

Ex. 21:1 Now these are the judgments which thou shalt set before them.

Now we get to specific laws and judgments for specific situations. This is where I got bogged down in my journaling so I am going to try a different approach. Instead of trying to explain everything in my own words I am just going to make observations as they jump out at me.

Ex. 21:2 If thou buy an Hebrew servant, six years he shall serve: and in the seventh he shall go out free for nothing.

Ex. 21:3 If he came in by himself, he shall go out by himself: if he were married, then his wife shall go out with him.

Ex. 21:4 If his master have given him a wife, and she have born him sons or daughters; the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out by himself.

Ex. 21:5 And if the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free:

Ex. 21:6 Then his master shall bring him unto the judges; he shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an aul; and he shall serve him for ever.

Observations:

1. This is where we are presented with the concept of being a bondservant—a slave by choice. This is a good picture of our relationship to the Lord. Once we accept His invitation to become part of His family, we are His forever.
2. It is also a picture of Christ's love for us by His willingness to be pierced to make us part of His family.
3. Slavery was an accepted part of the culture of the time.
4. Women had a different position in society in that culture.
5. No man had to serve more than six years to pay off his debt.
6. A man who was married when indentured would be allowed to take his family with him at the end of the six years of service.
7. A man who married a woman given to him by his master would not be able to take his family with him when he was freed since they were possessions of the master to begin with. I have to admit that this is one I don't understand.
8. These laws show respect for the person in servitude and responsibility on the part of the master.
9. Implied is that good treatment is expected for there to be the likely consideration that a man would choose to enslave himself for life and to have accepted a wife from the master knowing the choice he would have to make.

Guzik notes four reasons that a person would become a bondservant:

- To escape poverty - *Leviticus 25:39 "And if thy brother that dwelleth by thee be waxen poor, and be sold unto thee; thou shalt not compel him to serve as a bondservant...."*
- Your father sells you - *Exodus 21:7 "And if a man sell his daughter to be a maidservant, she shall not go out as the menservants do."*
- To pay off debt due to bankruptcy - *2 Kings 4:1 "Now there cried a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets unto Elisha, saying, Thy servant my husband is dead; and thou knowest that thy servant did fear the LORD: and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen."*

- Restitution for a theft - *Exodus 22:3 "If the sun be risen upon him, there shall be blood shed for him; for he should make full restitution; if he have nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft."*

Ex. 21:7 And if a man sell his daughter to be a maidservant, she shall not go out as the menservants do.

Ex. 21:8 If she please not her master, who hath betrothed her to himself, then shall he let her be redeemed: to sell her unto a strange nation he shall have no power, seeing he hath dealt deceitfully with her.

Ex. 21:9 And if he have betrothed her unto his son, he shall deal with her after the manner of daughters.

Ex. 21:10 If he take him another *wife*; her food, her raiment, and her duty of marriage, shall he not diminish.

Ex. 21:11 And if he do not these three unto her, then shall she go out free without money.

1. The harder issue in this section is that of slavery being right or wrong.
2. The one thing that stands out is that these laws seem clearly to address the protection of the rights of the person in servitude.
3. Although it is obvious that the master has rights and choices, he is not the only one with rights and choices.
4. No person was to be bound for life except by choice. I guess that is not entirely true of the woman; but if she is chosen as a spouse, that puts her in a position of privilege instead of servitude.
5. If she was rejected as a wife, she was to be released with honor intact.

Ex. 21:12 He that smiteth a man, so that he die, shall be surely put to death.

Ex. 21:13 And if a man lie not in wait, but God deliver *him* into his hand; then I will appoint thee a place whither he shall flee.

Ex. 21:14 But if a man come presumptuously upon his neighbour, to slay him with guile; thou shalt take him from mine altar, that he may die.

1. I think this section is another emphasis on God's sovereignty regarding the sanctity of life. *Genesis 9:6 "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man."*
2. The emphasis is clearly on the intent of the attacker.
3. Choosing to "take the place of God" in the taking of a life brings forth the penalty of death. Only God has the right to decide when to begin and end a person's life.
4. Although it is wrong to let our emotions rule our actions, mercy is shown to the one who attacks in the heat of emotion, but not with the intent to kill, or to the one who accidentally causes another person's death.
5. It is made clear that God is in direct control of the outcome in these circumstances, and we must conclude that it is God's will in the master plan of the lives affected.
6. Also implied is that the taking of a man's life in compliance with God's directive is not sinful, but rather an act of obedience.
7. City of refuge is referenced by the clause "I will appoint thee a place where he shall flee"; however, it is not described as such yet.

Ex. 21:15 And he that smiteth his father, or his mother, shall be surely put to death.

I felt the need to check the concordance on the Hebrew for “smiteth,” but it really didn’t clarify things. The word has a variety of implications from “strike” to “wound to kill.” The first thought is that the punishment reflects the killing of a parent. But in the next couple of verses the verdict/punishment is the same for “cursing” a parent. God’s intention is for one to honor one’s father and mother. The parents’ position of authority and honor is God-given. To dishonor a parent in such a way is to dishonor the one through whom God chose to give one life. More importantly, it shows direct rejection of God’s authority in one’s life.

Ex. 21:16 And he that stealeth a man, and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death.

This is a direct statement forbidding human trafficking.

Ex. 21:17 And he that curseth his father, or his mother, shall surely be put to death.

(3/10) These verses describe offenses that call for the death penalty

- Kidnapping, whether for intent to sell for profit or for personal use.
- Cursing father or mother.

Capital punishment is ordained by God and was instituted with far broader application than would be acceptable today—at least in America.

Ex. 21:18 And if men strive together, and one smite another with a stone, or with his fist, and he die not, but keepeth his bed:

Ex. 21:19 If he rise again, and walk abroad upon his staff, then shall he that smote him be quit: only he shall pay for the loss of his time, and shall cause him to be thoroughly healed.

(3/10) These verses establish responsibility for one who injures another in a fight to compensate the injured party for loss of work during the time required for healing from the inflicted injury.

Ex. 21:20 And if a man smite his servant, or his maid, with a rod, and he die under his hand; he shall be surely punished.

Ex. 21:21 Notwithstanding, if he continue a day or two, he shall not be punished: for he is his money.

I think this represents more than just his property. It’s interesting to note that the punishment is not specified, neither is accommodation made according to intent. I would assume that the precedent of intent being already established, that beating with the intent to kill would demand the punishment already established.

Guzik: “The idea was that if the victim did not die immediately, it was evidence that he was struck with the intention of discipline and not murder.”

The beating for discipline is another category. Who decides the appropriate punishment? The elders? The priest? It seems that the next verse gives the answer—the judges. Were they appointed? Elected?

Ex. 21:22 If men strive, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart *from her*, and yet no mischief follow: he shall be surely punished, according as the woman's husband will lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges *determine*.

Ex. 21:23 And if *any* mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life,

Ex. 21:24 Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,

Ex. 21:25 Burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.

It's amazing how many specific situations the Lord addresses. Verse 22 speaks of men who are fighting and end up hurting a pregnant woman to the point of causing a premature birth. In this case, as long as mother and baby end up OK, the punishment is a fine levied by the husband as approved by the judges. If there is serious injury, then it is spelled out as life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, etc. In other words, in whatever way they had injured another, they were to be injured in return. No stipulations for motive are given here. If men choose to fight, then they must accept responsibility concerning innocent bystanders.

A woman with child represents a whole new category—she is nurturing new life, a new creation. It appears to me that importance is designated equally to mother and child. “If any mischief follow”—seems clear that any injury to mother or child is a basis for punishment. The child's importance isn't based on the stage of the pregnancy. The child is recognized as a person in its own right while still in the womb.

Ex. 21:26 And if a man smite the eye of his servant, or the eye of his maid, that it perish; he shall let him go free for his eye's sake.

Ex. 21:27 And if he smite out his manservant's tooth, or his maidservant's tooth; he shall let him go free for his tooth's sake.

My first thoughts are that this seems out of sync in comparison to verse 21. My second thought is that an eye and a tooth are of much different value. I know that God places significance on all parts of the body of Christ and the dependence of one part on another. I guess the reason these two were singled out is because they would be the ones most likely injured through striking or beating.

Ex. 21:28 If an ox gore a man or a woman, that they die: then the ox shall be surely stoned, and his flesh shall not be eaten; but the owner of the ox *shall be quit*.

Ex. 21:29 But if the ox were wont to push with his horn in time past, and it hath been testified to his owner, and he hath not kept him in, but that he hath killed a man or a woman; the ox shall be stoned, and his owner also shall be put to death.

Ex. 21:30 If there be laid on him a sum of money, then he shall give for the ransom of his life whatsoever is laid upon him.

Ex. 21:31 Whether he have gored a son, or have gored a daughter, according to this judgment shall it be done unto him.

Ex. 21:32 If the ox shall push a manservant or a maidservant; he shall give unto their master thirty shekels of silver, and the ox shall be stoned.

1. Awareness of the fact that an animal is dangerous makes the owner liable for its actions.
2. Again, a big difference is made between injury to a family member vs. a slave. The bigger point being made seems to be the status of relationship and the significance of being a son or daughter.
3. The thirty pieces of silver automatically makes me think of the price Judas was paid for betraying Jesus—the price of a slave.

4. Introduces concept of paying ransom for one's life.

Ex. 21:33 And if a man shall open a pit, or if a man shall dig a pit, and not cover it, and an ox or an ass fall therein;

Ex. 21:34 The owner of the pit shall make *it* good, *and* give money unto the owner of them; and the dead *beast* shall be his.

Ex. 21:35 And if one man's ox hurt another's, that he die; then they shall sell the live ox, and divide the money of it; and the dead *ox* also they shall divide.

Ex. 21:36 Or if it be known that the ox hath used to push in time past, and his owner hath not kept him in; he shall surely pay ox for ox; and the dead shall be his own.

You are responsible for things that result from your actions/carelessness. I think the main principle being addressed is responsible ownership.