings and peace offerings, and to make sure to cover our nakedness.

We've went over all of that, but today we move into the next chapter, which is really not a new chapter, it's just that Bible translators add chapters and verses for location and memorization purposes - but the thought continues here where we read in Exodus 21:1 "These are the ordinances that you must set before them." It's quite possible that had the people not requested for Moshe to speak to them rather than Yahweh, Yahweh would have just continued speaking directly to everyone, just like he did in Exodus 20:1-17.

So these commandments we are reading now into chapter 21 are just as holy and binding as the "Big Ten" in chapter 20. Yahweh continues to speak these commandments to Moshe all the way to Exodus 23:33, and we will cover them all (Yahweh's will). They are all valid. They are all eternal. And they actually all fall under the category of at least one of the Ten Commandments. In other words, these ordinances teach us how to keep the Ten Commandments *completely*.

Mishpatim

The word ordinances here in verse 1 is the Hebrew word *mishpatim,* and often translated as judgments, and sometimes translated as "manner" or "fashion." It's not so much judgments as though a judge is passing a final sentence on a person (it can be that), but here it's in the sense of, "I judge this to be the proper manner or way of doing something."

So we're learning some Hebrew here! (I know brother Sandy will appreciate that.) We all know the word *Torah* (meaning teaching or instruction), and now we've learned the word *mishpatim* (everyone say *mishpatim*)… and a good definition for this word is "the proper manner of living."

This section of the Torah actually begins one of the traditional Torah Portions in the Hebrew faith, and the name of the portion is "*Mishpatim*" after the word used in verse 1. *This Torah portion goes from Exodus 21:1 to Exodus 24:18, and there are over 50 commandments found therein (in the traditional counting of the 613).

Studying Yahweh

Don't let that overwhelm you, anything worth doing takes time. You can do something cheap in a hurry, so it's okay to take your time, and it's fine if you only grasp one small nugget during each Torah Study we do here. That's one more gold nugget to add to your collection of wisdom and understanding. We are studying the character of Yahweh here. Each commandment, no matter how small, teaches us something about our Creator. The study of the commandments is the study of Elohim, and that's whether or not a particular commandment even applies to you. It's still holy, and it still comes from the mouth of Yahweh.

We don't want to edit Yahweh, even when we read a section of law that violates what our current culture thinks or promotes. When we edit Yahweh we are trying to mold Him into our own image rather than us being molded into His image.

Slavery in the Bible

Let's move into Exodus 21:2 here, it says: "When you buy a Hebrew slave, he is to serve for six years; then in the seventh he is to leave as a free man without paying anything." What we begin to see here is that Yahweh ***regulates*** the practice of slavery; He does not condemn the practice wholesale, but puts guidelines on it, showing how to *properly* practice it.

Regulating vs. Condemning

When Yahweh regulates something in His law it is not a sin to practice it so long as you abide by the regulations. Some people read these laws, and just do not want to accept that slavery isn't outright condemned, so they come up with excuses for Yahweh or accommodations. They'll say something like, "The people already practiced slavery, and God didn't like it, ***but*** He formed to their current culture and tried to wean them off it a little at a time."

No. That's not right. Yahweh does not bow to the whims or wants of people. When the Creator wants to condemn something He has no problem doing that. "Thou shalt not murder. Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not bear false witness." It's easy for Him to tell His people what sin is. He's not accommodating anyone. If He doesn't like something, He tells you. If He allows something, even with regulations, it shows you that He is okay with a practice, and that practice is not a sin.

An example is drinking wine or beer. The practice is *regulated* not condemned. Deuteronomy 14 says you can enjoy oxen and sheep (for food) and wine and beer (for drink) at the feast, whatever your soul desires. Yet Deuteronomy 21 condemns a drunkard (there in the law concerning a rebellious son). So there's regulations in drinking, don't over-do it. Practice moderation.

Harsh Slavery Condemned

That's going on here in Exodus 21, regulating slavery. We know the story of the exodus. We know that the children of Israel were under harsh slavery in Egypt. It didn't start out that way. In the days of Joseph's adulthood the Israelites and Egyptians became friends. After Joseph, things started to change, and eventually the Egyptians had enslaved the Israelites to the point of beating them, and even throwing their baby boys in the river Nile. One translation of Exodus 1 says the Egyptians *ruthlessly* made the Israelites serve. That word ruthlessly is *perek* in Hebrew meaning "to break apart, fracture, be cruel." So Yahweh sent a deliverer, Moshe, and the children of Israel were delivered from harsh slavery.

Slavery and the Sabbath

So there is a wrong type of slavery in the Bible. That can be proven easily, but I want you to look at something you've read before (maybe numerous times) from Deuteronomy 5's rendering of the Ten Commandments. Before we read, remember that at the first giving of the law, the 4th commandment about the Sabbath mentioned Yahweh making heaven and earth in 6 days and resting on the 7th day. But in Deuteronomy 5 *that is not mentioned*. Look at it:

Deuteronomy 5:12-15 (HCSB) “Be careful to dedicate the Sabbath day, as Yahweh your Mighty One has commanded you. (13) You are to labor six days and do all your work, (14) but the seventh day is a Sabbath to Yahweh your Mighty One. You must not do any work - you, your son or daughter, your male or female slave, your ox or donkey, any of your livestock, or the foreigner who lives within your gates, so that your male and female slaves may rest as you do. (15) Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and Yahweh your Mighty One brought you out of there with a strong hand and an outstretched arm. That is why Yahweh your Mighty One has commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.”

You see that? He stresses the point that the Israelites were once slaves in Egypt, and they were allotted **no** Sabbath. In Exodus 4-5, when Moses and Aaron begin to speak to the Israelites, Pharaoh gets upset because they are causing the Israelites to rest from their labor. So Pharaoh yells, “Get back to work!” Deuteronomy 5 pulls that back, not by abolishing slavery, but by *regulating* it. “Your manservant and maidservant shall rest on the Sabbath.” It’s a commandment to let your servants rest on Shabbat.

Released on Shabbat

Take note of the relationship between the Sabbath day and the removal from Egypt in Deuteronomy 5. He tells them, “You were a slave in Egypt, and Yahweh brought you out. That’s why He commanded you to keep the Sabbath.” On what day did Yahweh deliver the Israelites from Egypt?

Remember it was Passover time, so it’s the 14th day of the moon, moving into the 15th. Numbers 33:3 says they departed from Rameses in the first month on the 15th day of the month, which is a Sabbath: a high Sabbath for us (weekly Sabbath + first day of Unleavened Bread) but still an annual no work-day for traditional Saturday Sabbatarians. **Yahweh delivered Israel on a Sabbath.**

I think lunar Sabbatarianism works better here because of the association of the deliverance with the 7th day Sabbath in Deuteronomy 5, but either way it’s a Sabbath. What better day to receive deliverance from bondage? It reminds me of when Yeshua healed the woman who had been bound by Satan for 18 years (Luke 13). He says she was loosed from her bond on the Sabbath day.

Slavery in Exodus and Genesis

Getting back to the servants… Exodus 20:10 says the same as Deuteronomy (HCSB): “But the seventh day is a Sabbath to Yahweh your Mighty One. You must not do any work - you, your son or daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the foreigner who is within your gates.” The law assumes that the Israelites had slaves or servants, and doesn’t condemn them, but regulates the practice, making sure the servants get a Sabbath.

We’ve read Genesis before too, but it doesn’t always register (in our minds) that the righteous people of Yahweh had slaves and were never condemned for it. For example, in Genesis 24

Abraham sends his oldest servant (probably Eliezer) to fetch a wife for his son Isaac. In Genesis 24:35 Eliezer says this, "Yahweh has greatly blessed my master, and he has become rich. He has given him sheep and cattle, silver and gold, male and female slaves, and camels and donkeys."

Genesis 30:43, in speaking of the blessings of Jacob, says "And the man became very rich. He had many flocks, male and female slaves, and camels, and donkeys." No insinuation there that any of these things were wrong.

So we have *approved* examples of righteous men having servants under them, in their household, and we have one of the Ten Commandments that assumes that at least some Israelites had servants. Then of course we have the text we're studying now in Exodus 21:2-6 regulating the practice of slavery or servanthood. So all slavery is not a sin. Practicing it wrongly is a sin. We'll get more into this when we cover kidnapping in Exodus 21:16… but it can be practiced justly. That will make people in the world mad, including many Christians, but I'm more worried about what makes Yahweh mad. I teach to please Him.

Stick with Yahweh's Law

When I study and teach something, I do not look to what anyone in the world thinks or believes. I do always consider what other students of Scripture in the past and present have concluded, and I do my best to stick with what I honestly believer Yahweh teaches through His Torah. I don't want to lean on my own understanding or anyone else's understanding. I want to gain understanding from the inspired instruction manual.

So sometimes my teaching upsets the more fundamental, conservative Christians. I did a little of that in my last series when I said pants are a neutral garment, and it's not a sin for a woman to wear pants. But in the next few sermons I'm sure I will upset the more progressive, liberal Christians by saying that not all slavery is bad, and that it can actually even be a good, healthy practice. I'm not trying to make anyone upset particularly, but by just sticking with the law of Yahweh, you eventually upset everyone, except for those people who have also decided they are sticking to the law of Yahweh.

The Beautiful Torah

Brothers and sisters, the law of Yahweh is perfect, converting the soul (Psalm 19:7), and the judgments - the ***mishpatim*** of Yahweh - are true and righteous altogether (Psalm 19:9). More to be desired are they than gold, yea than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned, and in keeping of them there is great reward (Psalm 19:10-11). Exodus 21:2's "When you buy a Hebrew slave, he is to serve for six years" may not sit well with our culture or society, but that doesn't matter. All of Yahweh's commandments are sure, they stand fast forever and ever (Psalm 111:7-8).

One of the great Hebrew Torah scholars of the past, Rabbi Moshe Ben Maimon (sometimes called by the acronym Rambam), said this concerning having servants:

The early sages would give their servants from every dish on their table. They would feed their animals and their servants before sitting to their own meals. Does it not say (Psalm 123:2), "As the eyes of the servant to the hand of his master; as the eyes of the maid to her mistress [so our eyes are towards the L-rd our G-d...]"? So, too, you should not denigrate a servant, neither physically nor verbally. The Torah made him your servant to do work, not to be disgraced. Do not treat him with constant screaming and anger, rather speak with him pleasantly and listen to his complaints. Such were the good ways in which Job took pride when he said, "Did I ever despise the judgment of my servant and my maid when they argued with me? Did not my Maker make him, too, in the belly; did not the same One form us both in the womb? (Job 31:13-15)" For anger and cruelty are only found among other nations. The children of Abraham, our father—and they are Israel, to whom the Holy One, blessed be He, has provided the goodness of Torah and commanded us righteous judgments and statutes—they are compassionate to all. This is one of the attributes of the Holy One, blessed be He, that we are commanded to emulate (Psalm 145:9): "And He has compassion for all He has made." *(Mishneh Torah, Laws of Indentured Servants, 9:8)*

Closing

Now get this in your mind (as I close today)… **you are a servant of Yahweh**. That same word - servant or slave - that is used of Eliezer (Abraham's servant), is also used of Abraham, in his relationship to Yahweh. In Genesis 26:24 Yahweh appears to Isaac and says, "I am the Mighty One of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid, for I am with you. I will bless and multiply your offspring because of my servant Abraham." That's the Hebrew word *ebed*, the same word used of Eliezer, and the same word used in the Ten Commandments for the manservants (male slaves). Abraham was an *ebed* of Yahweh, and if you want to be in a right relationship with Yahweh, you too will be an *ebed* or slave of Yahweh. || Abraham treated Eliezer properly. Abraham was even ready to give Eliezer his inheritance upon death according to Genesis 15:3. **Abraham realized that just as he had a servant, he WAS a servant.** Yahweh had Abraham for a manservant, and if Yahweh treated Abraham with kindness, so ought Abraham to treat his servant Eliezer with kindness.

We'll pick this up next time I teach, and we'll go over Exodus 21:2-6 verse-by-verse. I hope that today helped lay some Biblical groundwork for the subject, and I hope we can train our minds to think like the Creator.

"The Hebrew Manservant"

Read Exodus 21:1-6 :: When a marriage turns sour, we do not speak against marriage, we speak against *that particular abuse* of marriage. We teach husbands and wives how to properly walk out their roles. A bad marriage doesn't mean marriage itself is bad.

According to Yahweh a bad master-to-slave relationship doesn't mean slavery itself is bad. Yahweh never speaks against the practice. He does condemn its abuse, but in doing so He explains how to properly go about it, showing that it's a lawful practice. It is difficult to get modern people to see this, even Bible believers. I knew when I got to this section in the Law I would get some kickback, and I have… but the kickback does not stem from Scriptural exegesis.

The kickback stems from humans thinking we can be stricter than the Almighty; that we have to apologize for something He allowed in His law.

We should trust in Yahweh with all your heart, and lean not to our own understanding. He doesn't make mistakes, and He doesn't accommodate sin. If He allows something it's allowed. It must be practiced properly, yes, but we cannot condemn something Yahweh does not condemn, else we will be guilty of taking away from His instructions, a violation of Deuteronomy 4:2.

The Word "Slave"

I've had some people say that in Exodus 21 it's better to say "indentured servant" or "bondservant" instead of "slave." I think either of those are fine, but at the same time I don't think the word slave is a bad word in and of itself, nor a bad translation. Several major scholarly translations use it here (NASB, NRSV, HCSB, LEB, ESV). I think that we've read of the abuse of slavery practiced in American and European history, and it's hard to detach that abuse from the word itself. So please realize when I use the word slave or slavery, I am not okaying the stealing of a person and the selling of that person to someone who will abuse them. The law of Yahweh condemns that practice (we'll see that as we go along in this chapter). When I use the word slave or slavery, I am trying my best to train your mind to think Biblically. You have to stop letting the world control how you think, and instead take your cue from Holy Scripture.

Exodus 21:2

So Exodus 21:2 reads, "When you buy a Hebrew slave, he is to serve for six years; then in the seventh he is to leave as a free man without paying anything."

This section is specifically about a Hebrew <u>man</u>servant. The Hebrew part is specified here in the verse (showing the Hebrews had servants among themselves). We know a male is in view here, because of the immediate context (vss. 2-6; this servant can acquire a wife), plus this section has a contrast with the maidservant laws in verses 7-11 (which we will get to in future studies).

The word slave is the Hebrew word *ebed*, and is used about 800x in Hebrew Scripture. All Hebrew lexicons give the words *servant* and *slave* as the primary definition. The meaning is that you have one person in authority and another person subject to that authority, who serves.

The person in authority is referred to as the master in verses 4-6 about six times, and each time the word master is used it's the Hebrew word *adon*, which is the base word for *adonai*, a word used of Yahweh, the Supreme Master all throughout Hebrew Scripture.

Modern examples of a servant may range from a waiter at a restaurant to a hired hand on a farm. At the restaurant you are paying for food and service. You sit down and someone takes your order, makes your food, brings you your food, and cleans up after you are done. A bit stronger example would be a hired hand on a farm. One man - the owner or master of the farm - may provide room, food, pay, etc. and the worker (who serves the owner) provides know how and

work. We now call this an employer to employee relationship, but it is still similar to the master-to-servant relationship in this text.

To Buy a Servant

Let's look at the concept of buying a servant. Why would a person buy a Hebrew slave? One reason, and I think the primary reason, was as a means of helping someone poor or debt-ridden. It was a welfare system that helped a man in need rise from poverty to financial stability. The poor Hebrew would sell himself, entering into as much as a 6 year contract with his Hebrew master. Leviticus 25:39a speaks to this by saying, "If your brother among you becomes destitute and sells himself to you."

So a fellow Hebrew is in poverty and needing a way out. The system of slavery regulated by Yahweh was a system whereby a poor person could rise up from poverty. *This is important, the slavery system of Yahweh brought more of an equality among the Hebrews than an inequality.* There was still a master and a slave, but the poor person who became a slave did not remain poor as his master provided for him all of the basic necessities of life in return for his labor.

A man may also be bought as a slave if he had stolen something, had no wealth, and needed to work to make restitution. We see this in Exodus 22:3b, "A thief must make full restitution. If he is unable, he is to be sold because of his theft." Theft or stealing was not a capital crime in Israel, meaning death was not its punishment. Paying back at least double (sometimes more) was the punishment. We aren't talking here about armed robbery, where a thief also has a desire to harm someone's life, but rather what we might call petty theft or burglary.

So poverty, debt, and theft are the three reasons why a Hebrew might be bought by another Hebrew to be a manservant.

The Slave's Release

At the end of verse 2 we see that the servant can choose to be released after 6 years of service, and at such time the slave has served the master lawfully and owes the master nothing at his release. Deuteronomy 15 actually tells us that if a slave chose to be released on the seventh year, the master was to give to him a financial gift.

12 "If your fellow Hebrew, a man or woman, is sold to you and serves you six years, you must set him free in the seventh year. 13 When you set him free, do not send him away empty-handed. 14 Give generously to him from your flock, your threshing floor, and your winepress. You are to give him whatever Yahweh your Mighty One has blessed you with. 15 Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and Yahweh your Mighty One redeemed you; that is why I am giving you this command today… 18 Do not regard it as a hardship when you set him free, because he worked for you six years — worth twice the wages of a hired worker. Then Yahweh your Mighty One will bless you in everything you do. (Deuteronomy 15:12-15, 18, HCSB)

This again shows the beautiful relationship or friendship between a good master and an obedient servant.

Arriving Married or Alone

Let's move now to verses 3-4 in Exodus 21, "(3) If he arrives alone, he is to leave alone. If he arrives with a wife, his wife is to leave with him. (4) If his master gives him a wife and she bears him sons or daughters, the wife and her children belong to her master, and the man must leave alone."

So the leaving here is done on the seventh year, and the first part of this we understand pretty easily. If he's bought by the master while he's alone, he leaves alone. If he's bought while married (his wife comes along with him during his service), then he leaves with his wife. It's verse 4 that we might balk at, because if his master gave him a wife while he was there serving (either a daughter or a maidservant in the household) the wife - and the children she bore to the Hebrew manservant - are to stay with the master. *What's up with that?*

First thing… don't lean to your own understanding. Remember that this is the perfect law of Yahweh. It's not submitting to Yahweh's Word when we only submit when we like one law but buck when we dislike another law. So whether or not we understand the why behind Yahweh's instructions, we must trust our Father in heaven that He knows best and has a good reason for commanding what He commands.

Second thing… we forget that in Hebrew culture it was required for a man to prove he could provide for his wife-to-be, oftentimes done with a dowry given to girl's father. The husband was to be the provider. He acquired the food while the wife prepared the food. He acquired the fabric or material while the wife made clothing out of that material. The husband provided the home while the wife was the keeper or caretaker of that home. And this is how it has been throughout most of history, and definitely in Hebrew culture. Families were overseen by a good, holy man of Yahweh who would love and take care of his family.

So when this Hebrew man became a servant he had just about nothing. When he was given a wife by his master during his time of service he did not have to prove to a father that he could provide for a woman, because he himself was being provided for by his master.

A Little on Parental Honor

I know in our culture we are getting away from this idea of a girl being under her father's authority until she is married, but it's a bad getting away from not a good getting away from. Thankfully some young men still have a proper upbringing where they go to a young woman's father and ask for her hand in marriage. We still see this at some weddings where it is asked, "Who gives this woman to be married to this man?" and the father of the bride says I do, or "her mother and I." Some people still recognize parental authority, that the fifth commandment is to be obeyed which says, "Honor thy father and thy mother." Modern culture wants to say "No, I'm my own person, it doesn't matter what my parents say." Hebrew culture says, "Your parents love

you so much. They've been through all of this in their own lives. Yes, you are your own person, but listen to a good father and mother if they don't think a person is fit to be married to."

Wife and Children Need Care

So because this Hebrew manservant came in with nothing, and was given a wife while he himself was being provided for, Yahweh saw it better for the woman and children she bore to stay with the master, so that their care would be guaranteed. In this case I must point out that the children stay with the mother here, not the father. In most cases - not all but most - a mother is the better caretaker of children than the father. Now I'm a father, and I love my children, but I fully admit that Yahweh placed some attributes in Tisha than just aren't in me. Men and women are different, they are not identical. One time Paul wrote to the Thessalonians about a gentle ***mother*** who nurtures her children. He used a mother for a reason.

The Option to Stay

But… and here's my favorite part… Yahweh gave the Hebrew manservant another option. Look at verses 5-6, "(5) But if the slave declares: 'I love my master, my wife, and my children; I do not want to leave as a free man,' (6) his master is to bring him to the judges and then bring him to the door or doorpost. His master must pierce his ear with an awl and he will serve his master for life."

In verse 5 we see just how good a master to slave relationship could be, and I tend to think that this would have happened in most cases, especially where the manservant was given a wife during his time of service. The slave here loves not just his wife and children, but he loves his master, his *adon*. "I enjoy working for you. I appreciate all you've done for me. I love you my master." I can picture them hugging each other. The master has done well. He's provided for and taken care of his servant. The servant has done well. He's worked hard and done his master a good job. He doesn't want to leave on the seventh year even though he's free to go.

Judges or Elohim?

So… the master brings him to the judges. The word judges here is the word *elohim*, and some people think that means it should read "the master brings him to God." Well, God - or Yahweh - is up in heaven folks. The master is not riding a cloud with his servant, up to heaven. What's taking place here is that *the judges of Israel act in the place of Elohim upon the earth.* They are Elohim's representatives who dictate and carry out Yahweh's Torah in the civil body politic of Israel. So they are called elohim, mighty ones, in the sense that they work uniquely for THE Mighty One.

Piercing the Ear

The judges then bring the Hebrew manservant to the door of the master's house (some say the door of the Tabernacle or Temple), and the master pierces the slave's ear with an awl (which is a piercing tool), and the purpose here was for an earring. A lot of the women here know that if you get your ears pierced, but stop wearing a ring in the hole, what happens? The hole closes up. Before long you can't even tell it was pierced. So this was not just a hole made in the Hebrew

manservant's ear that would disappear later. It was to be a forever sign. A ring would be placed in the ear as a marker for lifelong service to his master.

Some might say a man wearing an earring is queer, gay, feminine, etc. Not according to this text. Some say men or women shouldn't wear earrings because it's a mark of slavery. Well… this particular earring is a mark of slavery, but I want to ask you… is it a bad mark or good mark? According to the text it's a good mark. If you saw this man walking around back in ancient Israel you would think, "Now there goes a good man who works hard and loves his master, his wife, and his children. Yahweh bless him!"

Psalm 40's Opened Ear

Now, let me show you something from Psalm 40:6, 8, and I'll read here from the KJV, "Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required… (8) I delight to do they will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart."

The context here is about keeping the Torah from the heart and not just relying on sacrifices and offerings. But, I want to focus on the word picture given here, "**mine ears hast thou opened.**" I don't know about you, but my ears are already opened. I've got a hole in each of them, lol. So most people think it's speaking spiritually, opening your spiritual ears to hear, and that's a good point, but there's more.

The more literal reading here is found in the Douay-Reims Bible and Aramaic Bible in Plain English, "But thou hast pierced the ears for me." The NRSV reads, "But you have given me an open ear." E.W. Bullinger comments on Exodus 21:6 by saying, "Bore his ear, hence a symbol of obedience and perpetual servitude, compare Psalm 40:6; Isaiah 48:8; Isaiah 50:5." I don't have the time to go over all of them, but listen to Isaiah 50:5 which says, "Adonai Yahweh has opened my ear; and I was not rebellious; I did not turn back."

The opening of the ear is equivalent to being submissive to Yahweh which hearkens back to Exodus 21:6 where the slave's ear was opened or bored through with an awl. It's a sign of submissiveness and obedience. It's a sign of someone who wants to serve their master because through the ear is where we *Shema* - where we listen with the intent to obey. So Psalm 40:6 (I think) is best seen as meaning "You have given me an open ear by literally opening it with an awl as a sign of my perpetual service to you to listen and be obedient to my good master."

Matthew Henry, the old, Puritan commentator writes in part that this law explains "the obligation which the great Redeemer laid upon himself to prosecute the work of our salvation, for he says (Psa 40:6), *My ears hast thou opened,* which seems to allude to this law. He loved his Father, and his captive spouse, and the children that were given him, and would not go out free from his undertaking, but engaged to serve in it for ever, Isa 42:1, Isa 42:4." Yeshua was the greatest Hebrew manservant of all. He perfectly obeyed His Master, Almighty Yahweh. If we downplay the slavery laws in Torah we are downplaying the person and work of Yeshua.

Conclusion

This is the Torah of Yahweh. This is part of the book of the law that should not depart from your mouth. This is what we are to be studying, and learning to practice.

Why teach on this text? Well first off it's here in the Bible as part of Yahweh's law. That should be good enough. But realize that the law here teaches us about proper relationships. How we should be kind to even the least of us. How we should give to the poor. How we should respect authority. How we should serve someone who treats us well. How that family is important. And how Yeshua himself models perfect servanthood and through being a servant saves us from our sins. All of this is found in these slavery laws Yahweh gives in His inspired Word that no one wants to talk about. It's amazing isn't it? His Word is alive!

"Selling One's Daughter as a Servant"

Read Exodus 21:2-6 & 7-11 :: If last week's text made the hair on the back of modern culture's neck stand up, the text for this week makes the hair on their toes stand up. Just that first line, "When a man sells his daughter as a slave," will make a lot of people stop listening or reading right from the start. "How is that even ethical? What kind of book are you reading?" These are some of the responses we get from objectors.

What we're looking at today is one of those texts that people who have never read the Bible (much less studied it) like to bring up because they heard someone say "the Bible teaches a father can sell his daughter into slavery," (with zero Scriptural or Hebrew culture context). They once heard this said, got triggered, and now they repeat it every time someone tries to convince them the Bible is a good or holy book.

Our job as servants of Yahweh is not only to (1) believe the law, and (2) practice the law (to whatever capacity we are able), but also to (3) give these people a proper understanding of the law. We need to realize that whenever we meet someone who hates the Almighty, it is an opportunity to show that person His love, and part of that is explaining about just how loving Yahweh's law is. You need to always resist the urge to argue with an unbeliever or objector. By argue I mean blurting out things back-and-forth which gets nowhere. Instead, be humble, listen to what they say, give them the opportunity to "let it all out," and then gently offer them the correct perspective, especially on a text like this.

Contrasting Sections

So, right at the beginning here I want you to recall that last week's text (in verses 2-6) is speaking only of a Hebrew manservant. We know that from the part about him entering into servitude with a wife, or having a wife given to him by his master. But I think even more importantly we also get that from a straight reading of verses 2-11 as a whole, because when verse 7 starts it comes right off the heels of verse 6 by saying (KJV) "And if a man sell his daughter to be a maidservant she shall not go out as the menservants do." There's a

contrast here between the *ebed* (manservant) of verses 2-6 and the *amah* (maidservant) of verses 7-11.

Amah is the Hebrew word for maidservant here. Other Bibles translate the word as handmaid, bondwoman, or just "female servant." As we see here the HCSB continues to use the word slave, as does the NASB and NRSV, two top-notch word-for-word English translations of the Bible. So female slave is not incorrect, but let me unpack the context a bit.

Scholarly Divide

The word *amah* is used about 56 times in the Hebrew Bible, and there is a divide in the scholarly world as to whether this word applies to a servant or a wife. T. Desmond Alexander writes in his commentary on Exodus (p. 475), "While it is possible to argue that the term *amah* is merely the female equivalent of ebed, a survey of how amah is used in the OT reveals that it is frequently closely associated with marriage… Schultz draws this out by contrasting the use of *amah* with that of *sipha*, the other Hebrew term for a female slave… Uncertainty regarding the exact status of an amah is highlighted by Avigad in discussing an ancient Hebrew tomb inscription, which records that the tomb contains the bones of the man and 'the bones of his *amah* with him… Legally, the amah was a bondwoman, but in practice her rank in the household depended entirely upon the position her master wished to give her.'"

This Section Deals with a Wife

If you look at Exodus 21:7-11, the purpose of this transaction was so that the man's daughter would become either the wife of the master's son (vs. 9) or the master's wife (vs. 10). Remember that words by their-self mean nothing (*Example = bat [animal, baseball, bat her eyes; noun or verb*). Words receive their meaning by the context in which they are used. In this case I believe the *amah* is meant to become a wife.

In verse 7b it teaches "she is not to leave as the manservant (*ebed*) does." The manservant in verses 2-6 serves for 6 years and then has the liberty to leave in the 7th year. Exodus 21:7 tells us this is not what happens with this *amah*. Why? Because the purpose of her being sold is to become a permanent wife in the home.

The Reason for this is Crucial

Why would a father sell his daughter to be an *amah*? Think back to my last lesson on the primary reason one Hebrew man would buy another Hebrew man for a servant - ***in order to lift that man out of poverty.*** What this dad is doing here is looking out for his daughter and seeing a better life for his daughter. He is not selling her to be trafficked by lawless humans. He is not selling her to be beaten or have no will of her own. He is selling her in order to lift her up from the poor status she is in to a high status in the community of Israel.

For a modern illustration or concept of this, think of when someone places their child up for adoption, because they live at the poverty level and want something better for their child. They want a stable and successful family to come along and buy this child in order to adopt him or her into the family to be provided for well.

Normally poor people marry other poor people and rich people marry other rich people. So the poor stay poor and the rich stay rich. One of Yahweh's solutions to this social dilemma is to place within His law the availability of selling one's daughter away to a wealthy family so that she becomes financially stable, and there is nothing wrong with that desire. In general even today, when a woman looks for a husband, is not one thing she should look for is a man who is willing to work to provide for her and their future family?

Marrying a Man Who Won't Work

I've done jobs for dads before who complain to me (because people like to vent) that their daughter married a man who won't work. The man just sits around the house watching TV all day, drinking beer, and eating the food that the wife brings home because she's the only one who works. They live in dad's rental house for basically nothing, and the dad doesn't want to kick them out because it's his daughter who is trying her best to stay afloat. But he can't do anything about the lazy son-in-law (because once a rat moves in it's hard to get him out). I've actually witnessed a heated argument (in the front yard) between a dad and son-in-law like this first-hand. It's an ugly thing.

Financial Security

My point here is that it is okay for a woman to seek financial security. That doesn't mean filet mignon every night… but it does mean a good house, car, food, clothing, and even nice things to pretty up her life. Torah prescribes that a man be the primary provider in the home. Remember the man brings home the meat and vegetables, the woman cooks the meat and vegetables. The man provides the fabric, the woman sews the fabric. That's how it worked in Hebrew society.

So this dad sees a good, righteous family, better off than he is, and he sells his daughter into this family, not to primarily better himself, but to make sure his daughter is set for the rest of her life.

Ruth and Boaz

This is similar to what took place between Boaz and Ruth. Now Ruth didn't have a good dad close by, but she did have a righteous mother-in-law, Naomi. Ruth clung to Naomi saying, "Your people will be my people, and your Elohim will be my Elohim." They were poor, so much so that they went behind Boaz's hired reapers in order to glean the leftovers of the harvest. Boaz took a liking to Ruth, and told his workers to leave extra for her. Now Boaz was kin to Naomi on her deceased husband's side, and don't you think for once second that Naomi didn't know what she was doing in setting up Ruth to be around Boaz. Boaz was a prominent man of noble character, and Naomi knew that young, poor Ruth would be safe and stable with a man like Boaz.

Naomi even tells her (Ruth 3:1-3, CEV): "One day, Naomi said to Ruth: It's time I found you a husband, who will give you a home and take care of you. You have been picking up grain alongside the women who work for Boaz, and you know he is relative of ours. Tonight he will be threshing the grain. Now take a bath and put on some perfume, then

dress in your best clothes. Go where he is working, but don't let him see you until he has finished eating and drinking." That's a smart Mama.

So Ruth secretly approaches Boaz while he's asleep, uncovers his feet and lays over them and says, "I *am* Ruth your handmaid (*amah*): spread your skirt over your handmaid; for you *are* a near kinsman." She's basically asking him to marry her here.

Exodus 21:7's Main Point

The main point here in Exodus 21:7-11 is protection for the man's daughter. That first line in verse 7 - "when a man sells his daughter as a slave" - sounds rough by itself without any context, but when we slow down and understand Hebrew culture it begins to unfold into something beautiful and loving for this female. Legally the girl became an *amah* (maidservant, handmaid), but the status of an *amah* could be as high as a wife for the master of the house.

More Proof She's a Wife

Look now at verse 8: "If she (the *amah*) is displeasing to her master, who chose her for himself, then he must let her be redeemed. He has no right to sell her to foreigners because he has acted treacherously toward her."

It's considered an act of treachery if the master who purchased the female decides he doesn't want to keep her. He has to let her be bought back into her family. He can't sell her to any outsiders. That same phrase "act(ed) treacherously" is used in Malachi 2:10-16 a total of 5x in reference to Israelite men putting away their wives without a bill of divorce while going after heathen women. The point I'm making is that I think both places, Exodus and Malachi, are marriage contexts, therefore getting rid of the woman in both Exodus and Malachi is considered a treacherous act, which is defined as being deceitful or unfaithful. ***The huge point here is that Yahweh is protecting the female in His law.***

What about Deuteronomy's Amah?

A question arises concerning where this law is repeated in Deuteronomy 15:12-18. Last week we read this, but only centered in on the part about how the master was required to give his Hebrew manservant a bonus check at the end of his service on the 7th year. But in the Deuteronomy text, it is not only the manservant in view but also the maidservant, and the 6 years of work and 7th year of release also applies to her.

If your fellow Hebrew, a man or a woman, is sold to you and serves you six years, you must set him free in the seventh year. (13) When you set him free, do not send him away empty-handed. (14) Give generously to him from your flock, your threshing floor, and your wine press. You are to give him whatever Yahweh your Mighty One has blessed you with. (15) Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and Yahweh your Mighty One redeemed you; that is why I am giving you this command today. (16) But if your slave says to you, "I don't want to leave you," because he loves you and your family, and is well off with you, (17) take an awl and pierce through his ear into the door, and he will become your slave for life. Also treat your female slave the

same way. (18) Do not regard it as a hardship when you set him free, because he worked for you six years - worth twice the wages of a hired hand. Then Yahweh your Mighty One will bless you in everything you do. (Deuteronomy 15:12-18, HCSB)

So we see a Hebrew woman mentioned in verse 12 and then she's called a "female slave" in verse 17, she goes through the same procedure as the male slave (6 years of service, 7th year release). The phrase "female slave" here is… *amah*. But the difference between here and Exodus 21:7-11 is ***the purpose for which the master bought the amah.*** Remember, legally an *amah* was a maidservant, but the master of the house could purchase an *amah* for a servant around the house, or to be joined to him as a wife. Either way she was taken care of. The commentary I quoted earlier mentioned an ancient Hebrew tomb inscription where a man and his *amah* were buried right beside each other. In that case, the *amah* was most likely his beloved bride.
I want to point out here that if the *amah* wasn't purchased to be a wife for the master or his son, she might still be given as a wife to a Hebrew manservant; remember Exodus 21:4 where the master gives the *ebed* a wife and she bears children and starts a family.

Conclusion

Isn't Yahweh's law amazing when we take the time to actually understand it properly? When you spend a lot of time dissecting the Torah's original intent it makes you say like King David, "Oh how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day!"

A wise sage named Rabbi Elazar once said, "Be diligent in the study of the Torah so that you know how to give an answer to an unbeliever." The Apostle Peter says basically the same thing in 1 Peter 3:15-16 when he wrote, "Always be ready to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you, however, do this with gentleness and respect." How will we always be ready if we haven't diligently studied?

My lessons through Exodus are sermons, but I try to make my sermons somewhat like a Bible class where you learn something each time. It's okay to preach a sermon to encourage people and excite people in our faith, but we should always be learning the Bible better, and then obtaining a good understanding. Good understanding brings better obedience.

In this lesson we've learned that Yahweh loves his daughters. He cares for and looks out for women, to the point of writing laws that specifically detail how a woman is to be treated. We've seen that as fathers and mothers here on the earth we should imitate Yahweh and look out for our daughters. We've also continued to see the beautiful servanthood laws of Yahweh are designed to lift up the poor from poverty and give them the opportunity to succeed financially in life. All of this is right here in this book, if people would only slow down and read - and study - what it says. We'll continue in verses 9-11 next time.

"Proper Treatment of a Wife"

Read Exodus 21:7-11 :: Since I taught the last message I've had several people comment or reach out to me saying that they appreciated the exegesis and understand much better what is going on here. That makes me happy - I enjoy seeing people gain a better understanding of what so many call a difficult text in Scripture.

I actually don't think it's that difficult, It's just that we often come to the Bible with our own biases and presuppositions, and sometimes we aren't ready to trust in Yahweh. I want to encourage you to let go of what you think or feel. We each carry with us a certain mindset due to how we were raised, where we lived growing up, who we hung around. It's not that all of that is bad, but… some of it is bad, lol.

Example of Biased Mindsets

I was raised eating pork, not so much from my parents but from my grandparents. Bacon or country ham was a staple breakfast food. The first time someone ever told me that it was a sin to eat pork I thought it was silly. It seemed so normal to me because I'd always done it. But what about the first time I found out that eating squirrel dumplings or fried frog legs was normal to some people? Even as a pork-eater that sounded gross. But for a lot of people in the south, squirrel and frog are eaten right along with pig, and they think nothing of it because… they were raised that way.

You see my point? We all have thoughts, feelings, emotional attachments to different ways of living, and I'm encouraging you to let all of that go, try your best to begin with a blank slate, and let Yahweh lead and guide you by His word, specifically His law.

Is Your Heart the Law Now?

Some people say, "Well, God wrote His law on my heart under the New Covenant, and my heart does not sit well with Exodus 21:7-11." I suggest to you that if your heart doesn't sit right with this law, the Almighty has not written His law on your heart. Too often people twist the New Covenant promise - Yahweh's law on our hearts - into our heart now being the law. Do you see the subtle twist there?

Christians think in their minds that they can just follow their own heart and it will lead them in the right direction, but that's not the New Covenant promise. The New Covenant promise - that actually hasn't been completely fulfilled yet - is that Yahweh writes **His law** (including Exodus 21:7-11) upon your heart and mind, so that you fully obey it and don't need anyone to teach you anymore. That fully happens at the resurrection, but for now on the earth we get a down-payment, and it's an on-going process.

So we can't go by what we think or feel, else one person's heart will say "Let's have squirrel dumplings for supper," and another person's heart might say, "We don't have to keep the Sabbath, Jesus is our rest." Yet another person's heart might say, "Well I'm good with the

Sabbath, but I just can't go along with a man selling his daughter to be an *amah*." All of that is trying to be wise in your own eyes. You've got to learn to love Yahweh's law. You've got to train your mind to think like the Creator.

Verse 9 (Treatment of Daughters)

So I'll pick it up with verse 9 today, and hopefully we'll make it through verse 11. Look at verse 9: "Or if he chooses her for his son, he must deal with her according to the customary treatment of daughters."

Remember that the reason the father sold his daughter into another family to be an *amah*, and the reason she would not leave as the *ebed* (manservant) does on the 7th year, **is because she was intended to become a wife in a new family.** We saw that from verse 8 where if the master of the house was displeased with her it was an act of treachery, and he had to let her be redeemed back into her original family. Yahweh is protecting the female.

But verse 9 shows that the master of the house may have bought her in order to give her to his son in marriage. So verse 8 and 9 give us two options. The master could choose her for himself (as a wife) or the master could choose her for his son (in which case she becomes the daughter-in-law of the master, an honorary daughter).

When my sons, Benjamin and Elijah, got married, I gained two daughters, Angel and Cassandra. Technically they are my daughters-in-law (by marriage), but I now treat them as my honorary daughters, even though I didn't father them. So if they call me and need something, I help them in whatever way I can. I give them a hug, I tell them I love them… all that is the customary treatment of daughters, because they are married to my sons. That's what's going on here in verse 9. The master chooses the *amah* for his son to marry, and she becomes a new daughter to the master, so he treats her thus.

Verse 10 (Additional Wife)

But what about verse 10? Look at it: "If he (the master; follow the "he" from verses 8 and 9) takes an additional wife, he must not reduce the food, clothing, or marital rights of the first wife." So this sounds like the master is allowed to have more than one wife, and that is a big red flag for people in the world, because "How dare we believe a book that says it's okay for a man to have two wives."

The World's "Standard"

You know what's weird to me, our society as a whole - out in the world - believes it's okay for a (1) man to be married to another man or a (2) woman to be married to another woman. They also think it's okay for a (3) man or woman to just sleep around outside of marriage with the consent of anyone and everyone that wants to do that.

They also think it's okay for (4) men to dress up like a drag queen and sit in front of a group of children and read story books. They also think it's okay for a (5) man to "change his identity"

and become a woman, and then they nominate that person to be woman of the year (Bruce "Caitlyn" Jenner) even though he is a biological male. They also think a (6) woman can turn herself into a man, and then be involved with whoever she/he wants to be involved with, and they shout "love is love" through all of this…

But… don't you dare say that it's okay for a man to have two wives. No, that's not allowed, and many in the world will tell you it's sick and misogynistic to believe such.

The only reason I can come up with - why people in the world will allow and celebrate all that other stuff but not allow and celebrate *polygyny* (a man having more than one wife) - is because it is allowed and regulated in Holy Scripture. Their heart is hard and calloused, and their mind is warped to the point that they will celebrate all those other relationships (which are all sinful according to Yahweh's law) but condemn a man with two wives (which although not commanded in Scripture, is allowed).

And by the way, the worldly phrase "love is love" is wrong. The proper phrase is "love is keeping the commandments of Yahweh."

Only When People Ask Me

Now… I normally never bring this subject up with anyone, because people have a hard time letting go of their emotions here, so I only comment on this when a person asks me what I think, and at that point I cannot speak against what Yahweh teaches in His Word. I do realize that this subject makes women of today, even holy women, uncomfortable, and I don't believe a man should throw this teaching in his wife's face. At the same time if a man and woman get married, and they both understand this teaching, and the first wife knows from the start that the man may acquire another wife in the future, there is nothing sinful with that.

It is also fine for a man and woman to vow to each other in a monogamous marriage, and stay true to that vow. It is also fine for a man or woman to be single, and remain single for their entire life. All of these are allowances within the standard of Yahweh's law.

Before we exegete Exodus 21:10, I want to take a few minutes to talk about some of the approved examples of polygyny in Scripture. We often read about it in the Older Testament, but it never dawns on us that, "Hey, this was okay in Yahweh's eyes."

Abram, Sarai, and Hagar

Turn to Genesis 16… here, Abram and Sarai were married but had no children, she was barren. Sarai had an Egyptian servant named Hagar, and Sarai said to Abram (Gen. 16:2) "Since Yahweh has prevented me from bearing children, go to my servant; perhaps I can have children by her. And Abram agreed to what Sarai said. (3) So Abram's wife Sarai took Hagar, her Egyptian servant, and gave her to her husband Abram as a wife for him." At that point Abram had two wives, Sarai and Hagar.

Now it is true that after Hagar became pregnant - Sarai resented her, but the resentment stemmed from the very thing Sarai wanted to happen in the first place! Hagar did walk around though looking down on Sarai after she became pregnant, so there was a feud between the two wives.

Some people say that a man having multiple wives is wrong because whenever it was done in Scripture it always caused problems. Well… I don't know of any marriage that hasn't had any problems in it. I have people contact me for marriage counseling all the time, and all of them are monogamous marriages. We are all flesh so we are all gonna' have spats and problems from time-to-time.

I could teach an entire sermon on Genesis 16, but the main point here is that this is what happened, and it happened without any inkling of Yahweh looking down on the practice, or saying it was sinful. It is true that we can't just look at what people did in Scripture and automatically think it's okay (many times Yahweh's people did wrong). But when one of Yahweh's people, like father Abraham, does something - and it is not condemned but spoken of as normal, customary practice - then we can know for certain it's an approved example.

Jacob's Wives

Let's move from here and turn to Genesis 29 and 30 (beginning around 29:13) with Abraham's grandson Jacob, many of you know the account. Jacob meets up with Laban, and Laban has two daughters, Leah and Rachel. Jacob fell in love with Rachel and agreed to work for Laban for seven years for her (*that's true love right there y'all, seven years?!*). The text says that the seven years only seemed like a few days because he loved her so much.

So they hold a wedding feast, and there is drinking and dancing, but Laban held back Rachel and instead gave *Leah* to Jacob after the feast. Jacob and Leah slept together that night, but Jacob didn't notice in was Leah until the morning. Some have explained this by the sisters being twins, or that Jacob had drunk a lot of wine at the feast, or maybe Leah had a veil covering her face during the feast. What we do know for sure is that Laban tricked Jacob, but when Jacob approached him Laban answered (Gen. 29:26-27), "It is not the custom in this place to give the younger [daughter in marriage] before the firstborn *(they could have still been twins)*. (27) Complete this week [of wedding celebration], and we will also give you this [younger] one in return for working yet another seven years for me." Laban is getting a lot of labor out of this young man let me tell you!

Jacob was given Rachel after that week, but he had to work another seven years still, and Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah. This does not mean that Jacob didn't love Leah, he just had the initial preference for Rachel. And all this takes place without the slightest hint of Jacob having two wives being sinful, or weird, or wrong, or anything negative. But there's more…

The Handmaids (KJV)

When Laban gave his daughters away in marriage, he also gave each daughter a servant-girl (or KJV = handmaid) to help them around the house. Leah was given Zilpah and Rachel was given

Bilhah. So at that point, Jacob had two wives and each wife had a handmaid. This is known as a *shiphchah* in Hebrew.

Beginning in Genesis 29:31, Yahweh looks down from heaven and sees that Leah is not loved as much as Rachel, so He opens Leah's womb and Leah starts having babies like there's no tomorrow, and she loves it! Leah bares Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah.

As you move into Genesis 30 Rachel is getting upset because she wants to have a baby (having babies is a wonderful, beautiful thing for a wife), so she goes to Jacob and says, "Give me sons or I will die!" Hahaha… I can picture Jacob looking at her like, "I'm doing everything I know to do honey," lol. He does tell her (Gen. 30:2) "Am I in Elohim's place who has withheld children from you?"

So what does Rachel do? She does the same thing Sarai did towards Abram. Rachel gives her handmaid over to Jacob as an additional wife, he sleeps with Bilhah, and Bilhah conceives. Rachel says, (Gen. 30:3, 6) "She'll bear children for me so that through her I can build a family… Elohim has vindicated me; yes, He has heard me and given me a son," and she named him Dan." So it appears here that even though Bilhah is now a wife to Jacob, there was a hierarchy still in the marriage with Rachel over Bilhah. Bilhah then conceives again later on and bears another son whose name is Naphtali.

Now Leah has stopped bearing children, but she wants to keep up with Rachel so she takes her servant-girl Zilpah and gives her to Jacob as a wife (in Gen. 30:9), and Jacob goes into Zilpah, she becomes pregnant, and bares Gad and later Asher. Leah names those two sons just like Rachel named the sons Bilhah had.

The point in all of this is that this is where we get the 12 sons of Jacob later known as the 12 tribes of Israel, from 1 man who had 4 wives, and there is nothing negative said about any of this anywhere in Genesis or the rest of the entire Bible.

Reuben's Sin

One thing I like to point out to people here is that sometime during all of this a sin *does* take place - Reuben (Jacob's firstborn son through Leah) - sleeps with his father's handmaid wife Bilhah (Gen. 35:22) and Jacob-Israel heard about it. The Septuagint text there reads "Israel heard about it, and it was seen as evil in his sight." In Genesis 49 as Jacob is dying he gives a few words to each of his children, and in verses 3-4 he says this: "Reuben, you are my firstborn, my strength and the first-fruits of my virility, excelling in prominence, excelling in power. Turbulent as water, you will no longer excel, because you got into your father's bed and you defiled it - he got into my bed."

This is mentioned again in 1 Chronicles 5:1, "These were the sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel. He was the firstborn, but his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph son of

Israel, because Reuben defiled his father's bed. He is not listed in the genealogy according to birthright."

The point here is that all of this is going on between Jacob and his four wives and nothing negative is said, but when Reuben lays with his father's handmaid-wife it is condemned. This shows that Jacob having multiple wives was permissible, but what Reuben did was not, else something negative would have been said with what was taking place with Jacob and Leah, Rachel, Zilpah, and Bilhah.

The Point of Exodus 21:10

This is just a small backdrop to the law in Exodus 21:10 (let's turn back there) about the master of the house taking an additional wife. The law here is still addressing the proper treatment of the *amah*, and she is the "first wife" mentioned in that verse that is not to be diminished if the master takes an additional wife, but the law allows for him to take a second wife, just like Abram and Jacob did. It's not a sin.

The point here is that if the master (later on) takes an additional wife, the *amah* (the first wife) is to continue to receive the necessities and benefits of her marriage, named here as food, clothing, and marital rights. Those things are not to be reduced if a second wife comes into the picture. Again, Yahweh is protecting the female here.

The Three Things

When it comes to these three things (food, clothing, and marital rights), the scholars and commentators don't argue much at all on food and clothing (although food literally means "flesh" or "meat"), although the Septuagint here (Brenton) does read, "he shall not deprive her of necessaries and her apparel, and her companionship with him."

I take this altogether as food, clothing, housing, time, and intimacy. I think that's what's being spoken of here as a whole. When a man takes a wife she becomes one flesh with him and he can't set her to the side and treat her as someone less than. He's required to provide for her to the best of his ability.

Now that last thing on the list, "marital rights" in the HCSB or "conjugal rights" in the KJV is debated among scholars, because the Hebrew word is *onah*, and it's only used 1x (right here) in the Hebrew Bible. Some scholars say it refers to oil or ointment based on comparing Sumerian and Akkadian texts that list food, clothing, and oil as necessities of life. Other scholars point to the Septuagint, which uses the Greek word *apostereo*, which has to do with defrauding something, and then take that over to 1 Corinthians 7:5 where Paul tells the husband and wife not to defraud (*apostereo*) one another except with agreement for a time of prayer and fasting. Paul is speaking of intimacy there, and I think the same thing is going on in Exodus 21:10. "Marital Rights" is not limited to intimacy but it does include intimacy.

You can read this played out some in the case of Rachel and Leah in Genesis 29:14-16 where Leah barters some mandrakes with Rachel in exchange for her night with Jacob. It appears that the women had designated times to be with Jacob.

The main point is that the *amah* that becomes the master's wife cannot be placed on the back-burner when it comes to food, clothing, housing, time, intimacy, and companionship. Her necessities in life must still be there if the master decides to take on an additional wife.

Conclusion in vs. 11

The concluding verse in this section, Exodus 21:11 says "And if he does not do these three things for her *(the amah)* she may leave free of charge without any exchange for money." The *amah* was not allowed to be trapped into a bad situation. Again, Yahweh is protecting the female here, she is free to leave if the master of the house decides he isn't going to provide for her any longer.

This is also a verse showing that divorce is permissible under Yahweh's law. Divorce can be ugly, but it can also be a good thing when a woman is no longer being loved and cherished by her husband. I realize the same thing can happen to a husband, his wife can get to a point where she is no longer taking care of her husband, but the law of Yahweh doesn't focus as much on the husband being mistreated… and the reason is because he is allowed to take on an additional wife.

We've went over a lot in this lesson, and it's probably best if you go back over it slowly later on, I'll have these notes for reading on my website soon where you can study through them.

The main ending point here is that this entire law in Exodus 21:7-11 is for the betterment of the young lady in a successful family, and then when she is in that position there are parameters for that family to follow, else she gets to leave freely. No one is to have complete control over her as though she isn't her own person made in the image of the Creator. A woman is a special treasure, and a virtuous woman is worth more than the finest rubies in the world. Husbands, a wife is to be provided for and taken care of with all the necessities of life. That's a big point we are taught here in the perfect law of Yahweh.

"Learning From Biblical Slavery Laws"

Read Exodus 21:1-11 :: Today's lesson will be my last one for this present time on the topic of slavery or servanthood in the law of Yahweh. I wanted to teach one more lesson on this subject because I think there may still be some questions come up, and in particular: "Why would I spend four lessons covering a practice that is… out of practice in our modern culture?" And… "Does all of this really matter due to us living in modern 21st century America today?"

Torah is Paramount

The first answer to those questions is this: the reason I've spent time going through this is because it's part of the perfect law of Yahweh, the law that Yeshua the promised Messiah said he did not come to abolish but to confirm or establish. Whether or not we personally participate or practice this allowance in the law has no bearing on it still being the perfect law of Yahweh.

Let me give you an example here. There may come a time when you study a particular law of the Levite Priesthood. You'll likely never participate in that law (unless by some chance a man here finds out you're a son of Aaron in the future, in the kingdom)… but if you never participate in one of Yahweh's laws, due to it not governing you specifically, it doesn't take away from the holiness of that law. It's still important for someone, and it's important for you to know as general Bible knowledge.

So that's the number one reason we covered this text, it's in the law of Yahweh and we should study the law of Yahweh. This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth but you shall think on it, meditate, recite it… day and night, right?

You Might Practice It

Okay, next point. There may come a time when you are faced with a circumstance where you actually do participate in these particular slavery laws we've covered here in the book of Exodus. You might come across a brother in need, and you have the opportunity to work that brother for six years, supplying his housing, food, clothing, and necessities of life in order for him to get back on his feet. Then the seventh year comes and you bless him liberally with your wealth (as the parallel text in Deuteronomy 15 shows). Or… you might be that poor brother who needs help.

Since we have studied these law together, you will know how to go about that situation, but even more so… we've learned here in general about taking care of the poor and needy in our community. There's no way we can help everyone, but here in this congregation first and foremost we've established a community or household of faith. When one of us falls on hard times there are others of us who can help lift up our brother and sister who is in need.

We learn that teaching here in these laws, and we go over them time and time again so that we are constantly reminded of how to treat each other. In these lessons we are working together with Yahweh in the process of Him writing His instructions on our hearts. Repetition builds memorization, and memorization builds hiding His word in our hearts.

Male Headship and Service

Alright let's look at some other things that are taught here. We are taught about male headship in the home. That's becoming less and less taught in churches today, but it's still the Scriptural model; the Bible doesn't change, it's just the whims and ways of man that change. Six times here in these 11 verses there is a person referred to as the "master" of the house.

Verse 4 “if his master gives him a wife.” Verse 5, “but if the servant declares: ‘I love my master.” That’s referring to the man of the house, the male gender. The Hebrew word here is *adon*, the root word for *adonai* (a word used to refer to Yahweh as the supreme Master or Boss over all). This hearkens back to when Sarah referred to Abraham as her lord or master in Genesis 18:12, which Peter picks up on in 1 Peter 3 when he speaks to Christian women.

You see this practice of calling someone “lord” sometimes on movies based in older periods where they refer to a king or ruler as “my lord.” Some people practice this today without realizing it, every-time they say “Yes sir.” Sir is a synonym to lord, used as title of respect to a male superior.

What we also learn in this is that the *adon* or master of the house doesn’t rule over the house in harshness, but in love. The master treats the servant so well that the servant loves him. The master supplies the servant with all he needs. The master takes a poor girl into his home in order to lift her up into success. The master is required to treat his daughter with respect, and supply his wife with food, clothing, housing, companionship, and intimacy. A good master doesn’t have to demand respect, he earns it. A good leader doesn’t have to force anyone to submit to him, people want to submit to him because he leads in gentleness and humility. We learn all of this from these verses.

Protecting Females

Let’s talk about the female gender here for a moment. Sometimes it is said by outsiders that the Bible is anti-women. Now granted, the Bible is at times *anti* what the world teaches about women, and about men for that matter. We’re at a point now in society where many people act like you can’t even define what a woman is anymore. But it’s not hard at all. You can look at me and Tisha standing beside each other, and you can see who is a man and who is a woman. The difference isn’t blurred and the difference should not be blurred. Deuteronomy 22:5 teaches that it’s an abomination when a man tries to look like a woman and a woman tries to look like a man. So I’m going to agree that the Bible is against all of this ideology that blurs the distinction between the sexes.

But is the Bible anti-women? Not at all. Here in the last verses we’ve went over, 7-11, we see Yahweh looking at societies, seeing how women have been mistreated, and making sure He establishes in His law that women are to be protected, provided for, and dealt with care, love, and affection. The law goes so far as to say that if a woman is not receiving these things she is free to leave, verse 11.

A man’s wife is to be his number one priority in life. Of course Yahweh comes first for all men and women, but I’m speaking of the horizontal plane. When I got married everyone else became second place to Tisha. I even set aside my own ways for her. I’m to love her which means serve her. Some men don’t like hearing that, but Biblically love means service. Of course it’s a two-way street, but this particular text is dealing with making sure a female gets treated properly, and

it's right here in Yahweh's law, that law many don't read and study because after all, "it's been abolished."

In the Ten Commandments

Moving now back to my first lesson on slavery or servanthood in the Bible… we learned that this concept or practice is hidden in plain sight right there in the Ten Commandments. People don't think about it much, but in the Sabbath commandment (#4) it says "You must not to do any work, you (that's speaking to a husband and wife), your son or daughter (children), your male or female slave/servant (ebed and amah), your livestock (animals; plow with ox or donkey), or the foreigner who is in your gates. Everybody gets a Sabbath, and this servant here is Hebrew or non-Hebrew, it doesn't matter their lineage. If they are your servant they get the Sabbath off.

Spirit-Filled Servants

It's interesting that while I'm teaching through Exodus 21 brother TJ (in teaching through Acts) brought out a point in a recent sermon that actually ties into my lessons. He was talking about the baptism of the Holy Spirit, moving from Acts 2 back to the prophet Yo'el (Joel) 2:28-32. There it is prophesied that Yahweh would pour out His Spirit upon all flesh, and then it names sons and daughters, old men and young men, and then Yahweh says, "I will even pour out My Spirit on the male and female slaves in those days." The male there is *ebed*, and the female there is *shiphcah*; remember that Hagar, Bilhah, and Zilpah were all *shiphcah's* BEFORE becoming an additional wife. So Yahweh has no respecter of persons when it comes to giving His Spirit. You may be a prominent Hebrew son or daughter or you may be an Egyptian handmaid. You can still receive the Spirit of Yahweh and be used by Yahweh mightily.

You Can Answer Objections

We learn all of this (and more) from reading and studying these laws in Exodus 21:1-11, and what's neat about this is now (if you've been listening, taking notes, studying, and reviewing) is that the next time someone questions you about your faith with the slavery laws you will be better equipped to give an answer. This is one of those subjects that tends to come up with people who question or look down on those of us who believe in Holy Scripture. "Well…" it's said, "I can't believe the Bible because it endorses slavery." And of course in their minds they're thinking of the worst kind of slavery whereby someone is kidnapped, beaten, starved, raped, etc. But Holy Scripture doesn't condone that practice from a master of the house. Whether a master has a Hebrew or non-Hebrew servant under him, they are to be treated with the decency all human beings deserve.

Harboring a Fugitive Slave

Turn with me to Deuteronomy 23:15-16 "Do not return a slave to his master when he has escaped from his master to you. (16) Let him live among you wherever he wants within your gates. Do not mistreat him." This is most likely referring to a slave that is fleeing from his or her non-Hebrew master. Ancient Hebrew commentators speak on this law as one which gives a slave the right to flee from an idolatrous master when they realize the Mighty One of Israel has a better law system. One Aramaic Targum reads here: "Thou shalt not deliver up a stranger

into the hand of the worshipper of idols; (the sojourner) who hath escaped to be among you shall be under the protection of My [presence] for therefore he hath fled from his idolatry. Let him dwell with you, and observe the commandments among you; teach him the law, and put him in a school in the place that he chooses in one of your cities: employ (or, have business with) him, that he may do well, and trouble him not by words."

The IVP Bible Background Commentary on Deuteronomy 23:15-16 says in part, "The Code of Hammurabi makes hiding a runaway slave a capital crime and sets a bounty of two shekels of silver for the return of a slave. Similarly, the international treaty between Pharaoh Rameses II and the Hittite king Hattusilis III (1280 b.c.) includes an extradition clause requiring the return of fugitive slaves." Yahweh was going against these existing law codes when He gave His law. His law is better, and when the nations hear of it and see it in action, they will want to join to Israel and be guided by this perfect law (Deuteronomy 4).

Foreign Slaves

As I close today turn with me to Leviticus 25:39-46. I know someone inevitably is going to ask about this text, and while I'm not going to spend an entire sermon on it, I want to comment on it here in brief. Let's read it:

39 If your brother among you becomes destitute and sells himself to you, you must not force him to do slave labor.
40 Let him stay with you as a hired hand or temporary resident; he may work for you until the Year of Jubilee.
41 Then he and his children are to be released from you, and he may return to his clan and his ancestral property.
42 They are not to be sold as slaves, because they are My slaves I brought out of the land of Egypt.
43 You are not to rule over them harshly but fear your Mighty One.
44 Your male and female slaves are to be from the nations around you; you may purchase male and female slaves.
45 You may also purchase them from the foreigners staying with you, or from their families living among you-those born in your land. These may become your property.
46 You may leave them to your sons after you to inherit as property; you can make them slaves for life. But concerning your brothers, the Israelites, you must not rule over one another harshly.

So, there's no need in denying what is spoken here by Yahweh. The Israelites were allowed to have slaves from the nations around them, but I want to point out here that the *harshness* a master was not allowed to treat the Hebrew slave with, that he could treat the non-Hebrew slave with, was not a harshness in how he conducted himself around and towards the slave, but rather ***the extent*** to which the slave had to serve. It's very important to catch this here.

The point in Leviticus 25 is that a non-Hebrew slave could be bought for life. You did not have to release him or her after six years, and the non-Hebrew slave could be passed down to the next

generation to continue to work for the Hebrew family. That's the difference here. The Hebrew slave could choose of his own will to stay permanently, but he could not be forced to more than six years. The non-Hebrew slave was a permanent one, but still treated with respect as a human being. We know this has to be the case because of the law in Deuteronomy 23:15-16 about the runaway slave. If Israel was to give asylum to a mistreated slave from another nation, then they were certainly not allowed to mistreat their own slaves from other nations. They were however allowed to work them for life.

If you'll go back to my first lesson where I quoted a Hebrew Rabbi ("Rambam") that quotation about how to properly respect and love a slave was in reference to a *Canaanite slave*. Rambam was pointing out that the Torah calls for the master of the house to respect all people, no matter their social status. He says there in part, "The Torah made him (the Canaanite slave) your servant to do work, not to be disgraced. Do not treat him with constant screaming and anger, rather speak with him pleasantly and listen to his complaints."

Civil War & Closing

As I close today… I have been asked about slavery in American and Europe, and the practice of slavery surrounding the Civil War in the mid 19th century. Well… I am not an American History or Civil War buff, and to be frank, I don't have the time to study about all of that because I am too busy studying and teaching Torah. My answer then is simple: if any type of slavery was practiced in America during that time period that violated the law of Yahweh it was sin and I am against it. But… if any type of slavery was practiced in America during that time period abided by the law of Yahweh then I am not against it. My guess is that both took place, because there are good people and bad people in all centuries. The main thing here is that what people do, or what America or any other country tries to dictate does not matter - it only matters what Yahweh says.

Yahweh is our king. Yahweh is our judge. Yahweh is our lawgiver. There is no other.

"Yahweh Teaches Capital Punishment"

Read Exodus 21:12-17 :: We have a string of laws here given by Yahweh that begin to teach us one way of maintaining peace and safety in society. Five times in these six verses we are told that certain actions committed require the death penalty for judgment. The phrase here is "must be put to death." We learn that some sins are counted as capital crimes, and these crimes must be punished.

Let me say at the beginning of this study that I would rather no one ever have to suffer the death penalty as punishment for a crime. I say with Yahweh: (Ezekiel 18:23) "Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? Instead, don't I take pleasure when he turns from his ways and lives?"

It would be wonderful if everyone abided by the government of Yahweh and did not do things like murder, manslaughter, kidnapping, or striking and cursing one's parents. But the fact is that

people do sin, and sometimes the sins they commit are criminal. If we let everyone in society go unchecked, it will produce anarchy. Anarchy is defined by Webster's Dictionary as "A state of lawlessness or political disorder due to the absence of governmental authority."

So… laws which govern a society, when they are broken, must be punished in order for those laws to be of complete value. As Ecclesiastes 8:11 says, "Because the sentence against a criminal act is not carried out quickly, the heart of people is filled with the desire to commit crime."

It's Everywhere

No matter where you go on earth you will encounter laws for life, and along with some of those laws are attached penalties for disobedience. This is even seen in family life. When I was a child I might get a spanking for breaking one of my parent's rules. As I grew into a teenager I wouldn't be allowed to go somewhere with my friends if I disobeyed mom or dad. Now as an adult, If I drive too fast in a school zone and get pulled over by a local policeman, he'll write me a ticket where I'm fined a certain dollar amount. If I steal something and get caught I end up in jail for a time.

My Childhood Theft

I'll never forget being a kid and stealing a Cadbury egg from the grocery store. Mama saw me with it and asked "Matthew, where did you get that?" I told her "Grandmama gave it to me," which was a lie to cover up my stealing. I reckon I was about 5-7 years old.

Of course my Mama was wiser than me and she went and asked Grandmama. When Grandmama told her she knew nothing about it, and I was pressed further, I broke down and confessed. My dad gave me a spanking, or as we say in the south, a "whoopin," and made me go back to store, apologize to the store manager, and pay him for the egg with money I had to work for.
My dad understood the value of there being a penalty to pay, even for a child, in order to teach me a lesson. At this point in my life I'm beyond thankful that I was raised by Christian parents who didn't let me act any way or do anything I wanted to do. They are a huge reason I'm the man I am today. Maturity appreciates righteous discipline.

Why Penalties?

All of these penalties I've mentioned are put in place for what reason? Think about it. They are there in order to bring order and stability to a particular area of life.

Take a subdivision for example, with speed limit signs of 15 mph. I drive through them all the time in my work truck. They are put there because it's a community where people live and take walks, children play and ride bikes. Driving through there slowly yields a slim chance of someone getting hurt. So we are careful.

Let's say I'm in there one day working at a person's house, and a car comes zooming by at 55 mph and clips me in the legs because they didn't see me standing beside my truck getting a

shovel off. I break both legs and am out of work for 3-6 months. What happens? Shouldn't some kind of penalty be put in place against the careless driver?

What if the subdivision gets together and writes him a letter asking him to not drive so reckless through the small streets again. Is that enough? I mean, I'm sitting up in my bed with two broke legs that can't work to provide for my family. Is a letter and a scolding enough for a penalty?

If the only thing that speed-demon gets for breaking my legs is a letter and a scolding, **there is no incentive to stop committing the wrong.** There must be a penalty that is equal in weight to the crime in order to cause even a hard heart from wanting to act that way again. In Scripture this is called an eye-for-an-eye and a-tooth-for-a-tooth. In law it's called *lex talionis*, which is a Latin phrase for the *law of retaliation*, whereby a punishment resembles an offense in kind and degree.

It is righteous for a punishment to fit the crime. It is unrighteousness for a punishment to be lesser or greater than the crime committed. Yahweh doesn't want anyone under-punished, but He likewise doesn't want anyone over-punished.

Yahweh's Divine Punishment

In Exodus 21:12-17 we aren't talking about speeding through a subdivision, we are talking about much more serious crimes of first-degree murder, hitting and cursing your father or mother, and kidnapping. And Yahweh says - remember, this isn't me saying what the penalty should be for these things - Yahweh says the penalty for each of these sins/crimes is death.

The Death Penalty in the USA

There are still 27 states in our country that have death as an appropriate penalty for some crimes. Additionally the US government and the US military retain the death penalty for some crimes. In 2021 there were 11 people executed by lethal injection in the United States, 10 male, 1 female.

Lisa Marie Montgomery was executed on January 13, 2021 by lethal injection at the age of 52 for a crime she committed back in 2004. She was convicted of kidnapping resulting in death. She strangled a pregnant woman to death and then cut the eight month gestation baby out of the womb. She was the first woman in 67 years to be executed by the Federal Government.
These are somber facts that we don't really like to think about. I bring them up - not because I agree with the United States justice system across the board - but for the purpose of showing you that even in our society - which has become more and more atheistic and humanistic - there is still an understanding that some crimes have to be penalized to the fullest extent.

If Not Death, What?

Let me ask you a question to get you thinking. Let's say you don't agree with Yahweh about the death penalty for first-degree murder. You think that's outdated and we've developed as humans to know better than that.

My question is: how do you then suggest a society punishes a murderer? If someone says jail-time, why? Why do you think a person should just be locked up in a secure building with other murderers to live for let's say 25 years to life? What made someone come up with that punishment? What standard are they going by? Do we just make things up as we go? Do we just get a committee of people together and vote on how we think best to punish a murderer?

Anytime we veer away from the perfect law of Yahweh that converts the soul (Psalm 19:7), and the judgments of Yahweh that are true and righteous altogether (Psalm 19:9), we end up having to come up with a different way of doing something. In this case we are left with our own thinking about how to punish a murderer, in which case we substitute Yahweh's way for man's way. Recognize here that there is no neutral ground. It's either Yahweh's law (one way) or man's law (many ways).

Yahweh says (vs. 14 here), "If a person willfully acts against his neighbor to murder him by scheming, you must take him from my altar to be put to death." Anything less than that is leaning to our own understanding.

A NT Parallel

Organized government is required by Yahweh to follow His pattern of rule. It's not just individuals that can sin against the Almighty, governments can sin too. A good passage to go to here is Romans 13 where we are told that government is a a servant of the Almighty. Turn with me to Romans 13:1-4.

(1) Everyone must submit to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except from [the Almighty], and those that exist are instituted by [the Almighty].
(2) So then, the one who resists the authority is opposing [the Almighty's] command, and those who oppose it will bring judgment on themselves.
(3) For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have its approval.
(4) For government is [the Almighty's] servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, because it does not carry the sword for no reason. For government is [the Almighty's] servant, an avenger that brings wrath on the one who does wrong.

Examples of Disobeying Man's Law

Some people read this and walk away believing it is a sin to violate the rule of the law of the land. The problem with that is that there is a Higher Law than any law of the land, Yahweh's law. There are cases in Scripture where the law of the land said one thing, and Yahweh's people disobeyed the law of the land.

In Exodus 1 the Hebrew midwives Shiphrah and Puah disobeyed the command from their government, the Egyptian authorities, to kill the Hebrew baby boys when they came out of the womb. Then they lied to or deceived the Egyptian government, and Yahweh blessed them for their disobedience against a tyrannical government.

Then you have Daniel in Babylon, when told not to petition anyone except Darius for 30 days, disobeyed and kept praying to Yahweh. Mishael, Hananiah, and Azariah were told to bow down to a statue in Babylon, but refused. The Apostles in Acts 5 were told by Jewish authorities not to preach about Yeshua of Nazareth, but they said, "We ought to obey the Almighty rather than man."

Romans 13 Rightly Understood

So what is Paul writing about in Romans 13? Notice a few things here, specifically in verses 3-4. "Rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad." This can't be describing every government on the earth, because many governments don't even punish bad conduct.

Some lawless conduct gets completely unchecked here in America. Take for example adultery and homosexual practice. Both are pretty much looked upon as normal by our local and federal law. Adulterers just get divorced and move on to the next person. People who practice homosexuality get an entire month of pride in their honor. So how is Romans 13:3 describing our government? It can't be.

Paul also writes in verse 4, "If you do wrong, be afraid, because it (rulers, government) does not carry the sword for no reason… an avenger of wrath on the one who does wrong." Again, this can't describe every government; it's impossible.

Romans 13 is instead a *prescriptive* text telling us how governments *should* rule, not a free-for-all text telling us to always submit to every single government official.

At the same time we are taught here that righteous government should be submitted to, and has the authority to carry out Yahweh's wrath upon criminals.

What is the Sword in Romans 13?

A sword is a weapon, and here it is used as a symbol of execution upon evil-doers. That's what it means by saying that a government is "an avenger of wrath on the one who does wrong." The sword stands for a penalty, and in the fullest extent the death penalty.

If you make notes in your Bible, write out Psalm 149:4-9 beside Romans 13. Turn with me to Psalm 149 (we'll begin reading at verse 4): "For Yahweh takes pleasure in His people;
He adorns the humble with salvation. Let the [righteous] celebrate in triumphal glory; let them shout for joy on their beds. Let the exaltation of [the Almighty] be in their mouths and a double-edged sword in their hands, inflicting vengeance on the nations and punishment on the peoples, binding their kings with chains and their dignitaries with iron shackles, carrying out the judgment decreed against them. This honor is for all His [righteous] people. Hallelujah!"

The two-edged sword is there to inflict punishment, carrying out the judgments of Yahweh. Psalm 149 and Romans 13 are prescribing the exact same thing, and we go to the Torah of Yahweh, in Exodus 21:12-17, to see exactly what punishment fits certain crimes.

Why Even Teach This?

When I think about and teach on this subject I get a bit frustrated, because this is something that is out of my grasp or control. I like to primarily focus upon things I can control, keeping myself and my family in order, or this assembly in order. Those are all things I can work on and do better in. But the government? I have no control over our government.

Some people believe in what's called post-millennialism, which basically means that through the preaching of the law and gospel this world will get better and better and eventually usher in an age of righteousness and justice *before* the Messiah returns (thus Yeshua returns post/after the millennium). So they put out teachings, and books, and courses on Biblical law, in the hope that one day society will realize that the way they've been doing things just isn't working, so let's try what the Christian law-makers suggest.

I hope that the post-mil position on eschatology is the correct one… but of this I have my doubts. I lean more pre-mil myself, believing that the return of Yeshua happens pre-millennium, and then the age of righteousness and justice is ushered in based upon his primary rule.

Regardless, the Word of Yahweh must be taught. His rule of law must be taught. We can't sit around and do nothing, we must be about the Master's business until He comes. This subject of capital punishment is one part of this book of the law that must not depart from our mouth and that we are to think about day and night. And even if no governmental official I talk to sees the light, I must still warn them about their walking in the darkness of man's law.

I must do like Yochanan the baptizer who told wicked king Herod (Mark 6:18), "It's not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." John was put in prison and eventually beheaded, but he stood true to the word of Yahweh, and he will get a new head at the resurrection. So I'm going to preach the truth like he did, even if a government official will not listen.

"Did Yeshua Overturn the Death Penalty?"

Read Exodus 21:12-17 :: In my last sermon I talked about the concept of capital punishment based on our first text where Yahweh says that a person who commits certain crimes must be put to death.

In order for there to be peace in a county, state, or country there must be laws, and in order for those laws to be of complete value, there must be penalties for breaking those laws. But when it comes to the ultimate penalty of someone having to forfeit their life due to a heinous crime, how does government or civil authority carry out these penalties? There are parameters involved.

Does John 8 Overturn?

I thought of a few ways I could go about teaching this, but I decided on exegeting John 8:2-11, the account of the woman caught in adultery. This is a text that is often cited as proof that Yeshua did away with the death penalty for crimes that called for such.

I want to show you why that is not the case, and as we walk through this text you will also learn about the proper parameters that must be met and followed in order to carry out this "must be put to death" clause in Exodus.

We'll begin by reading John 8:2-5, "At dawn He went to the temple complex again, and all the people were coming to Him. He sat down and began to teach them. Then the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery, making her stand in the center. "Teacher," they said to Him, "this woman was caught in the act of committing adultery. In the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do You say?"

Adultery in the Law

So they bring this woman up to Yeshua, and she's standing right in the view of everyone, and they tell Yeshua she was caught committing adultery. Adultery is defined primarily in the Torah as sleeping with another man's wife. We find this in Leviticus 20:10, "If a man commits adultery with a married woman — if he commits adultery with his neighbor's wife — both the adulterer and the adulteress must be put to death." Other than the Ten Commandments, this is the only mention of the word adultery in the Law, and we see here not only the definition for adultery, but also the penalty attached to it - "must be put to death," the same clause as in Exodus 21:12-17. (Note: Deuteronomy 22:22 also mentions this act as criminal, but does not use the word adultery.)

So Pharisees say to Yeshua, "In the law Moshe commanded us to stone such women." Remember that Moshe is used here because he's the man Yahweh directly and personally spoke the Law to. The people said, "Let not Elohim speak to us," so the end of Exodus 20 and into 21 is Yahweh speaking directly to Moshe and he in turn relaying it to the people. We'll get more to the stoning aspect later when I talk about the methods Yahweh prescribes for putting a criminal to death.

What I want you to notice now is that in Leviticus 20:10 the penalty is not just death for the adulteress (woman) *but also the adulterer (man)*. When a married woman commits adultery she is not the only one involved in the sinful act, the man she sleeps with is as well, and both are to be punished - not just the woman, not just the man - both.

They Only Brought the Woman

How does that play into John 8:2-5? *The scribes and Pharisees only brought the woman*. She was caught <u>in the very act</u> of adultery they said, which means that the man committing adultery with her had to be caught too… but he was not brought, which is an unjust measure.

So this is the first misuse of the Law to point out (by these scribes and Pharisees). They were not interested in justice; they must have had ulterior motives in only bringing the woman. And that's exactly what we find in the next verse, John 8:6a "They asked this to trap Him, in order that they might have evidence to accuse Him."

Now we see their motive. If you don't understand this initial point from the text you will misinterpret and misunderstand the rest of it. The whole reason they brought this woman to him was not because they wanted justice for Yahweh's Law being violated. Had they really wanted justice, the adulterer would have been brought as well. They were just upset with the stir Yeshua was causing in the community so they wanted to trap him, accuse him, and ultimately kill him.

When my children were all little, one of them would sometimes come up to me and tattle-tell on their brother or sister. I'd always listen, but I would question them about what happened. I'd usually find out that they had been provoking their sibling to anger and then got mad when their sibling decided to retaliate. They wanted me to punish their sibling, but they didn't want me to know about what they had done wrong to start with.

The proper understanding here begins by realizing the impure motive of the Pharisees. They brought the woman to tattle on her, but they'd been bad boys themselves, and they knew it. They were just trying to trap or trick Yeshua.

Thankfully, our Master is smarter than a Pharisee. Do you think Yeshua knew the Law of Leviticus 20:10? Of course he did. He knew you couldn't just condemn the adulteress (female). He knew that the adulterer (male) must be condemned as well.

Writing in the Dirt

So what does he do? Well, John 8:6b says, "Yeshua stooped down and started writing on the ground with His finger." I've heard all kinds of ideas about what Yeshua wrote down. Some have said this act resembles the act of the high priest in Numbers 5 where some dirt from the tabernacle floor was mixed with holy water as a drink for a woman who was *suspicioned* to have committed adultery.

Some say Yeshua may have written some of the Pharisees names who stood around him, hinting that they were guilty of the same or similar sins. Others say he may have written "thou shalt not commit adultery" as a jab towards the men who brought the women - again - that they were guilty of the same sin. Still others say he was kind of ignoring them and continuing to write about something he had been teaching the crowds as sort of a spiteful act to the Pharisees like, "You're wasting my time with your tricks."

The fact is that we don't know what Yeshua wrote in the sand, the text does not tell us. It's neat to speculate and discuss what he might have wrote, but we shouldn't be dogmatic about our view.

Combining Two Wise Sayings

Look at John 8:7-8, "When they persisted in questioning Him, He stood up and said to them, "The one without sin among you should be the first to throw a stone at her." Then He stooped down again and continued writing on the ground."

So he tells them to stone her… but he is tricky in doing so. Using his wisdom he combines the phrase "throw a stone at her" with "the one without sin among you." He already knows what's going on is unjust judgment, so he offers a challenge and then keeps writing on the ground.

By saying "throw a stone at her" they couldn't accuse him of ignoring the law of Moshe.

But in saying "the one without sin among you" do this, that challenges the hearts, motives, and lives of the men. (He's extremely wise.)

The Accusers Leave

So John 8:9 says: "When they heard this, they left one by one, starting with the older men. Only He was left, with the woman in the center." Why did they leave? Conviction. They must have all been guilty of the same or similar sin, which meant they too deserved to be stoned *if* they'd been caught in the very act. As impure as they were being, their consciences still convicted them of what they were guilty of and what they were trying to do.

Now… there is nothing in the law that says a person must be sinless in order to carry out the death penalty on someone else, however… a person who is *privately* guilty of a capital crime themselves will think long and hard before condemning and putting to death another person who is *publicly* guilty of a capital crime. This is because eventually, anyone guilty who is unrepentant will have to stand before the Judge of All the Earth and be punished.

No Eye-Witnesses

Now… here is where we learn a few more parts of properly carrying out the Torah's death penalty on a criminal. The woman's accusers all left, so there was no longer anyone there who had been an eye-witness to her sin/crime.

Deuteronomy 19:15 says, "One witness cannot establish any wrongdoing or sin against a person, whatever that person has done. A fact must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses."

Deuteronomy 17:6-7 says this: "The one condemned to die is to be executed on the testimony of two or three witnesses. No one is to be executed on the testimony of a single witness. The witnesses' hands are to be the first in putting him to death, and after that, the hands of all the people. You must purge the evil from you."

So not only did you need at least two witnesses to accuse someone of a criminal act - and then have them put to death, the eye-witnesses hands were to be the first ones who picked up the

stones, and only after this could the rest of the community carry out the penalty. Evil must be purged, but it must be purged inside the parameters that the Law allows.

Why eye-witnesses? This is both the wisdom and the mercy of Yahweh. It is easy for 1 person to rise up and claim that someone committed a wrong. It is more difficult to get 2 people or 3 people to rise up and make that same claim. It is even more difficult to get 2 or 3 people's testimonies to agree with one another.

One of the best ways to determine if people are conniving with each other in a lie is to separate them and question each of them alone. You can examine story lines and pertinent points, but… you cannot do that with a single witness. Yahweh is so merciful that He sometimes lets a guilty person go free here on the earth in order to protect innocent people from being falsely accused by a single witness. That's the beauty of the two or more witnesses clause in Scripture.

Yeshua's Mercy Within in the Torah

So without (1) the adulterer (male party) there, and (2) no eye-witnesses to the crime, Yeshua could not lawfully command the earthly death penalty on this woman. Yes, Yeshua showed this woman mercy, but he only showed her the mercy the Law allowed.

In John 8:10-11 we read, "When Yeshua stood up, He said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, Lord," she answered. "Neither do I condemn you," said Yeshua. "Go, and from now on do not sin anymore."

Notice that he knew she was guilty, prophets could know the hearts and actions of a person even if they weren't there to see it. But he couldn't carry out the penalty the Torah prescribed because all the puzzle pieces weren't there for a lawful execution. That's why he doesn't condemn her; *he means he doesn't condemn her <u>to the earthly death penalty.</u>* He's not saying he doesn't condemn her sin. He does. He ends by saying, "from now on do not sin anymore."

Yahweh is Still Merciful

So get this… even when Biblical Capital Punishment is in place in a community, there are still times when people are shown mercy because due process of law must be strictly followed.

But… if all the parameters are met, the death penalty can - and should be - carried out.

In such cases Deuteronomy 19:21 must be followed: "You must not show pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, and foot for foot."

I know I teach a lot about mercy, and Yahweh is merciful. Yahweh has let way more guilty people go free than be put to death, even though He is aware of all crimes with His sovereign eyes in heaven. But when His Law is in force in society, and all the parameters and procedures are in place… "you must not show pity" He says.

It is not merciful to a society to allow a murderer or rapist to go free. In such cases we shouldn't worry about mercy on the criminal, but mercy on the community, and mercy upon the family of the victim. Proverbs 21:15 says "Justice executed is a joy to the righteous but a terror to those who practice iniquity."

The reason this brings about peace in society is that even the stone-cold hearts of wicked men are slowed down when they know they will be faced with death if caught. Deuteronomy 19:20 says "Then everyone else will hear and be afraid, and they will never again do anything evil like this among you." People say capital punishment doesn't deter crime. Well… Yahweh says it does, and I can guarantee you this, when a murderer or rapist is executed, they will never commit murder or rape again.

We Would Rather Perfect Harmony

I'll end today by reminding you that I do not teach these lessons because I want to see people die. I would love for everyone to be law-abiding citizens. I would love for wicked people to repent and live. But the fact remains that men are sinners, and when the big, criminal sins are committed, the strong arm of the Law is in place to make the community a safe space for law-abiding citizens.

Next week I will talk about the objection that these death penalty regulations are only for Israel, in the land of Israel. I strongly disagree, and I will show you from the Scriptures why I disagree. For now…

"Even Canaanites Can Sin"

Read Exodus 21:12-17 :: So for the past two sermons I've been talking about Yahweh's judgments or earthly penalties that should be in place on a civil or governmental level, in order to curb evil and keep peace in a society.

But the response I hear from many Christians is that, "Well, that was for Old Testament Israel. Those penalties can only be enforced in the nation of Israel while in the land of Israel. You can't take that and apply it to modern day America, or any other nation."

Alright, so… I think there is *some* truth to that objection, but I also think there is some falsehood to that objection.

Laws Only for Israel

It is true that some laws were put in place by Yahweh to separate Israel from the surrounding nations. Let me give you a basic example of this in Deuteronomy 14:21a where the Israelites are told: "You are not to eat any carcass *[KJV = dieth of itself; ESV = died naturally]*; you may give it to a resident alien within your gates, and he may eat it, or you may sell it to a foreigner. For you are a holy people belonging to Yahweh your Mighty One."

Notice the separation there - YOU, Israel - are a holy (set-apart, separated) people. So you can't eat this (Yahweh tells them), but you can sell it to an outsider. That is clearly showing a separation in law or regulation between someone who is inside the Covenant with Yahweh and someone who is outside the Covenant of Yahweh.

Now, some people point out a text like Exodus 12 (which is the Passover text, right), and they'll say there's only one law for the native and the foreigner (vs. 49). And that's a true statement, but it misses a vital point, in that the statement about "one law" or "the same law" is a statement applying to native born Israelites and <u>those foreigners who have joined the nation of Israel to serve Yahweh by keeping His commandments.</u>

So it's like in our congregation or community here, we are in Covenant with Yahweh. It doesn't matter whether some of us are Israelites by lineage or non-Israelites by lineage, when we are in Covenant with Yahweh, we are required to abide by the same guide or set of laws.

So with the text in Exodus 12, about the Passover, once a male foreigner is circumcised (in the flesh), which is the Covenant sign going back as far as father Abraham (in Genesis 17), he becomes as one born in the land and must follow all of the Passover regulations given in that text. An uncircumcised man who has not joined to Israel to serve Yahweh does not fall under the "one law" or "same law" guidelines. Do you see that?

Talking to Christians

This is why I tell people who claim to follow the Mighty One of Israel (the "God of the Bible" as He's sometimes called) that if they are going to walk in agreement with Him, they can't say that the laws given to Israel do not apply to them. In Scripture, the question was always: "How do the nations join to Israel," NOT " How do Israelites join to the nations?"

Now, for a Gentile who joins… yes there is a grace period. Yes there is leniency; we learn addition and subtraction before algebra. *Acts 15 right?* But a grace period doesn't mean we aren't ever required to advance in our obedience. If a landlord gives a person a grace period, there still comes a time when payment has to be made. You can't hang out in the apartment for a year grasping at that 30 day grace period. You can't claim the title "follower of the Messiah" and then live the next 30 years of your life dismissing all the parts of his lifestyle you don't want to practice.

So there is an Acts 15 learning process, where the Gentiles who were joining to Yahweh with Israel were saved by grace and welcomed into the fellowship, but they had to stop their most heinous practices right away, and then come to the synagogue on Shabbat to gradually learn the rest of the Torah.

It's interesting that the four things given there to the Gentiles to stop doing (abstain from idolatry, sexual immorality, things strangled, and blood) are all listed in Leviticus 17-18, right

after the forgiveness chapter in Leviticus 16 about the Day of Atonement. I don't think that's a coincidence. But let me get back to the main point of the sermon…

Laws Governing All People

Now, I also believe people take things too far, to the extent of thinking that none of the laws Israel was given can be used to govern foreign nations. I want to show you that Yahweh holds foreign nations accountable for transgressing certain parts of His law. So one is correct in saying that law of the Passover (or the law against eating an animal that has died of itself) do not regulate foreign nations, but what about the laws against murder, kidnapping, sexual immorality, and honoring parents? Does Yahweh hold non-Israelite nations or individual people accountable for transgressing these laws?

Amorite Transgression

Let's start with Genesis 15. Someone may say this is before Israelites existed, and yes that's technically accurate, but Genesis 15 is still dealing with father Abraham, the grandfather of Jacob-Israel who walked in Covenant obedience with Yahweh. Let's look at verses 13-16 here: Then Yahweh said to Abram, "Know this for certain: Your offspring will be foreigners in a land that does not belong to them; they will be enslaved and oppressed 400 years. However, I will judge the nation they serve, and afterward they will go out with many possessions. But you will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a ripe old age. In the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."

So Yahweh is talking to Abram here about what will happen to his descendants, and there are some clues that point to the Israelites living in Egypt: Yahweh judging the Egyptians, and then Israel leaving Egypt with many possessions or spoils. Yahweh also says they would "return here" in the fourth generation (the "here" is the land Yahweh has just told Abram he'd be given, vs. 7, also called the promised land or land of Canaan), and then he gives a clause at the end, "for [this is because] the iniquity of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."

The word iniquity here in Hebrew is *avon* (meaning "evil" or "perversity"), but in the Greek Septuagint it's the word *hamartia*, a word that is often translated in the Greek NT as sin. Matthew 1:21 "for he shall save his people from their sin." Matthew 3:6 "people were baptized in the Jordan river confessing their sins." That's *hamartia*.

The point is that in Genesis 15:16 Yahweh is holding the Amorites accountable for transgressing certain laws. According to Genesis 10, the Amorites were an off-shoot of the Canaanites from Ham, the same Canaanites that are spoken of negatively throughout the Bible. So the Amorites/ Canaanites dwelt in the land Yahweh would give Abram, and there would come a point where their sin reached its full measure (think of filling up a cup with water and then it overflowing once the water reached the top), and Yahweh would kick them out of the land.

Canaanite Transgression

Now… look with me to Leviticus 18, beginning with verses 1-5, "Yahweh spoke to Moshe: "Speak to the Israelites and tell them: I am Yahweh your Mighty One. Do not follow the practices of the land of Egypt, where you used to live, or follow the practices of the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you. You must not follow their customs. You are to practice My ordinances and you are to keep My statutes by following them; I am Yahweh your Mighty One. Keep My statutes and ordinances; a person will live if he does them. I am Yahweh."

The Israelites heard these words while in the wilderness, and would soon be given the land of Canaan. They were being told by Yahweh that once they inherited the promised land (promised to Abram and his descendants) they were to follow His behavior, not Canaanite behavior.

What's Leviticus 18 about? ***Sexual immorality.*** You can read the whole thing in your personal study time (we've read it before in our public Torah reading), but I want you to look at what's said towards the end of the chapter.

Do not defile yourselves by any of these practices, for the nations I am driving out before you have defiled themselves by all these things. The land has become defiled, so I am punishing it for its sin, and the land will vomit out its inhabitants. But you are to keep My statutes and ordinances. You must not commit any of these detestable things — not the native or the foreigner who lives among you. For the men who were in the land prior to you have committed all these detestable things, and the land has become defiled. If you defile the land, it will vomit you out as it has vomited out the nations that were before you. (Leviticus 18:24-28, HCSB)

The key points are "the nations have defiled themselves by all these things" and "the land has become defiled," and "I am punishing it for it's sin" so the land is going to spit out its current inhabitants. And He tells Israel that if they end up doing what the Canaanites did, the land will spit them out too.

Differing Law Codes

So here are some laws that Yahweh is holding non Israelites - people who aren't even in special Covenant with Him - accountable to. So whereas the dietary laws and Passover regulations separated Israel from the nations, the laws against sexual immorality were held as a standard for even the Canaanites to follow.

This brings us back around to last week's message where I talked some about adultery. Adultery is a sin according to Exodus 20:14. Leviticus 20:10 teaches it's also a capital crime, and Leviticus 18 teaches us that it's one of those laws that governs all peoples and all nations of the world. So whereas you can't get upset with and chastise an unbeliever for not keeping Passover or eating unclean, you can get upset with and chastise an unbeliever for committing adultery. Do you see the point?

Capital Crimes Everywhere

So how are nations, the governments of the world, required to punish certain sins which are crimes? In regards to capital punishment, the law of *any* land should be that adultery is wrong and a crime to be punished. The same goes for laws against murder, rape, theft, kidnapping, and cursing and hitting one's parents. These are not just laws governing Israel in the land of Israel, these are laws that Yahweh requires foreign nations to follow. If He did not require it of them, He would not call what they are doing sin, iniquity, abomination, etc. Thus Proverbs 14:34, "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people."

This is why Daniel could tell the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, "Therefore, may my advice seem good to you my king. Separate yourself from your sins by doing what is right, and from your injustices by showing mercy to the needy. Perhaps there will be an extension of your prosperity." (Daniel 4:27, HCSB)

This also explains the prescriptive text in Romans 13 that we went over in the first lesson on capital punishment. Rulers, no matter what nation they are over, are to be a terror to workers of evil. Government should be the Almighty's servant, carrying the sword of punishment, as the avenger of the Almighty's wrath on the person who does wrong.

What About Shabbat?

So, the question may now come up about the law of… the Sabbath. It appears from my reading of Scripture that the Sabbath was given to Yahweh's Covenant people, and I believe as the Covenant people of Yahweh we should invite unbelievers to forsake their sin and join to Yahweh, keep the Sabbath and experience its blessing.

I believe we should tell Christians who don't keep the Sabbath that they are in sin for thinking they've joined themselves to the Messiah (the chief Israelite) and yet teach and practice the abolition of the Sabbath. Remember Acts 15:21 assumes Sabbath observance for the Gentiles.

At the same time though I don't believe a person living in a non-Israelite society should be held culpable for Sabbath violation. If we lived in a theocracy, and the Sabbath law was in force, and a person who claimed to be in Covenant with the Almighty was caught defiantly violating the Sabbath, I believe the penalty should be death (we see this in Numbers 15:32-36). But I don't believe the Sabbath laws or penalties should be enforced in a society foreign to the theocracy of Israel. It's one of those laws that sets Israel apart from the nations. The Canaanites weren't kicked out of their land for violating Sabbath, but they were kicked out of their land for their many sexual immoralities.

A Covenant Community

I hope this clarifies some things for you. Here at this assembly we are in Covenant with Yahweh. If you join this fellowship you need to understand that. That's why we keep Sabbath, eat clean, celebrate Passover, etc. Whether we are native born or foreigner joined there is one law, not two laws. We aren't a government here, so we cannot enforce the death penalty, but we are a church

or congregation, so we do teach and practice Yahweh's law. If someone isn't really interested in serving Yahweh fully, this is probably not the place for them. We invite people into this blessed experience of serving Yahweh in all fullness, just as Israel was to be a light to the nations according to Deuteronomy 4:5-8, but we can't expect people who aren't serious about Covenanting with Yahweh to join and be fully obedient.

What we can expect, and what Yahweh expects out of all nations is to live by the guidelines of basic morality, and everything listed in our base text (Ex. 21:12-17) for the last few sermons falls under this. When any society shuns these laws, or any government doesn't enforce these laws, they are in sin against the Almighty and will be held accountable unless they repent.

"Murder: Destroying Yahweh's Image"

Read Exodus 21:12-17 :: In the last three lessons we've went over capital punishment in general. I'd like to quote here from the IVP Bible Background Commentary, by Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas on Exodus 21:12, "Capital Punishment is required in those cases where the culprit is a threat to the well-being and the safety of the community. Thus murder, disrespect for parents (abuse), adultery and false worship are capital crimes, because they injure persons and corrupt the fabric of society. The principle involved assumes that leniency would encourage others to commit these crimes. Stoning is the usual form of execution. In this way no one person is responsible for the culprit's death, but the entire community has participated in the elimination of evil." That's a great summary.

Today we are going to begin going over the individual laws listed in this section that call for the death penalty when violated, the first of which is the law against murder.

Is Murder the Worst Sin?

It is possible to argue that murder is the greatest of all sins. I mentioned this to my sons this week, and Josiah asked me a good question. "Is murder worse than denying the Messiah?" The answer is no, and that's what makes it a good question. Denying the Messiah is the greater, *spiritual* sin that will keep you out of the Kingdom of Heaven for sure.

In this case, I'm speaking more to *physical* sins, actions you commit or don't commit. The reason I say murder may indeed be the worst of sins is because the greatest of all the commandments is to preserve life, which is the opposite of murder (all the negative commandments have positives). So to help someone, heal someone, care for someone, or nurse someone back to health is the greatest act of righteousness you can ever do.

As important as the Sabbath is (it's violation by a Covenant person calls for the death penalty too), you can break the Sabbath if you are helping someone or preserving someone's life; Yeshua taught us that when he healed on the Sabbath, or even when he allowed his disciples to pluck heads of grain and eat them on the Sabbath. Preserving of and caring for life is right at the top.

Destroying Yahweh's Image

That makes the unlawful taking of life (murder) down at the bottom, and it all has to do with destroying the image of the Creator. Look at Genesis 9:5-6 here, long before Moshe was ever born and the law was codified at Mount Sinai.

I will require the life of every animal and every man for your life and your blood. I will require the life of each man's brother for a man's life. Whoever sheds man's blood, his blood will be shed by man, for [the] Almighty made man in His image. (Genesis 9:5-6, HCSB)

Verse 5 can be a little tricky in its reading, but here is a good rendering from the CEV: "I created humans to be like me, and I will punish any animal or person that takes a human life. If an animal kills someone, that animal must die. And if a person takes the life of another, that person must be put to death."

So whether it's an animal that kills a person, or a person that murders another person, Yahweh requires the life of the one who took life as payment for the act. Genesis 9:6 makes it clear that payment is taken on the earth. In other words, it's not Yahweh who enacts judgment by Himself directly from heaven. "Whoever sheds man's blood, his blood will be shed BY MAN." That goes back to human judges.

And what's the reason given here? "For (because) the Almighty made man in His image." That hearkens back to Adam and Eve in Genesis 1-2. Yahweh made Adam in His image, and then he pulled Eve out of Adam (so to speak), as a counterpart comparable to Adam. So when someone later comes along and destroys the life of a human unjustly, they are destroying the image of Yahweh. That's what makes this such a terrible sin and crime.

Parallel Texts

So both Genesis 9:5-6 and Exodus 21:12-14 call for the death penalty to be carried out upon the murderer. This is also seen in Leviticus 24 and Numbers 35.

Leviticus 24:17-21 :: If a man kills anyone, he must be put to death. Whoever kills an animal is to make restitution for it, life for life. If any man inflicts a permanent injury on his neighbor, whatever he has done is to be done to him: fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. Whatever injury he inflicted on the person, the same is to be inflicted on him. Whoever kills an animal is to make restitution for it, but whoever kills a person is to be put to death.

Note: The word for kill here is *nakah*, which has to do more with smiting or hitting someone so that they die. It's used here because the previous verses are about where two men were fighting in the camp and one of them blasphemed Yahweh's Name. Just as fighting can lead to blasphemy, fighting can also lead to murder. The JPS Tanach reads (vs. 17) "And he that smiteth any man mortally shall be put to death." The NET reads "If a man beats any person to death, he must be put to death."

Now in these verses, we see the difference between animal life and human life. Animal life is important, so important that the unlawful killing of an animal must be made right by making restitution to its owner. But capital punishment is not the penalty if someone drives by and kills all of my chickens for no reason. I would be mad, and a penalty is necessary, but I don't get to ask for the criminal to be executed. They just need to compensate me for the wrong, either monetarily or with new birds. But when it comes to *human* life, the criminal is to be put to death.

Numbers 35:16-21 :: If anyone strikes a person with an iron object and death results, he is a murderer; the murderer must be put to death. If a man has in his hand a stone capable of causing death and strikes another person and he dies, the murderer must be put to death. If a man has in his hand a wooden object capable of causing death and strikes another person and he dies, the murderer must be put to death. The avenger of blood himself is to kill the murderer; when he finds him, he is to kill him. Likewise, if anyone in hatred pushes a person or throws an object at him with malicious intent and he dies, or if in hostility he strikes him with his hand and he dies, the one who struck him must be put to death; he is a murderer. The avenger of blood is to kill the murderer when he finds him.

Here is a list of possible scenarios of how a murder could take place. We shouldn't read this list as the only ways murder can take place, but as *case law* covering in general what constitutes murder.

Seeking to Harm

One thing I want you to notice here is that when you do something seeking to harm someone, even if you didn't think what you did was going to take their life, but it ends up killing them, it is looked upon as murder. Why? Because, as one scenario says, you threw the object and struck another person with malicious intent.

So if two men get in an argument, and end up fighting, and neither of them are really trying to kill the other one (but just hurt or harm them), and one ends up dead - it's murder. You can't holler, "But I wasn't trying to kill him!" You should have controlled your anger.

No Mercy for a Murderer

Exodus 21:14 also teaches us that there is no mercy shown to a murderer. "If a person willfully acts against his neighbor to murder him by scheming, you must take him from my altar to be put to death."

The altar here is seen as an extreme holy object and place, where people would seek asylum for the wrongs they had committed. You can find a case of this in 1 Kings 2:28-35 where Joab sought refuge by holding on to the horns (*qeren*) or corner projections of the altar in Yahweh's tabernacle. King Solomon had him executed anyhow, because… Exodus 21:14. No mercy is to be shown to a murderer, even if he's holding on to something as holy as the altar of Yahweh, begging for mercy.

Deuteronomy 19:13 says that of a murderer, "You must not look on him with pity but purge from Israel the guilt of shedding innocent blood, and you will prosper."

Numbers 35:30-31 says, "If anyone kills a person, the murderer is to be put to death based on the word of witnesses. But no one is to be put to death based on the testimony of one witness. You are not to accept a ransom for the life of a murderer who is guilty of killing someone; he must be put to death."

The family of the murderer might offer a million dollars to the victim's next of kin, to let their family member who has committed murder go free. Yahweh says no - the murderer must be put to death.

Can a Murderer Repent?

I've been asked several times if a murderer can repent, and the answer is yes. There is forgiveness for all sins except the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit (according to Yeshua in Matthew 12:31-32). But… that is between the murderer and Yahweh. The earthly penalty must still be carried out. If the murderer truly repents, Yahweh will forgive them and they will be in the kingdom of heaven, but that has no bearing towards the judgment that takes place on earth in the here and now.

Unintentional Killing

Now, if we look back to our base text in Exodus 21, we see that Yahweh recognizes that there is a difference between premeditated murder or hatred leading to a murder vs. the unintentional taking of a life. "(12) Whoever strikes a person so that he dies must be put to death. (13) But if he didn't intend any harm, and yet the Almighty caused it to happen by his hand, I will appoint a place for you where he may flee."

You see that phrase "he didn't intend any harm"? The literal rendering from the Hebrew there is "he was not lying in wait." The phrase is also used in 1 Samuel 24:11 where David had the opportunity to kill King Saul but only cut off a corner of his robe, and David said to the King, "I haven't sinned against you even though you are hunting me down to take my life." Saul was "lying in wait" to take David's life.

So Exodus 21:13 shows that a person might be killed accidentally, and Yahweh's providence didn't step in to stop it.

Cities of Refuge

In that case Yahweh says He will appoint a place for the person who accidentally killed someone to flee for refuge. Yahweh calls these places "cities of refuge" in Numbers 35 and Deuteronomy 4:41-43 and 19:4-10.

Numbers 35:9-15 - Yahweh said to Moses, "Speak to the Israelites and tell them: When you cross the Jordan into the land of Canaan, designate cities to serve as cities of refuge for you, so that a person who kills someone unintentionally may flee there. You

will have the cities as a refuge from the avenger, so that the one who kills someone will not die until he stands trial before the assembly. The cities you select will be your six cities of refuge. Select three cities across the Jordan and three cities in the land of Canaan to be cities of refuge. These six cities will serve as a refuge for the Israelites and for the foreigner or temporary resident among them, so that anyone who kills a person unintentionally may flee there.

Later in this chapter we learn that a person who fled to one of the cities due to an accidental killing had to stay there until the death of the current high priest. If they left the refuge city before that and were caught by the "avenger of blood" (the family of the person who was killed accidentally), there was no guilt of bloodshed if that family took the person's life. It seems that Yahweh understands the anger and pain here of the family in these cases, but still protects the person who wasn't "lying in wait" so long as they stayed in the refuge city.

Examples of Unintentional Killing

Deuteronomy 19:4-6 :: "Here is the law concerning a case of someone who kills a person and flees there to save his life, having killed his neighbor accidentally without previously hating him: If he goes into the forest with his neighbor to cut timber, and his hand swings the ax to chop down a tree, but the blade flies off the handle and strikes his neighbor so that he dies, that person may flee to one of these cities and live. Otherwise, the avenger of blood in the heat of his anger might pursue the one who committed manslaughter, overtake him because the distance is great, and strike him dead. Yet he did not deserve to die, since he did not previously hate his neighbor.

Having done manual labor most of my life, I can think of several scenarios where something like this might happen out on the job site, but I didn't put any of them in this sermon because it makes me sad just to think about one of my sons or a co-worker friend who might die from a mishap on the job. As sad as it would be though, it is not considered murder if there was no hatred, malicious intent, or lying in wait.

It Begins in the Heart

We've covered a lot of Scripture in this lesson, but you may think that you really don't have to worry about much of this because you've never committed murder and never intend to do so. But I want to remind you of what our Messiah says in Matthew 5:21-24.

You have heard that it was said to our ancestors, Do not murder ,and whoever murders will be subject to judgment. But I tell you, everyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Fool! ' will be subject to the Sanhedrin. But whoever says, 'You moron! ' will be subject to hellfire. So if you are offering your gift on the altar, and there you remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

Yeshua taught us that murder begins in the heart. Murder starts with hatred, or cursing, or belittling another person.

Unjust anger and hatred places you subject to judgment, and if you say to someone "You fool!" or "You stupid moron!" or anything like that… you are in danger of hell-fire (Gehenna). Words mean things, and words can kill or heal. And it doesn't have to be a so-called "four letter word" for it to be a sin. To speak hatefully towards someone, or even give a hand gesture like shooting a bird is a form of murder. It's not the kind that calls for the death penalty in the here-and-now, but an unrepentant person who harbors anger and hatred in their heart and slurs other people will go to Gehenna in the after-life. Get that out of your heart before it's too late.

It's so important that we realize here that as Yahweh's people we should be about protecting life and showing kindness. These are the opposites of murder and hatred. Our everyday life and words should be bringing life to people. We should be healing others with our words, giving out genuine compliments and words of appreciation; acts of kindness and good deeds of mercy. This is how the son or daughter of Yahweh lives - free from bitterness and strife.

"The Weight of Striking or Cursing a Parent"

Read Exodus 21:15, 17 :: The fabric and strength of a society is the family. It begins with a man and woman getting married and then pro-creating other people who will grow up to be men and women. That's how we continue on: strong marriages, children, stable adults, and further strong marriages.

The more spiritually strong a father and mother are the greater the percentage of producing spiritually strong children. It doesn't always work this way, you can have righteous parents with unrighteous children, or vice versa, but the majority of the time righteousness begets righteousness and wickedness begets wickedness.

The family unit is such a fabric and strength that honor due to the father and mother is mentioned in the very Ten Commandments of the Almighty. The Ten Commandments aren't an exhaustive list of all the laws of Yahweh, but they are a good summary of the basic law by which a society is best ruled. Guaranteed… Yahweh's Ten Laws will produce more peace and stability in a community than any other legislation that has been passed or ever will be passed.

The Fifth Commandment

The 5th Commandment says (Septuagint, OSB), "Honor your father and your mother, that it may be well with you, and your days may be long upon the good land Yahweh your Mighty One is giving you." Paul cites this in Ephesians 6:2-3, and adds that it's the first commandment with a promise: prosperity and long life. If children honor their parents, society will flourish, but if children dishonor their parents, it will be society's downfall.

How to Read the Commandments

This is a good place to point out how the Ten Commandments should be read. Exodus 21:15 and 17 - the laws against striking or cursing your father and mother - fall under the heading of the 5th commandment. If someone says they follow the 5th commandment, they need to believe in these laws too. The commandments are explained throughout the entirety of the Torah. The basic law is in the Ten Commandments, the entirety of the Torah is then a commentary on the basic laws whereby we understand better how each command is to be fully obeyed.

General Texts on Honoring Parents

Proverbs 1:8-9 ERV says, "My son, listen to your father when he corrects you, and don't ignore what your mother teaches you. (9) What you learn from your parents will bring you honor and respect, like a crown or a gold medal."

Proverbs 20:20 CEV says, "Children who curse their parents will go to the land of darkness long before their time."

Proverbs 23:22 GNB says, "Listen to your father; without him you would not exist. When your mother is old, show her your appreciation."

Proverbs 30:17 HCSB says, "As for the eye that ridicules a father and despises obedience to a mother, may ravens of the valley pluck it out and young vultures eat it."

Maybe you can incorporate that one into Bible story time with your children.

I'm going to quote a text from the Wisdom of Sirach now, chapter 3. I talked about this book in my series on almsgiving, but I haven't yet taught a series on the "Apocrypha." I hope to do so in the near future, maybe sometime next year. For today I will just say that this book was in the 1611 KJ Bible, and was not officially removed from the KJ Bible until the year 1885. So one of the most beloved and used English Bibles of all time contained the book of Sirach in it for over 250 years.

Here is Sirach 3:3-16 from the OSB:

He who honors his father atones for his sins; (4) And he who honors his mother is like one who stores up treasure. (5) He who honors his father will be gladdened by his own children, and when he prays, he will be heard. (6) He who honors his father will have a long life, and he who obeys the Lord will give rest to his mother; (7) And he will serve his parents as his masters. (8) Honor your father and mother in word and deed, that a blessing may come upon you from him. (9) For the blessing of a father establishes the houses of the children, but the curse of a mother uproots their foundations. (10) Do not glory in the dishonor of your father, for your father's dishonor is no glory to you. (11) For the glory of a man is from the honor of his father, and it is a disgrace for children to dishonor their mother. (12) My son, help your father in his old age, and do not grieve him in his life; (13) And if his understanding fails, be considerate, and do no dishonor

him in your prime. (14) For kindness to a father will not be forgotten, and it will be credited to you instead of your sins. (15) It will be remembered in the day of your affliction; thus your sins will melt away like frost in warm weather. (16) He who forsakes his father is like a blasphemer, and he who provokes his mother to wrath is cursed by the Almighty.

There is no doubt that the Bible teaches us to honor, respect, and revere our parents, as well as take care of our parents when they grow old and can no longer care for themselves. It's mentioned multiple times in Scripture.

What about Unbelieving Parents?

Even in cases where you have an unbelieving parent, you can still give them respect and honor for their age, and do nothing to harm them. Whenever I talk about obedience and submission in any area of life I usually get asked, "What if they tell me to do something I know is wrong?" Well… you should never obey a person if it causes you to disobey Yahweh. You should obey your boss at work, but if your boss tells you to steal a woman's purse… you have to disobey your boss. No matter what area of submission you are in on this earth, Yahweh always comes first. So let's get that out of the way. No problem at all with that understanding.

In all other areas, submission is required to those we are under the authority of. This does not mean a parent or older person has the right to disrespect their child, that's not what I'm saying and that's not what Yahweh is saying. (I could do an entire message on parents not stirring up anger in their children, Ephesians 6:4.) What I am saying is that even when someone disrespects you, you still have the obligation to obey the law of Yahweh towards that person. Bless them that curse you, pray for them that despitefully use you, and do not render evil for evil.

Striking = Death

The honor and respect due to a parent is so important, that the death penalty is called for in Exodus 21:15 and 17, even though the father or mother *does not* die from what took place. It says nothing about the strike or curse causing a parent to have a heart-attack and die.

The word strike is the Hebrew word *nakah*, ("to strike, smite, hit, beat, slay, or kill" BDB)… so sometimes it carries with it the idea of striking someone to death, but that's not the case here because that was already covered back in Exodus 21:12 - "whoever strikes a person so that he dies must be put to death." Your father or mother would be a person right? So you strike them and they die, you deserve death. But verse 15 says if you just *strike* your father or mother you deserve death; nothing about them dying there.

Older Children

It must be noted that this law applies to older children. It doesn't apply to a child in training. Little children might strike their mom or dad if they get upset while in a high chair, just because a parent wants them to eat their vegetables. That's not what this is talking about. This is a case

where an older child (in their teenage years) gets violent with his or her parents to the point where they land blows on them in an attempt to hurt or harm them.

Injury Inflicted

According to ancient Hebrew exegesis of this text, only the actual infliction of physical injury by an adult son or daughter entails the death penalty. The old Baptist commentator John Gill writes on this old understanding by saying, "With his fist, or with a stick, or cane, or such thing, though they died not with the blow, yet it occasioned any wound, or caused a bruise, or the part smitten black and blue, or left any print of the blow; for, as [Rashi] says, the party was not guilty, less by smiting there was a bruise, or weal made, or any mark or scar." Puritan commentator Matthew Henry writes, "so as either to draw blood or to make the place struck black and blue." The point is that there was physical harm done at a time of anger. The Bible says, "be ye angry and sin not," so you are commanded to control your emotions.

Cursing = Death

What about the cursing of a parent? One view is that this is derogatory speech directed at a parent, or that the Divine Name was mentioned in the curse, like in Leviticus 24 (with the son of the Israelite woman). If you've ever been around a teenage child who back-talks their mom or dad, you know how uncomfortable it makes people. To hear a son or daughter actually speak forceful, vulgar words of hatred towards a parent is even worse.

Another view is presented in the NET Bible in Exodus 21:17, "Whoever treats his father or his mother disgracefully must surely be put to death." They view the verb *qalal* here ("to be slight, swift, trifling, lightly esteemed, of little account" BDB) as doing the opposite of what the 5th Commandment calls for (*qalal* = light vs. *kabad* [honor] = heavy). In other words, instead of honoring and respecting one's father or mother, you decide to do the opposite and treat them with overall contempt and disgrace. This would include cursing but not be limited to cursing.

Yeshua's Commentary

This view gains weight when we compare the commentary offered to us by Yeshua in Matthew 15. The Pharisees came up to Yeshua and asked him why his disciples transgressed the tradition of the elders by not performing the ritual hand-washing ceremony before eating. Instead of directly answering their question, Yeshua challenges them with the opposite. He says, (Mt. 15:3) "Why do you break the Almighty's commandment because of your tradition?"

Yeshua then cites four texts: Exodus 20:12, Deuteronomy 5:16, Exodus 21:17, and Leviticus 20:9. He doesn't quote any of those texts in full, but he combines them all and gives the short overview of what is intended. The HCSB gives him saying this (vs. 4) "For the Almighty said: Honor your father and mother, and the one who speaks evil of father or mother must be put to death." So Yeshua is talking to grown men Pharisees here, and he is holding them accountable for violating the 5th Commandment! I need to add here that this is the only time Yeshua mentions the death penalty in his ministry, and he mentions it in relation to neglecting to honor one's parents.

So how were they violating the command? Notice verse 4 "For the Almighty said," and then in verse 5-6, "But you say - whoever tells his father or mother, 'Whatever benefit you might have received from me is a gift [committed to the temple] - (6) he does not have to honor his father.' In this way, you have revoked the Almighty's word because of your tradition."

What some Pharisees were doing is placing honor to the Temple above honor to their parents. This was called the *Korban Rule* in second temple period Judaism, korban meaning "gift." They believed they were pious for dedicating their wealth as a gift for Temple needs, and that was greater than taking care of their parents with their wealth when their parents grew elderly and feeble. This was treating mom and dad lightly instead of heavily.

The command is cited by Yeshua - and then the opposite of this command is cited as well. The Pharisees were not put to death here, not because they didn't do something worthy of death, but because tradition had taken the place of the commandment on a wide scale. Traditions that violate commandments are horrible and should be abandoned.

Qalal Means "Treating Lightly"

This means that Exodus 21:17 isn't just talking about cursing one's parents in word; *qalal* refers to treating your parents disgracefully by not taking care of them when they need help. They took care of you when you were little and incapable of taking care of your-self.

One day the roles of parent to child are reversed - the father and mother will be the feeble ones, but their children will still be young enough to take care of them. When that honor is not given, it is a *qalal* - a curse, disgrace, a treating lightly of one's parents.

Stoning a Rebellious Child

Let's focus a little on Deuteronomy 21:18-21. Have you ever heard an atheist say that the Bible teaches to stone little children? I sure have. I've even had Christians who do not like the OT say this, in an attempt to teach that the "old law" was so bad and shouldn't be used today.

Well, Deuteronomy 21 isn't talking about stoning your toddler in their car-seat if they say "No mama!" No, the books of Deuteronomy and Proverbs teach to train and discipline children, in love and patience, and steer them in the righteous direction. Deuteronomy 21 is more commentary on Exodus 21:15 and 17.

(18) If a man has stubborn and rebellious son who does not obey his father or mother [both parents are to be respected] and doesn't listen to them even after they discipline him [notice there has been proper training to no avail; the child is a repeat offender], (19) his father and mother [joint agreement and effort] must take hold of him and bring him to the elders of his city [a righteous court of law so as to ensure this isn't just small frustration], to the gate of his hometown. (20) They will say to the elders of his city, 'This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious; he doesn't obey us. He's a glutton and a drunkard' [describes an older,

wild child]. (21) Then all the men of his city will stone him to death. You must purge the evil from you, and all Israel will hear and be afraid."

Now some people will not like this text even after understanding it properly, and I can't help that… I will not apologize for Yahweh and His law. Mercy must be shown to the *community as a whole* when there is an older child who will not stop their rebellion. This child is older, has been properly disciplined, and maybe even flogged by the civil authorities (Deut. 22:18; 25:1-3) *before* this greater penalty is enacted. The young man was given a chance to correct his sin but refused, so the evil must be purged from Israel.

The Gravity of Respecting Parents

We don't normally think of dishonoring or disrespecting one's parents as equal in evil to murder or adultery, but it is - according to Yahweh. If the prescribed penalty is death, Yahweh sees it as equivalent to other laws which carry the same penalty if violated.

Anyone of us in here that still has a living parent, may we listen to Yahweh's law. May we not become like some Pharisees who in their adulthood saw fit to neglect their parents. May we always be respectful in our conversations with Mom and Dad. May we show them love in our actions. May we never seek to harm them and may we always seek to better them. When they are old and feeble, may we do whatever is in our power to take care of them like they once took care of us. And this goes for grandparents who might have been the ones to raise you, or an aunt or uncle, or any other adult who stepped up to the plate and did what an adult should do for you when you were a child.

Those of us with younger children… one day they will be older and we will be elderly. We're going to need care then, so may we give care now. May we never provoke our children to wrath but bring them up with love, teaching them, and giving them a holy example to follow by the Word of Yahweh.

"Kidnapping and War Conquest"

Read Exodus 21:16 (KJV) & Deuteronomy 24:7 (KJV) :: The eighth commandment (Ex. 20; Deut. 5) says, "Thou shalt not steal," and there are some who believe that the stealing being referenced there is man-stealing or kidnapping. They reason that the list is dealing with commands that call for the death penalty when violated. Murder (the sixth commandment) and adultery (the seventh commandment) can both be punished by death. Why not the eighth?

But what about the tenth commandment? "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house or thy neighbor's wife." That commandment is broken in mind and heart and surely doesn't warrant the earthly death penalty if violated. The tenth commandment is one that when broken, no one may even know their neighbor is coveting.

I think it's best to view the eighth commandment as one that prohibits theft in general, taking something that doesn't belong to you. This would include stealing a man's ox (or work truck), or stealing an actual person. So man-stealing would be covered under this command. In the case of stealing a man's ox, the penalty is restitution, paying back 5-fold (Exodus 22:1). In the case of stealing an actual man, the penalty is death (Exodus 21:16).

The HCSB renders Exodus 21:16 as: "Whoever kidnaps a person must be put to death, whether he sells him or the person is found in his possession." What we call kidnapping is what is intended in this verse, so the HCSB is right in it's more modern translation.

Child-Trafficking

We might read this law, and kind of pass on by it thinking, "I don't have anything to worry about here, I'd never kidnap anyone… and when's the last time I knew someone who was kidnapped?" But even a small amount of research will show you that right here in the US children are abducted every day. Many children reported missing are never found. Small children are the easiest target for criminals. It's not something we like to think about, but there are parents who are having to deal with the severity of this crime right now as we speak.

Just imagine your child being kidnapped, sold, becoming a slave or trafficked in unlawful ways. It's so horrific that I can't let my mind go there for long, but when you think about it, you don't have any trouble at all agreeing with Yahweh on the death penalty for this crime. You can watch testimonials online of young girls who survived being kidnapped and sex-trafficked, and it is heart-wrenching. Sadly, many of these girls do not live to give a testimony. It's an all too real thing brothers and sisters.

I bring this up here though because if there is anyone out there that has trouble with the death penalty for kidnapping, just go read some of the stories of people, people like you and me, who have experienced it (or are friends with someone who has experienced it). I don't think it will take anyone long to see just why Yahweh calls for the death of the perpetrator in this crime.

How many lives would be un-injured and saved if criminal offenders were punished in the way Yahweh says they are to be in His law?

Just this past year right here in Georgia, 28 teens were rescued in metro Atlanta after a nation-wide operation against child-trafficking by the FBI. The children ranged from 14-17 years old. Cobb County police Lt. Matthew Thomas Brown said, "Numerous offenders were apprehended after detectives conducted online exploitation investigations seeking offenders who go online for the purpose of finding children."

The internet can be a powerful and even righteous tool, but at the same time there are lawless people in this world who use this powerful tool to destroy the lives of young children and even adults. May we keep our guard up in this world in which we live. May we pray over our children and take measures to protect our children, warning them that not everyone they talk to or "meet"

online is just an innocent person seeking friendship. Child-trafficking is a real thing and we do not need to turn a blind eye to it. Like with many things, something isn't real until it happens to you or your family. Let's do our best to love our neighbor as ourself and do what we can to help.

A quick internet search will show you ways that you can help stop kidnapping or human trafficking. Three simple ones are here.

1. Know the signs. Learn the red flags and indicators of trafficking. Challenge common myths about trafficking with facts.
2. Report a tip. Contact the National Human Trafficking Hotline if you have any concerns about a potential trafficking situation. Call 1-888-373-7888, or text HELP to BEFREE (233733), or email help@humantraffickinghotline.org
3. Spread the word. Share and display HHS Look Beneath the Surface and DHS Blue Campaign awareness resources in your community. Let everyone know that the National Human Trafficking Hotline is here to help.

Exegeting the Law

Now… when we look at Exodus 21:16 together with Deuteronomy 24:7 we see some differences. Exodus says "Whoever kidnaps a person" while Deuteronomy says, "If a man is discovered kidnapping one of his Israelite brothers." Jeffrey Tigay says in his commentary on Deuteronomy (from the JPS Torah Commentary), "Here in Deuteronomy, it is a capital crime if the victim is an Israelite, but only if the victim has been enslaved or sold. In Exodus, it is a capital crime no matter who the victim is, and it apparently makes no difference whether the kidnapper has sold the victim or 'is still holding him.'"

If we read Exodus carefully it gives kidnapping as a crime whether the kidnapper has sold the person or is still holding on to the person. Deuteronomy limits the crime to a fellow Israelite, and only if the Israelite is sold as a slave. I don't think we need to try to read both laws as identical, and I also don't think we need to lessen the evil of kidnapping an Israelite to only if that person is later sold into slavery.

The law in Deuteronomy is giving us an extreme case, but is not telling us that it's not a wrong if the Israelite is just kidnapped and then kept safely at the kidnappers house with plenty of shelter, food, and water. What the law is doing is giving us a judgment for the *main reason* someone would be kidnapped: for the purpose of power and money.

Also, just because the Deuteronomy text limits its crime to kidnapping a fellow Israelite does not mean we have to read the Exodus text as such. Some commentators do that, and the Septuagint text and one Aramaic Targum add "Israelite" there in Exodus. I think the Hebrew reading is best, teaching us that it is not right to kidnap or commit man-stealing on anyone. What this means is that much of the slavery that we read about in American and European history was a transgression of Yahweh's law. As I went over in my series through Exodus 21:1-6, Yahweh does allow certain forms of slavery, but not all slavery. Kidnapping someone and making them a slave

is prohibited here. The ERV of Exodus 21:16 reads it well as, "Whoever steals someone to sell them as a slave or to keep them for their own slave must be killed."

Also remember that slaves or servants were not to be mistreated. Deuteronomy 23:15 says "Do not return a slave to his master when he has escaped from his master to you. Let him live among you wherever he wants within your gates. Do not mistreat him." The slave would be escaping from an unjust master. We are called to be just and kind masters if we have someone serving us.

War Conquest

Now… there is some nuance that I need to talk about, because it often comes up in discussions about morality and ethics. During times of war and conquest the Israelites battled other nations and took the spoils of war for themselves, *which included people as spoils*. In ancient times brutal war was fairly common-place, and there were times that Yahweh commanded the Israelites to war against other nations, for reasons that His sovereignty and providence knew.

Look at Deuteronomy 20:10-14, "When you approach a city to fight against it, you must make an offer of peace. If it accepts your offer of peace and opens its gates to you, all the people found in it will become forced laborers for you and serve you. However, if it does not make peace with you but wages war against you, lay siege to it. When Yahweh your Mighty One hands it over to you, you must strike down all its males with the sword. But you may take the women, children, animals, and whatever else is in the city — all its spoil — as plunder. You may enjoy the spoil of your enemies that Yahweh your Mighty One has given you." This does not fall under the category of kidnapping in Torah - Yahweh allows this but condemns the other.

Not all the cities approached by the Israelites were approached for the purpose of waging war. At the beginning of Deuteronomy, the cities belonging to Esau, Moab, and Ammon's descendants were to be passed by. Yahweh tells Israel, "Don't fight with them and show no hostility toward them." There were reasons Yahweh commanded Israel not to fight with some nations, offer peace first to others, and then some He told them to utterly destroy. There's good reasons for all of these. War is a fact of history, and still a fact of today. According to Yahweh, it is *at times* the way to solve a problem.

At the same time though, Yahweh's directives must be obeyed. There were times when the Israelites wanted to go to war with a nation, went to war, but Yahweh was displeased because He had given them no commandment to do so.

Yeshua's Terms Match Deuteronomy

We are not ancient Israel today, at war with certain nations and being given a land of promise, but look with me to Matthew 10 where Yeshua gives similar instructions to his disciples about going about and preaching the kingdom. He tells them here to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those with skin diseases, and drive out demons. He says, "You've received these

miraculous gifts without paying, so you give them without being paid." He does tell them to accept shelter, food, and basic necessities when it is offered to them.

In verse 11 he says this, "When you enter any town or village, find out who is worthy, and stay there until you leave. (12) Greet a household when you enter it, (13) and if the household is worthy, let your peace be on it. But if it is unworthy, let your peace return to you. (14) If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that house or town. (15) I assure you: It will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town."

What happened to Sodom and Gomorrah? Destruction, yes. Yeshua says these towns that his disciples went to, and gave an offer of peace to… if they reject the disciples they will too receive destruction - and even in a greater way than Sodom. So the disciples aren't going into these towns themselves with a sword (like ancient Israel), but the same concept is still here through spiritual warfare. Offer peace - if they don't accept you keep your peace, and shake the dust off your feet when you leave - and that house and the people therein will be destroyed later (physically) at the final judgment.

Kidnapping vs. War Conquest

I'm getting into this because I want you to see the difference between kidnapping (a sin) and spoils of war (allowed). One reason why the law may specify the kidnapping of only an Israelite in Deuteronomy is because Yahweh's law allowed for war against some of the other nations, and the women and children could be taken as spoil. I know this doesn't sit well with many people today, but it's in the same law as the condemnation of kidnapping. We aren't allowed to believe one part and neglect the next part. Either you accept it all or you reject it all, those are the options.

So in conclusion, kidnapping is a sin/crime, whether it's stealing a foreigner or a fellow Israelite, but… if Yahweh gives Israel the instruction to lay siege on a city, taking what He allows for spoil is not a sin or crime. Things are disallowed or allowed on Yahweh's terms not our own.