

Just Laws for a Fallen World: Labor Laws

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Date: 01 January 2023

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[0 : 00] We are back in our series in the book of Exodus. So if you would please turn in your Bibles to book of Exodus. If you don't have a copy of a Bible, you could raise your hand and one of our greeters will bring you a copy you can use while you're here.

Let me pray for the reading and preaching of God's word. Heavenly Father, in my own strength I am not up to the task of preaching your holy and authoritative word.

Please empower me by your spirits this morning and incline all of our hearts and ears to you so that we may see the wondrous things in your law.

So that we may see how your word points to Jesus and his gospel. So that we might be built up as your people and made more like Jesus, our Savior and Redeemer.

Please do all that in your sovereign grace. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

[1 : 20] Please stand for the reading of God's word if you are able. I'll be reading from Exodus chapter 21 verses 1 to 11. Exodus 21 verses 1 to 11.

Now these are the rules that you shall set before them. When you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve six years and in the seventh he shall go out free for nothing.

If he comes in single, he shall go out single. If he comes in married, then his wife shall go out with him. If his master gives him a wife and she bears him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her masters and he shall go out alone.

But if the slave plainly says, I love my master, my wife, and my children, I will not go out free. Then his master shall bring him to God and he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost and his master shall bore his ear through with an owl and he shall be his slave forever.

When a man sells his daughter as a slave, she shall not go out as the male slaves do. If she does not please her master who has designated her for himself, then he shall let her be redeemed.

[2 : 37] He shall have no right to sell her to a foreign people since he has broken faith with her. If he designates her for his son, he shall deal with her as with the daughter. If he takes another wife to himself, he shall not diminish her food, her clothing, or her marital rights.

And if he does not do these three things for her, she shall go out for nothing without payment of money. This is God's holy and authoritative word. Please be seated.

We've been away from the book of Exodus for a little while because of Advent and Christmas when we're in the book of John. So let me just remind you where we left off in our series. We just finished going through the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20, the Ten Words, or the Decalogue, the words that Lord Yahweh himself spoke to his people.

And after the Ten Commandments, it says in chapter 20, verses 18 to 21, that the Israelites were afraid and trembled as they saw God appear and speak from the heavens, from the thunderers and flashes of lightning.

And so they stood far off, it says, from God's revelation of himself, appearance. And they said to Moses, you speak to us, and then we will listen. But do not let God speak to us, lest we die.

[3 : 53] And so that's kind of where we left off. Because of this, Moses then leaves the people behind and then draws near to God alone, starting in verse 22. And then the Lord addresses Moses individually and instructs him what he should relay to the Israelites when he returns to the camp.

And so that's where we are. And what follows is Moses' instruction, the instruction that he received from the Lord individually, that kind of fleshes out the Ten Commandments in greater detail.

And Exodus 24, 3, so this whole section lasts from 20, 22 to 23, 33. And after this section, which is known as the Book of the Covenant, Exodus 24, 3 refers back to these as the words of the Lord and all the rules.

So to give you an example how these flesh out the Ten Commandments, for example, the Sixth Commandment of the Ten Words said you shall not kill. But what if you kill someone accidentally? What if you injure someone in a brawl and that person dies a few days after the fight? Are you still responsible for that person's death? What if the ox you own gores and kills someone?

[5 : 04] Are you still responsible for that person's death? What if the fight is between a master and a slave? What if, you know, who is the master still responsible?

What if there's collateral damage? So all of these kind of practical questions, these next few chapters of Exodus answered. Similarly, the Eighth Commandment says, you shall not steal. But what if the owner of the property catches the thief who has broken into his house and gets into a tussle and unintentionally strikes him dead? Is he liable for murder?

What about letting your ox kind of wander into someone's field and eat the grass there? Is that considered stealing? So all of these complex and practical questions are answered in Exodus 21 and following.

So if the Ten Commandments were a flyover, the 20-22 to 23-33 are the rules and the words where the rubber meets the road. It's still not intended to be exhaustive, but it is representative.

[6 : 05] And it is specific enough to set precedents and patterns for God's people to follow. The Ten Commandments, together with these more detailed rules, compose what Exodus 24-7 refers to as the book of the covenant, as I mentioned.

And there are a couple important things, general principles about the book of the covenant that I want to mention before we start. First, the book of the covenant teaches us that this book is covenantal.

God's word is covenantal. It's not just a compendium of laws to follow. It's a relationship-forming and covenant-forging document.

It's meant to bring us into relationship with God, to worship him and to love him and to walk with him. That's what the Bible is. So when you read your Bible in the morning, you're not just checking off a box. You're checking in, in a relationship you have with the Lord.

And this is important because if you don't have a right relationship with God, you can't live rightly in society or relate rightly to your neighbors. Think about it this way. If you worship money or success rather than God, you will trample upon others to get ahead.

[7 : 16] You will not love your neighbor as yourself. If you love sex or pleasure more than God, you will use and manipulate and abuse others to pleasure yourself. If you worship a tribal God or an ethnic God or a national God, then you will seek the interests of your own tribe at the expense of others.

It will cause division. It will not help you to love your neighbor as yourself. Only when you worship the one true God who has commanded us to love him with our whole heart and to love our neighbor as ourselves can we truly embrace all of our neighbors.

This is why a just society can only be established on the foundation of true worship. That's why the Ten Commandments begins with worship. The second thing that the Book of the Covenant teaches us is that God cares about all of life.

The nitty-gritty details of this passage shows us that God is not bored with our day-to-day life and he just pays attention to us on Sunday mornings when we're worshipping him and then rest of the week he turns away and doesn't really care about what happens.

That's not what God is like. He cares about our day-to-day life, how we behave, how we speak, how we even think. And so this is a challenge to us.

[8 : 31] Some of us have a minimum requirement attitude when it comes to following God. If God's law doesn't speak specifically and explicitly about something, well, then I'm off the hook.

I can do whatever I want in that arena. That's not how we live. We flirt with sin and we skirt the edges of permissibility. But instead of doing that, we should have a maximal obedience mentality and bring the whole of Scripture to bear on every aspect of our lives.

We should try to live at the center of God's will instead of skirting the edges of permissibility. In August of this year, a man who was hiking in Cannon Mountain, New Hampshire, died because he went off trail and fell off a steep edge of a slope.

Sin brings death and separation from God. And God has given his word to protect us and guide us to keep us within his covenant. So why would we flirt with death?

Why would we want to get as close to the edge of the precipice as possible? Instead, we should keep our eyes fixed on the trail markings of God's word and keep on the path right on the center. [9 : 41] Over the next four or five weeks, we'll go through these rules and words of the book of the covenant. And I've entitled this mini-series Just Laws for a Fallen World. And as we're going through it, I want you to keep a few things in mind.

One is that these laws were given to govern a sinful society. So there are concessions to human wickedness that do not reflect God's creation ideals. For example, in Matthew 19, when the Pharisees asked Jesus why he prohibits divorce when Moses permitted it, Jesus answers, because of your hardness of heart, Moses allowed you to divorce your wives.

But from the beginning, it was not so. So in God's creation ideal, there would be no divorce at all. But because of the hardness of human heart, Moses gave concessions in the law of God to govern a sinful people.

Similarly, in our passage this morning, there are provisions for slaves, although it's a very different kind of slavery than what we're familiar with in our history. Nonetheless, this is still not part of God's creation ideal.

There are no slaves in the Garden of Eden. There are no slaves in the new heaven and new earth. But in a fallen world where the ground is cursed and there is pain in our work, as it says in Genesis 3, some people fall into poverty and are reduced into servitude.

[11 : 03] This is not God's ideal, but these legal provisions exist as a safety net for people who fall into those conditions in this world. Second, these are rules and regulations that are historically and culturally situated for Jews living in 15th century BC in the ancient Near East under a theocratic government.

So we can't lift these laws out of context and apply it straight to our 21st century AD American context. Nevertheless, there are principles of justice here in all these passages that are timeless and relevant.

And then third, because we are regularly bombarded with unsubstantiated claims about how regressive and barbaric the Bible is and especially the Old Testament is, by osmosis we sometimes assimilate these suspicions and a sense of embarrassment about passages like this, about God's word.

And we come to a section like this warily and sheepishly. But such thoughts and attitudes, I want to exhort you, are not fitting. It's unbecoming of our faith in God's holy and authoritative word.

I want to challenge you this morning as we explore these rules that govern Israel as a society. Approach the text with faith, seeking comprehension, instead of with suspicion, seeking corroboration.

[12 : 27] Instead of playing a game of gotcha with God's word, listen and read with humility and seek to trust and obey. When you do that, you'll be struck by the wisdom and justice of God's laws.

That was a longer than usual introduction. But let's jump into the text, Exodus 21, 1-11. This passage deals with the proper treatment of Hebrew slaves. And it teaches us that as those who have been redeemed from our harsh slavery, we should treat every laborer with human dignity. I'm going to talk first about verses 1-6, which talks about the servitude of labor, and then about verses 7-11, which speaks to the servitude of marriage. But before, just notice, take a scan the passage, your page, and notice where this passage is situated.

There are several laws, sets of laws that are addressed here. Here we find the laws, labor laws, and then we find after that, personal injury laws, in verses 33 to chapter 22, verse 15.

And then, you know, we find property laws. Sorry, property laws is the, later on, 21, 33 to 22, 15. And so, notice that these laws about Hebrew slaves are first not found in the section dealing with property.

[13 : 46] Because the Bible sees slaves as humans and not as property, as things to own. Now, it says in verse 2 to 3, when you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve six years, and in the seventh, he shall go out free for nothing.

If he comes in single, he shall go out single. If he comes in married, then his wife shall go out with him. Whenever we hear in English the word slave or slavery, we have a visceral reaction to it because we automatically associate it with the transatlantic slave trade and the kind of slavery that our country was involved in.

But immediately in these verses, we see that the slavery in view here is very unlike the kind of slavery that we know of. Why? Because there's a defined term limit. Right from the onset of one's own subjection to slavery, there's a limit.

The Hebrew slave was to serve six years, and in the seventh year, he goes out free for nothing. No payment or redemption price necessary. Unlike American chattel slavery, where slaves were considered permanent movable property of the owner, a Hebrew slave was guaranteed manumission in the seventh year.

This goes beyond our passage, but if you look ahead a little bit in verse 16, it gives us another important detail about slavery in Israel. It says, whoever steals a man and sells him and anyone found in possession of him shall be put to death.

[15:11] This verse explicitly prohibits it prohibits enslaving someone through trafficking and kidnapping, which is what the transatlantic slave trade was all about.

In fact, it specifies that Israelites cannot even be found in possession of a slave that someone else kidnapped. So if you were found with the slave in your possession under your authority, you were punishable by this law.

Both the seller of kidnapped slaves and buyer of kidnapped slaves were sentenced to death.

Furthermore, slaves, according to the Bible, were protected from abusive treatment.

So later in 26 to 20, verses 26 and 27, it says that if the master damages a slave's eye or knocks out his tooth, the slave was to go free. Not only that, a runaway slave was granted refugee status all throughout the land of Israel because the Bible assumes that a slave would not run away unless he was mistreated.

Deuteronomy 23, 15 to 16 says this, you shall not give up to his master a slave who has escaped from his master to you. He shall dwell with you in your midst, in the place that he shall choose within one of your towns, wherever it suits him.

[16:26] You shall not wrong him. So not only did the Bible not expect well-treated slaves to run away, it expected that some would want to remain a slave of the master forever.

So there is a process that's defined in verses 4 to 6 for a slave who insists on remaining in the service of his master, even after the six years of service is up. As you can see from these details and provisions, this so-called slavery in Israel was nothing like the institution of slavery that we are familiar with.

It's a sad historical reality that some so-called Christians were complicit in our nation's sin of enslaving black people because if they had only went to the actual passages dealing with the treatment of slaves, they would have seen how plainly their practice was out of line.

To give you an example of how weak the pro-slavery argument by so-called Christians were, Josiah Priest's book, Slavery as it Relates to the African Race, defends slavery using Genesis 9, where one of Noah's three sons, Ham, is cursed for staring at the nakedness of his father.

Priest argues that Ham, whose descendants were the Canaanites, he was cursed. He says that Ham was black when there is absolutely nothing in the text that remotely suggests that.

[17:50] How can Ham be black if his biological brothers Sham and Japheth are not? It makes no sense. That's how flimsy the argument for pro-slavery argument is according to these so-called Christians.

In contrast, there were Christian abolitionists back then who made substantial and robust biblical arguments like George Bourne who wrote The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable, and by the book he means the Bible.

George B. Cheever who wrote books like God Against Slavery and The Freedom and the Duty of the Pulpit to Rebuke It as a Sin Against God. He wrote another book entitled The Guilty of Slavery and the Crime of Slaveholding demonstrated from the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures.

I love the title of the sermon, or it's not a sermon, a speech he gave, The Fire and Hammer of God's Word Against the Sin of Slavery. Those who used the Bible to justify the kidnap-sourced, racist, abuse-laced, and greed-driven slavery from the 16th to 19th centuries did so not because of the Bible, but in spite of the Bible's clear teaching against it.

They did not submit to the will of God revealed in Scriptures. They arrogated the Scriptures for their own agenda and incorrectly and inappropriately used it to justify their sinful, selfish desires.

[19:12] This is a cautionary tale for us. We need to make sure that the way we are wielding Scripture, the text of Scripture, is not merely a pretext for our own agenda. Are you actually submitted to the Word of God?

Or are you superimposing the spirit of the times, the prevailing opinions of the day, your own priorities and preferences upon the Word of God? So if slavery in the Bible times was not like the slavery in our day, then what was it like?

The slavery in view here is more like the medieval indentured servitude. Usually, the Jews sold themselves or their family members into slavery due to financial crisis of some kind because of their dire poverty, because they can't provide for their own family, or because they have accumulated insurmountable debt.

In a society that did not have state-funded welfare programs, this was the way that Israelites took care of the poorest and most vulnerable members of their society.

When the poor entered into this form of indentured servitude, they were guaranteed employment and provisions. It's not all that different from modern-day contractual employment.

[20 : 26] For example, Boston Red Sox, all-star shortstop, Xander Bogarts, maybe you guys don't know about him. He just signed an 11-year, \$280 million contract with the San Diego Padres last month.

To be sure, Hebrew slaves didn't get paid that well. Some of them were pretty well off, but probably not that well off. But it's similar because the owner of the San Diego Padres, he's called an owner, Peter Seidler.

He owns the entire team and all of its players. He owns the rights to Xander Bogarts for 11 years. That's a lot more than six.

And so that Bogarts is legally forbidden from playing baseball for anyone else unless Peter Seidler decides to sell his rights to another owner. It's not all that different.

And some slaves back in the Old Testament times did actually accumulate quite a bit of wealth. For example, in Genesis 13-2, it says Abraham was very, very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold.

[21 : 31] He was the top 1% of his generation. And then we see in Genesis 15-2 that before Abraham had Isaac, that the heir of his house was Eliezer of Damascus, his slave.

He was in line. He was the heir apparent to take over all of Abraham's estates. So some of these slaves did quite well for themselves. Or take the example of military service nowadays.

My brother-in-law serves in the Navy and we like to tease him, tell him that he's a slave of the government because the U.S. government paid for his studies at the U.S. Naval Academy. And because he did an extra stint here at MIT, also paid for by the government, he owes them seven years.

I think actually maybe now six. Six years of his life in service to the U.S. military. And it's not always pleasant service. He has to spend seven months out of the year in the cramped quarters of a submarine.

And he lives for all those months apart from his wife, my sister. And so if he refuses to do this service, he has to repay back to the government every single penny that they gave him for all of his schooling, which he obviously cannot afford to do.

[22 : 40] So he's effectively enslaved to the government for the next six, seven years. It's very similar to the servitude of labor we're seeing in verses one to six. The terms for this servitude of labor are very straightforward unless the slave has family.

And verses three to four teach Israelites what to do in such cases. It says, if the slave comes in single, he shall go out single. If he comes in married, then his wife shall go out with him.

If his master gives him a wife and she bears him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be our masters and he shall go out alone. So some of it's straightforward. If he comes single, he goes out single.

If he came with his own wife, then he leaves with his wife. But if the master gives him his wife and she bears him children during his time of servitude, then his wife and children stay with the master. Now, this seems wrong to 21st century Americans on several levels. But that's because we don't understand ancient Near Eastern culture. We need to remember that it's the duty of loving, responsible parents to provide a wife or a husband for their children.

[23 : 46] For example, one of my neighbors is a Muslim man from Saudi Arabia and he told me proudly about how his mother went and picked his wife for him. He didn't even know who she was until they got married.

And they're still happily married and they have two kids. And so arranged marriages are not necessarily evil if it happens with the consent of the parties involved.

And so in this situation, by giving a wife to his servant, the master is acting like a loving father to his servant. And also in the culture of this time, the man seeking to marry a woman had to bring a costly betrothal present to the woman's family.

The man seeking to marry the woman, what some people call a bride price, though I don't like that expression because it makes the marriage sound so transactional and financial. The betrothal present was a pledge of the man's serious commitment to marry the woman.

But the debt slave, the indentured servant, obviously does not have that kind of money. So it's a large sum of money and it's because all the labor that he's currently doing is to repay his debts so he can get out of his slavery.

[24 : 59] So this is very similar to Jacob's situation in Genesis 29. He has no money but he really, really wants to marry Rachel. So what does he do? He says, I will work for you for nothing for seven years.

She's even more than six years. So he's basically Laban's slave, servant for that year so that he could earn, he could have the money, the wealth, betrothal present for Rachel. And here in Exodus 21, because the man is already a debt slave, he doesn't have the money.

That means the master is responsible for paying this betrothal present for this female slave that he's bringing as a wife to his servant. And so because both the wife and the children she brings forth are a value that the master provided for the servant, he can't just take off with them until his wife's six years of service to the master is also completed.

To illustrate, if you get a job as a field technician for Comcast, I don't know if this is still true, but they will give you a service vehicle. But when you quit your job, you have to return the service vehicle because it was given for you to fulfill your responsibilities and duties for your job.

And so the slave likewise, the servant likewise, has to leave his wife behind and his children behind until they themselves are freed. And so the man has several options.

[26 : 22] Option one is if after he earns his freedom, he can stay in the area close to his family and then when their term of service is over, he can take them and go wherever he pleases.

So in this case, obviously he wouldn't be able to live at the master's house on the master's dime because he's not working for him anymore. Option two, after he earns his freedom, he can work hard and save money so that he can go and redeem his wife and children before their time of service is up.

Then he can take them and go wherever he wants. Option three, when the master offered him a wife, he could have said, no thank you, I will get a wife for myself after my time of servitude is over. He could have just waited a few years to get married and avoided this scenario altogether. Option four, he can stay with his master if he likes him and commit to lifelong service. So it's not like he doesn't have options.

And this fourth option is specifically addressed in verses five to six. But if the slave plainly says, I love my master, my wife, and my children, I will not go free, then his master shall bring him to God and he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost and his master shall bore his ear through with and all and he shall be his slave forever.

[27 : 33] This probably happened more often than we might expect. If the master cares about his servant enough and has good enough of a relationship with his servant to get him a wife, then it's probably already evidence of a strong bond between them, between a father and a son.

And so there was probably an implicit expectation that the servant would stay beyond this term and that's probably why this provision is also here.

It's kind of like when Tom Brady was still here, I don't know if you guys remember serving as a quarterback for the New England Patriots. He served the New England Patriots for 20 years and he was a very loyal servant of the team, of owner Robert Kraft.

In fact, he always waxed eloquently about how much he loved the owner, Robert Kraft. This is what he said on the radio in 2018, New England Sports Radio. Mr. Kraft has been like a second father to me in so many ways.

He's been part of so many important events in my life. He was at my wedding. I love him like a dad. He's always around. He does a great job. There's a lot to manage when you own a team. There's a lot going on.

[28 : 38] He gives contributions to our team. He provides great guidance and leadership. He really cares so much about us and provides us with facilities, all the food, everything. He's a very giving man.

He does a lot for our community. His foundation does a lot for our community and I can't obviously say enough good things about him and what our relationship has been and what it will always be. That's why many years Tom Brady took a contract, took less money than he is worth to stay with the New England Patriots.

He stayed with it for 20 years and it was a fruitful partnership. They won six Super Bowls together and made a lot of money until 2020 when he left. Which I'm not at all bitter about.

Anyway, so if the slave loves his master and wife and children and wants to stay in servitude to his master, he can't. The expression forever doesn't literally mean forever because neither the master nor the slave live forever.

It just means that there's no defined term limit. It's hard to tell whether that means lifetime of the master or the lifetime of the servant. My guess is that it is intentionally ambiguous, whichever occurs first.

[29 : 48] So if the master dies, the slave is free to go or if he dies, obviously his term of service is over. And so in either case, boring his ear through with an awl marks his servitude because the ear represents listening and hearing, obeying.

So if that's the servitude of labor, verses 7 to 11 speak of a different kind of servitude. It says in verse 7, when a man sells his daughter as a slave, she shall not go out as the male slaves do. Now, the idea of a man selling his daughter as a slave seems appalling to us, but this is not the same thing that happens in countries like Cambodia and Bangladesh and Pakistan or another country where sex trafficking is an acute problem.

In those countries, tragically, sometimes poor parents are hounded by loan sharks and pimps into selling their minor daughters into slavery. Those kind of tragic situations would never happen under these biblical guidelines because these rules are here in place to help poor families like that.

Rather, what's in view here is a poor father who cannot provide for his own family and so he sells his daughter to a man not to be his sex slave but to be his wife. Let me prove this point to you.

[31 : 07] We know this because the Hebrew word translated slave here is not the same word that is translated slave earlier in verse 1. This particular word is used only to refer to female slaves and there are two Hebrew words that refer to female slaves.

The first word is shifa and refers to a slave woman or maid servant who is sexually out of limits, off limits and serves exclusively the woman of the house, a maid servant.

The second word is ama and it refers to a slave woman who is designated to be a man's secondary wife or a concubine. This is why Sarai's maid servant Hagar is called a shifa, a maid servant because she is exclusively reserved for Sarai and it's not until Sarai gives her to Abraham as his wife that she is now available to Abraham as a wife and she did this, Sarai did this so that she might have children through Hagar.

Very similar situation with Leah and Rachel and their maid servants Zilpah and Bilah. Now in contrast, when a Levite is traveling through a city with his concubine, his secondary wife in Judges 19, he refers to his female servant as Amah, not as a shifa because she is his wife and the passage calls the Levite her husband.

Similarly, in 1 Kings 1, Bathsheba, who is King David's wife, refers to herself as an Amah, not as a shifa. I'm getting all these details to prove to you that the word translated slave here refers specifically to a slave woman who is designated to be the master's wife.

[32 : 58] This is why later in verse 10 it says, if he takes another wife to himself, he shall not diminish her food, her clothing, or her marital rights. This provision for the event that the man takes another wife confirms that this female servant is in fact designated to be his wife.

And this is precisely why it says in verse 7 that she shall not go out as the male slaves do after six years of servitude. It's not because she's a woman and women have less rights than men.

It's because she's not an ordinary servant but his wife who has far greater privileges and responsibilities. And that's why if you look at a parallel passage to this in Deuteronomy 15, 12 to 18, it specifically notes that both male and female slaves go free after six years of service.

It's only the female slave designated to be the man's wife that does not go free after six years. So when a man sells his daughter as a slave due to financial hardship, the family receives money in lieu of the betrothal present and this obviously helps the struggling family but now the daughter is no longer under the protection of her father and is potentially in a vulnerable situation and that's why God gives these laws for her protection.

verse 8 is one of those guardrails. If she does not please her master who has designated her for himself then he shall let her be redeemed. He shall have no right to sell her to a foreign people since he has broken faith with her.

[34 : 35] The master has designated her to be his wife but sometime after purchasing her rights he decides that he no longer wants to take her as his wife. In that case he has no right to sell her to a foreign people but must let her be redeemed by non-foreign people a non-foreign family meaning her family her kin she was given up by her father to be his master's wife not to be passed around to other people so if he doesn't want her for himself then he must let her kin redeem her.

That's what this passage says. In some cases the master might designate the woman not for himself but to be his son's wife and that's what verse 9 has in view and once again this shows that this woman's status is more than a workslave it says if he designates her for his son he shall deal with her as with a daughter.

If he gives her to his son as a wife she should no longer be regarded as a servant but as his own daughter. Just because she came from a poor family doesn't mean that you can treat her like dirt. She is someone else's precious daughter and now it is your job to treat her like one. That's what God says here. Then verses 10 to 11 provide guidelines for it for if and when a man takes an additional wife.

While polygamy is not God's ideal as clearly taught in Genesis 2 24 it was already a reality in the ancient Near East and knowing the hardness of man's hearts God gives this law to govern those sinful people in a fallen world.

[36 : 15] It says if he takes another wife to himself he shall not diminish her food her clothing or her marital rights and if he does not do these things for her she shall go out for nothing without payment of money. So if he chooses to take another wife he must not reduce his concubine his secondary wife's food clothing or marital rights.

Marital rights probably refers to the wife's right to sleep with her husband and bear children in his name. The possibility that a man might deprive his wife of marital rights reminds me of the sad situation in Genesis 30.

Some of you might remember this where Leah Jacob's wife barter away mandrakes which were herbal medicine that was believed to help women bear children.

She barter away the mandrakes for the right to sleep with her own husband for one night because Jacob was also married to Rachel and Rachel was his favored wife.

So it seems like the situation was that he was not sleeping with Leah at all and sleeping every day with Rachel and depriving her of her marital rights. And so here he's saying that the master may not do that.

[37 : 29] So if you withhold any of these three things from her food, clothing, or marital rights and the right to bear children comes with that because women in those days were considered honor to be able to bear children and depriving her of that would have been a great disservice to her.

If you deprive the woman of any of that, then she shall go out for nothing without payment of money. So by this point, hopefully you have a better understanding of what slavery among the ancient Israelites looked like, but you might still be wondering what all of these laws have to do with us since we don't have any servants or slaves.

How does this passage apply to us? This passage teaches us that God cares about justice, about giving people what is due to them. We might not have servants, but some of you do have people who report to you, who work for you, people who are under your authority.

And if you do not, you might in the future. This passage teaches us to love such people as our neighbors, to treat them well, men like sons and women like daughters.

Don't think of them as pawns you can sacrifice to advance your own agenda. Don't think of them as workhorses that you can drive and drive and drive until they drop. They are humans, not tools.

[38 : 49] Give them their fair wages and reasonable hours. Implement policies that give what is due both to the employer and to the employee. Invest in your workers. Don't exploit them just because you have the power to.

But there's another layer of meaning in this passage also. the reason why laws about slaves occupy such a prominent place in the book of the covenant right here in the beginning is that the Jews themselves were once oppressed as slaves in Egypt.

So this is God's way of telling them don't treat anyone the way you were treated as slaves in Egypt. Notice also that the rules governing slaves begin and end with the provisions for when they go free. verse 2 it says when you buy a Hebrew slave you shall serve six years and the seventh he shall go out free for nothing. A nearly identical expression is found in verse 11 and if he does not do these things for her he shall go out for nothing without payment of money.

In both cases of servitude there is a movement toward freedom. There are provisions for freedom. In all cases except for when a servant woman is taken was required to free the Hebrew slaves after six years.

[40 : 08] And this begs the question why? The answer is given in a parallel passage in Deuteronomy 15 12 to 15 it says if your brother a Hebrew man or a Hebrew woman is sold to you he shall serve you six years and the seventh year you shall let him go free from you and when you let him go free from and out of your wine press as the Lord your God has blessed you you shall give to him you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you therefore I command you this today the reason why God commands the manumission of all Hebrew slaves in the seventh year is that all Israelites were once slaves in Egypt but God already redeemed them he already paid the ransom price for their freedom and because

God has purchased them for himself they are now to serve God and they are not to be permanently reduced to servitude to man this is why while most of the protections for slaves that I talked about this morning apply it also to non Hebrew slaves one notable distinction between Hebrew slaves and non Hebrew slaves was the non Hebrew slaves did not go free on the seventh year why because God had not redeemed them this was one of God's way of distinguishing those who had been redeemed and those who had not been redeemed and that distinction is there to point to a deeper spiritual reality some of you probably think that you have never been enslaved to anyone but the truth is that we were all once slaves in the spiritual realm when Jesus taught that the Jews in John 8 if you abide in my word and you are truly my disciples and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free that Jesus taught the Jews and the

Jews understandably responded in confusion well we have never been slaves to enslave to anyone how is it that you say you will become free and then Jesus says truly truly I say to you everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin the slave does not remain in the house forever the son remains forever so if the son sets you free you will be free indeed living however you want and sinning as much as you want is not a freedom but a slavery sin sullies our hands it dulls our consciences sin grows in strength until it controls us and masters us sin keeps us enslaved in the cages of guilt and shame guilt is our sense of condemnation because of our sin and shame is our sense of alienation from God and others because of our sins we were all once trapped in that we were all once laboring under insurmountable debt and think about how frightening that is no matter how much you will repay this debt and eventually the loan sharks come and they will take everything that belongs to you and that's where sin slavery to sin leads to death and to damnation and eternal separation from God and that's the heavy burden of death that we were all carrying and that's why God sent his only son Jesus to redeem us he sent Jesus and Jesus came and in one fell swoop by paying the price for our sins paying our debt on the cross with his own life Jesus freed us of that debt erased it clean slate that's what this passage ultimately points to Jesus death on the cross paid all our debt of sins so we are no longer slaves and it is our duty and responsibility to proclaim this news of emancipation to all those in our lives so I hope you feel the visceral force of this as Martin Luther King

Jr. said in his speech free at last last free at last thank God almighty we are free at last let's pray father thank you for your love for us and thank you for your compassion and mercy that when you saw us in our debt of sin you could have in your righteousness and in your justice turned away from us and said well they brought it upon themselves they deserve it because we did deserve it but father you were merciful and you were compassionate and you said your only son Jesus and you paid the most precious price and gave him as the ransom price for our freedom so that now we have your spirit so that we are now free indeed thank you for this freedom lord we love you and now with our freedom lord we live for you help us to do that in

[45 : 54] Jesus name we pray amen