

Session 7
Old Testament Survey with Apologetics
April 8, 2025

Reference:

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From the narrative of the 10 Plagues in chapters 7-11 of Exodus:

According to the Book of Exodus, these are the ten plagues that struck Egypt before the Israelites were freed:

1. **Water Turned to Blood:** The Nile River and other waters turned into blood.
2. **Frogs:** Frogs overran homes and the land.
3. **Gnats (or Lice):** Gnats swarmed everywhere, causing discomfort.
4. **Flies:** Swarms of flies infested Egypt.
5. **Death of Livestock:** The Egyptian livestock died of disease.
6. **Boils:** Painful boils afflicted people and animals.
7. **Hail:** A destructive hailstorm devastated crops and homes.
8. **Locusts:** Locusts consumed every remaining plant and crop.
9. **Darkness:** A deep darkness covered Egypt for three days.
10. **Death of the Firstborn:** The firstborn in Egyptian households perished.

The ten plagues in the Book of Exodus are rich in symbolism and meaning. Each plague targeted a specific aspect of Egyptian life, culture, or belief, demonstrating divine power and challenging the authority of Pharaoh and the Egyptian gods. Here's an overview of the significance of each plague:

1. **Water Turned to Blood:** The Nile was central to Egypt's economy and daily life. Turning it to blood symbolized the corruption of Egypt's lifeblood and targeted the gods associated with the Nile, like Hapi, the god of the river.
2. **Frogs:** Frogs were associated with fertility and life, linked to the goddess Heket. Their overabundance turned a symbol of life into a nuisance, illustrating the disruption of natural order.
3. **Gnats (or Lice):** Gnats invading people and animals disrupted cleanliness and worship, as Egyptian priests highly valued ritual purity. This plague may have mocked their meticulous cleanliness.
4. **Flies:** The swarms of flies represented chaos and disorder, opposing the Egyptian belief in Ma'at, the principle of order and harmony.
5. **Death of Livestock:** Livestock were both economically vital and linked to gods like Apis (the bull deity). This plague challenged Pharaoh's ability to protect these essential resources.
6. **Boils:** Physical afflictions mocked Egyptian medicine and healing deities, such as Imhotep. The boils were a direct attack on their ability to maintain health and well-being.
7. **Hail:** The hailstorm destroyed crops and property, showing the limits of Egypt's agricultural gods like Nut (sky goddess) and Seth (storm god). It further jeopardized their food security.
8. **Locusts:** Locusts consuming the remaining crops symbolized total devastation. This was a severe blow to Egypt's economy and reliance on agricultural deities.
9. **Darkness:** Darkness for three days directly targeted Ra, the sun god and one of Egypt's most important deities. It symbolized the supremacy of the God of Israel over their gods.
10. **Death of the Firstborn:** The death of the firstborn struck at the heart of Egyptian society, including Pharaoh's lineage, which was considered divine. It demonstrated ultimate authority and power, forcing Pharaoh to release the Israelites.

Each plague systematically demonstrated the impotence of Egypt's gods and Pharaoh, ultimately leading to the liberation of the Israelites. The plague events demonstrated God's great power to the Egyptians, to the countries around Egypt (especially those in Canaan), and to the Israelites themselves. In addition, the incredible display of God's power over nature and life was orchestrated by God to compel Pharaoh to let the Israelites go.

High Level Summary of Exodus 12 Through 23

The Scripture in Exodus 12-23 primarily focuses on the instructions for the Passover and the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. It begins with the Lord's instructions to Moses and Aaron regarding the Passover, including the selection of an unblemished animal, the preparation of the meal, and the application of the blood on the doorposts. The Lord promises to pass through Egypt and strike every firstborn male, but the blood on the houses will be a distinguishing mark, sparing the Israelites. The day is to be celebrated as a festival to the Lord, with specific instructions on eating unleavened bread for seven days.

The Scripture then describes the actual Exodus, where the Lord strikes every firstborn male in Egypt, leading Pharaoh to release the Israelites. The Egyptians pressure the Israelites to leave quickly, and the Israelites plunder the Egyptians by receiving silver, gold, and clothing. The Israelites travel from Rameses to Succoth, and the document notes that they had lived in Egypt for 430 years.

Further instructions for the Passover are provided, including the prohibition of foreigners from eating it unless circumcised. The document also details the route of the Exodus, with the Lord guiding the Israelites through a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.

The Egyptian pursuit and the escape through the Red Sea are described, with the Lord causing confusion among the Egyptian forces and ultimately drowning them in the sea. The Israelites sing a song of praise to the Lord for their deliverance.

The document concludes with various laws and ordinances, including those about slaves, personal injury, theft, crop protection, personal property, seduction, capital offenses, and protection of the vulnerable. It emphasizes the importance of honesty, justice, and respect for God.

Sure, here is a summary of all the places mentioned in Exodus chapters 12-23:

1. **Egypt:** The land where the Israelites were enslaved and from which they were freed.
2. **Rameses:** The starting point of the Israelites' journey out of Egypt.
3. **Succoth:** The first stop after leaving Rameses.
4. **Red Sea:** The body of water that the Israelites crossed during their escape from the Egyptians.
5. **Etham:** A location where the Israelites camped on the edge of the wilderness.
6. **Marah:** A place where the Israelites found bitter water.
7. **Elim:** A location with twelve springs and seventy date palms where the Israelites camped.
8. **Wilderness of Sin:** The area between Elim and Sinai where the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron.
9. **Rephidim:** A place where the Israelites camped and faced a lack of water and where the Amalekites attacked.

10. **Horeb**: The rock at Horeb where Moses struck to provide water.
11. **Midian**: The land of Moses's father-in-law, Jethro.
12. **Sinai Wilderness**: The area where the Israelites camped in front of Mount Sinai.
13. **Mount Sinai**: The mountain where God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses.
14. **Philistines**: The land that God did not lead the Israelites through to avoid war.
15. **Canaanites, Hethites, Amorites, Hivites, Jebusites**: The peoples whose lands God promised to the Israelites.
16. **Pi-hahiroth, Migdol, Baal-zephon**: Locations near the sea where the Israelites camped during the Egyptian pursuit.
17. **Wilderness of Shur**: The area the Israelites traveled through after crossing the Red Sea.

ARTICLE **EXODUS 20**

IS THE OLD TESTAMENT ETHICAL?

by Christopher Wright

The prevailing prejudice against Scripture is that the Old Testament portrays a violent God of a violent people and is filled with narratives recounting horrendous events with disreputable people playing major roles. Is the Old Testament ethical? Here are some reasons why it is.

It was ethical enough for Jesus. Jesus accepted the truth and ethical validity of the Old Testament ("the Scriptures") in his own life, mission, and teaching. His noted "you have heard that it was said . . . but I tell you" (see [Mt 5](#)) sayings don't contradict or criticize the Old Testament but either deepen its demands or correct distorted popular inferences. "Love your neighbor" meant "Hate your enemy" to many in Jesus's day, even though the Old Testament never says any such thing. Jesus reminded his hearers that the same chapter ([Lv 19](#)) also says, "Love [the alien] as yourself," extending this to include "Love your enemy" ([Mt 5:44](#)). Jesus thus affirmed and strengthened the Old Testament ethic.

Narratives describe what happened, not what was necessarily approved. We assume wrongly that if a story is in Scripture it must be "what God wanted." But biblical narrators dealt with the real world and described it as it was, with all its corrupt and fallen ambiguity. We shouldn't mistake realism for ethical approval. Old Testament stories often challenge us to wonder at God's amazing grace and patience in continually working out his purpose through such morally compromised people and to be discerning in evaluating their conduct according to standards the Old Testament itself provides.

The conquest of Canaan must be understood for what it was. This event, rightly, is troubling to sensitive readers. We can't ignore its horror, but some perspectives can help us evaluate it ethically.

- It was a limited event. The conquest narratives describe one particular period of Israel's long history. Many of the other wars that occur in the Old Testament narrative had no divine sanction, and some were clearly condemned as the actions of proud, greedy kings or military rivals.

- We must allow for the exaggerated language of warfare. Israel, like other ancient Near East nations whose documents we possess, had a rhetoric of war that often exceeded reality.

- It was an act of God’s justice and punishment on a morally degraded society. The conquest shouldn’t be portrayed as random genocide or ethnic cleansing. The wickedness of Canaanite society was anticipated ([Gn 15:16](#)) and described in moral and social terms ([Lv 18:24; 20:23; Dt 9:5; 12:29-31](#)). This interpretation is accepted in the New Testament (e.g., [Heb 11:31](#) speaks of the Canaanites as “those who disobeyed,” implying awareness of choosing to persist in sin—as the Bible affirms of all human beings). There’s a huge moral difference between violence that’s arbitrary and violence inflicted within the moral framework of punishment (this is true in human society as much as in divine perspective). It doesn’t make it “nice,” but it changes the ethical evaluation significantly.

- God threatened to do the same to Israel—and he did. In the conquest God used Israel as the agent of punishment on the Canaanites. God warned Israel that if they behaved like the Canaanites, he would treat them as his enemy in the same way and inflict the same punishment on them using other nations ([Lv 26:17; Dt 28:25-68](#)). In the course of Israel’s long history in Old Testament times, God repeatedly did so, demonstrating his moral consistency in international justice. It wasn’t a matter of favoritism. If anything, Israel’s status as God’s chosen people, the Old Testament argues, exposed them more to God’s judgment and historical punishment than the Canaanites who experienced the conquest. Those choosing to live as God’s enemies eventually face God’s judgment.

- The conquest anticipated the final judgment. Like the stories of Sodom and Gomorrah and the flood, the story of Canaan’s conquest stands in Scripture as a prototypical narrative, or one that foreshadows what is to come. Scripture affirms that ultimately, in the final judgment, the wicked will face the awful reality of God’s wrath through exclusion, punishment, and destruction. Then God’s ethical justice will finally be vindicated. But at certain points in history, such as during the conquest period, God demonstrates the power of his judgment. Rahab’s story, set in the midst of the conquest narrative, also demonstrates the power of repentance, faith, and God’s willingness to spare his enemies when they choose to identify with God’s people. Rahab thus enters the New Testament hall of fame—and faith ([Heb 11:31; Jms 2:25](#)).

An eye for an eye is remarkably humane. Unfortunately this phrase sums up for many what Old Testament law and ethics are all about. Even then they misunderstand that this expression—almost certainly metaphorical, not literal—wasn’t a license for unlimited vengeance but precisely the opposite: it established the fundamental legal principle of proportionality; that is, punishment mustn’t exceed the gravity of the offense. The rest of Old Testament law, when compared with law codes from contemporary ancient societies (e.g., Babylonian, Assyrian, Hittite), shows a remarkable humanitarian concern, especially for the socially weak, poor, and marginalized (the classic trio of “the widow, the orphan, and the alien”). Israel’s laws operated with ethical priorities of human life above material property and of human needs over legal rights. Not surprisingly, then, Jesus (who clearly endorsed the same priorities) could affirm that he had no intention of abolishing the Law and the Prophets but rather of fulfilling them.

TWISTED SCRIPTURE [Exodus 20:8-11](#)

Seventh-day Adventists use these verses to advocate a strong view of the Sabbath, even arguing that worship must take place on Saturday because Sunday worship is the mark of the beast. [Exodus 20](#) sets the seventh day as one for rest and worship. Most Christian scholars argue that the early church moved their day of worship from Saturday to Sunday to begin marking the day of the resurrection as the day of worship and we see this very movement in Acts, 1 Corinthians, and Revelation. Similarly, many biblical scholars argue that Jesus is the Sabbath for Christians and we are to take our rest in him rather than in a specific day of the week. In fact, only nine of the Ten Commandments are specifically mentioned and reinstated in the NT whereas Jesus says, in [Matthew 12:8](#), that he is the Lord of the Sabbath.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE PASSOVER

12 The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: ² “This month is to be the beginning of months for you; it is the first month of your year. ³ Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month they must each select an animal of the flock according to their fathers’ families, one animal per family. ⁴ If the household is too small for a whole animal, that person and the neighbor nearest his house are to select one based on the combined number of people; you should apportion the animal according to what each will eat. ⁵ You must have an unblemished animal, a year-old male; you may take it from either the sheep or the goats. ⁶ You are to keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; then the whole assembly of the community of Israel will slaughter the animals at twilight. ⁷ They must take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses where they eat them. ⁸ They are to eat the meat that night; they should eat it, roasted over the fire along with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. ⁹ Do not eat any of it raw or cooked in boiling [A](#) water, but only roasted over fire — its head as well as its legs and inner organs. ¹⁰ You must not leave any of it until morning; any part of it left until morning you must burn. ¹¹ Here is how you must eat it: You must be dressed for travel, [B](#) your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. You are to eat it in a hurry; it is the LORD’s Passover.

¹² “I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night and strike every firstborn male in the land of Egypt, both people and animals. I am the LORD; I will execute judgments against all the gods of Egypt. ¹³ The blood on the houses where you are staying will be a distinguishing mark for you; when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No plague will be among you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.

¹⁴ “This day is to be a memorial for you, and you must celebrate it as a festival to the LORD. You are to celebrate it throughout your generations as a permanent statute. ¹⁵ You must eat unleavened bread for seven days. On the first day you must remove yeast from your houses. Whoever eats what is leavened from the first day through the seventh day must be cut off from Israel. ¹⁶ You are to hold a sacred assembly on the first day and another sacred assembly on the seventh day. No work may be done on those days except for preparing what people need to eat — you may do only that.

¹⁷ “You are to observe the Festival of Unleavened Bread because on this very day I brought your military divisions out of the land of Egypt. You must observe this day throughout your generations as a permanent statute. ¹⁸ You are to eat unleavened bread in the first month, from the evening of the fourteenth day of the month until the evening of the twenty-first day. ¹⁹ Yeast must not be found in your houses for seven days. If anyone eats something leavened, that person,

whether a resident alien or native of the land, must be cut off from the community of Israel. ²⁰ Do not eat anything leavened; eat unleavened bread in all your homes.” [C](#)

²¹ Then Moses summoned all the elders of Israel and said to them, “Go, select an animal from the flock according to your families, and slaughter the Passover animal. ²² Take a cluster of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and brush the lintel and the two doorposts with some of the blood in the basin. None of you may go out the door of his house until morning. ²³ When the LORD passes through to strike Egypt and sees the blood on the lintel and the two doorposts, he will pass over the door and not let the destroyer enter your houses to strike you.

²⁴ “Keep this command permanently as a statute for you and your descendants. ²⁵ When you enter the land that the LORD will give you as he promised, you are to observe this ceremony. ²⁶ When your children ask you, ‘What does this ceremony mean to you?’ ²⁷ you are to reply, ‘It is the Passover sacrifice to the LORD, for he passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt when he struck the Egyptians and spared our homes.’ ” So the people knelt low and worshiped. ²⁸ Then the Israelites went and did this; they did just as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron.

THE EXODUS

²⁹ Now at midnight the LORD struck every firstborn male in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the prisoner who was in the dungeon, and every firstborn of the livestock. ³⁰ During the night Pharaoh got up, he along with all his officials and all the Egyptians, and there was a loud wailing throughout Egypt because there wasn’t a house without someone dead. ³¹ He summoned Moses and Aaron during the night and said, “Get out immediately from among my people, both you and the Israelites, and go, worship the LORD as you have said. ³² Take even your flocks and your herds as you asked and leave, and also bless me.”

³³ Now the Egyptians pressured the people in order to send them quickly out of the country, for they said, “We’re all going to die!” ³⁴ So the people took their dough before it was leavened, with their kneading bowls wrapped up in their clothes on their shoulders.

³⁵ The Israelites acted on Moses’s word and asked the Egyptians for silver and gold items and for clothing. ³⁶ And the LORD gave the people such favor with the Egyptians that they gave them what they requested. In this way they plundered the Egyptians.

³⁷ The Israelites traveled from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand able-bodied men on foot, besides their families. ³⁸ A mixed crowd also went up with them, along with a huge number of livestock, both flocks and herds. ³⁹ The people baked the dough they had brought out of Egypt into unleavened loaves, since it had no yeast; for when they were driven out of Egypt, they could not delay and had not prepared provisions for themselves.

⁴⁰ The time that the Israelites lived in Egypt [A](#) was 430 years. ⁴¹ At the end of 430 years, on that same day, all the LORD’s military divisions went out from the land of Egypt. ⁴² It was a night of vigil in honor of the LORD, because he would bring them out of the land of Egypt. This same night is in honor of the LORD, a night vigil for all the Israelites throughout their generations.

PASSOVER INSTRUCTION

⁴³ The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “This is the statute of the Passover: no foreigner may eat it. ⁴⁴ But any slave a man has purchased may eat it, after you have circumcised him. ⁴⁵ A temporary resident or hired worker may not eat the Passover. ⁴⁶ It is to be eaten in one house. You may not take any of the meat outside the house, and you may not break any of its bones. ⁴⁷ The whole community of Israel must celebrate [B](#) it. ⁴⁸ If an alien resides among you and wants to observe the LORD’s Passover, every male in his household must be circumcised, and then he may participate; [C](#) he will become like a native of the land. But no uncircumcised person may eat it. ⁴⁹ The same law will apply to both the native and the alien who resides among you.”

⁵⁰ Then all the Israelites did this; they did just as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron. ⁵¹ On that same day the LORD brought the Israelites out of the land of Egypt according to their military divisions.

[«Exodus 11 | Exodus 13»](#)

[12:5](#) This passage appears to contradict [Dt 16:2](#) regarding which animals may be used for the Passover sacrifice. The instruction of [Dt 16:2](#) allows animals of the herd—that is, cattle or oxen—as well as lambs or goats from the flock. But a careful reading suggests that these two passages are addressing different issues. [Ex 12:5](#) deals with the animal that is to be eaten as part of the Passover meal, on the first night of an eight-day celebration that included both the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread. On the other hand, [Dt 16:2-8](#) mentions the kinds of sacrificial animals that were to be used for different purposes throughout the festival period. The guidelines of [Dt 16:2](#) are spelled out in greater detail in [Nm 28:16-31](#), which specifies that bulls, sheep, and goats were to be sacrificed on each of the days of this lengthy celebration.

[12:7](#) It was the people’s obedience to God that saved them, not the blood on the doorpost. Those who obeyed the Lord’s instruction to place the blood of an unblemished male lamb or goat on the doorposts of their home were spared. By doing so, they demonstrated that they were placing their trust in a sacrificial death prescribed by God for their salvation. Since the days of the apostles, Christians have seen in this event a foreshadowing of the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, “our Passover” ([1Co 5:7](#)), whose blood spares us from the coming wrath of God ([Rm 5:9](#)).

[12:13](#) God knows all things ([1Jn 3:20](#)) and did not need to make an inspection tour through the land, noting the blood on each doorpost to discern who was obedient to him. The blood was the “distinguishing mark,” a sign for the benefit of the Israelites that confirmed their obedience to God and his promise of salvation. The phrase “when I see the blood” is used figuratively to indicate the Lord’s knowledge of those who trust him. The expression looks ahead to God’s response to those who, having entered into the death of Christ ([Rm 6:3-7](#)), are protected by his blood from the wrath of God’s judgment.

[12:31](#) If the exodus occurred as the Bible describes it, why does it receive no mention in Egyptian records? The probable answer is that the official Egyptian records were written by government functionaries not to provide an objective recording of historical events but to support the existing political and religious powers of their day. Egyptian annals glorify the accomplishments of the pharaohs and reinforce the prevailing Egyptian religious convictions.

Any set of events that cast Egyptian gods and their pharaoh (who was himself considered a god) in a bad light would hardly be mentioned in an official Egyptian document.

12:40 How much time did the Israelites spend in Egypt? The Hebrew text used as the basis for English translations of this verse states literally that “the dwelling of the sons of Israel which they dwelt in Egypt was 430 years.” The Samaritan Pentateuch, on the other hand, states that the Israelites spent 215 years in Egypt. The difference in numbers may not be a true contradiction but the result of different ways of computing Israel’s time in Egypt. The Samaritan Pentateuch, following a very old tradition that is reflected in the NT (see [Gl 3:17](#)), probably arrived at the figure 215 by starting with the number 430 and then factoring in certain events associated with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The editors of that version concluded that Jacob’s descendants spent 215 years in the land by taking into account the number of years between Abraham’s visit to Egypt and the birth of Isaac (25 years, see [Gn 12:4](#); [21:5](#)), Isaac’s age when Jacob was born (60 years, [Gn 25:26](#)), and Jacob’s age at the time he entered Egypt (130 years, [Gn 47:9](#)).

The Septuagint likewise clarifies the number 430 but does so in a different way. It expands the reading found in the Hebrew text, stating that “the dwelling of the sons of Israel, *and of their fathers*, which they dwelt *in the land of Canaan, and in the land of Egypt*, was 430” (italics added).

12:43,48 Although the OT requires non-Jews adopting the faith of Israel to be circumcised, the NT discourages the practice ([1Co 7:18](#); [Gl 5:2](#)). The Prophet Jeremiah foresaw a time when God would make a new covenant that would replace the one he made with Israel at Mount Sinai ([Jr 31:31](#)). Jesus Christ brought that new covenant into being through his sacrificial death on the cross ([Heb 9:15](#)). Through Christ a new relationship exists between God and humanity ([2Co 5:17](#); [Gl 6:15](#)), one that does not require men to be circumcised ([Ac 15:1-21](#)).

^A **12:9** Or *or boiled at all in*

^B **12:11** Lit *must have your waist girded*

^C **12:20** Or *settlements*

^A **12:40** LXX, Sam add *and in Canaan*

^B **12:47** Lit *do*

^C **12:48** Lit *may come near to do it*

[« Exodus 12 | Exodus 14 »](#)

13The LORD spoke to Moses: ² “Consecrate every firstborn male to me, the firstborn from every womb among the Israelites, both man and domestic animal; it is mine.”

³ Then Moses said to the people, “Remember this day when you came out of Egypt, out of the place of slavery, for the LORD brought you out of here by the strength of his hand. Nothing leavened may be eaten. ⁴ Today, in the month of Abib, ^A you are going out. ⁵ When the LORD brings you into the land of the Canaanites, Hethites, Amorites, Hivites, and Jebusites, ^B which he

swore to your fathers that he would give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, you must carry out this ceremony in this month. ⁶ For seven days you must eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there is to be a festival to the LORD. ⁷ Unleavened bread is to be eaten for those seven days. Nothing leavened may be found among you, and no yeast may be found among you in all your territory. ⁸ On that day explain to your son, ‘This is because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt.’ ⁹ Let it serve as a sign for you on your hand and as a reminder on your forehead, [C](#) so that the LORD’s instruction may be in your mouth; for the LORD brought you out of Egypt with a strong hand. ¹⁰ Keep this statute at its appointed time from year to year.

¹¹ “When the LORD brings you into the land of the Canaanites, as he swore to you and your fathers, and gives it to you, ¹² you are to present to the LORD every firstborn male of the womb. All firstborn offspring of the livestock you own that are males will be the LORD’s. ¹³ You must redeem every firstborn of a donkey with a flock animal, but if you do not redeem it, break its neck. However, you must redeem every firstborn among your sons.

¹⁴ “In the future, when your son asks you, ‘What does this mean?’ say to him, ‘By the strength of his hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, out of the place of slavery. ¹⁵ When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the LORD killed every firstborn male in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of humans and the firstborn of livestock. That is why I sacrifice to the LORD all the firstborn of the womb that are males, but I redeem all the firstborn of my sons.’ ¹⁶ So let it be a sign on your hand and a symbol [D](#) on your forehead, for the LORD brought us out of Egypt by the strength of his hand.”

THE ROUTE OF THE EXODUS

¹⁷ When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them along the road to the land of the Philistines, even though it was nearby; for God said, “The people will change their minds and return to Egypt if they face war.” ¹⁸ So he led the people around toward the Red Sea along the road of the wilderness. And the Israelites left the land of Egypt in battle formation.

¹⁹ Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, because Joseph had made the Israelites swear a solemn oath, saying, “God will certainly come to your aid; then you must take my bones with you from this place.”

²⁰ They set out from Succoth and camped at Etham on the edge of the wilderness. ²¹ The LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to lead them on their way during the day and in a pillar of fire to give them light at night, so that they could travel day or night. ²² The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night never left its place in front of the people.

[« Exodus 12 | Exodus 14 »](#)

[13:12-16](#) Offering every firstborn male animal from their flocks required financial sacrifice on the part of the Israelites, yet the Lord required it. God is interested in more than his people’s material prosperity; he also wants them to develop their values, character, and spiritual life. As each succeeding generation of Israelites gave its firstborn males to God, they would in some way recreate the exodus event. They would be reminded of the seriousness of sin; whenever they ate the meat of the animal, they would be reminded of the sacrificial meal eaten by their forefathers on the night of the exodus. By sparing their own firstborn sons through the death of a sacrificial

animal, in obedience to the Lord's command, they would experience the lifesaving grace of God in a deep and unforgettable way. Unlike the Canaanites, who gave firstborn sons and daughters to their gods by killing them ([Lv 18:21](#)), the Israelites were to let their children live ([Dt 18:10](#)). They were to pay a redemption price for each child redeemed. The males of the tribe of Levi were then to serve as lifelong substitutes for the redeemed sons ([Nm 3:12](#)).

[13:21-22](#) According to [Nm 10:29-31](#), Moses asked Hobab, son of his father-in-law Reuel, to assist the Israelites during their time in the desert. As a local resident Hobab knew that area well, and his insights would be invaluable to the Israelites. His role, however, was only supportive. God would guide the covenant people to the promised land through the pillars of cloud and fire.

^A [13:4](#) March–April; called Nisan in the post-exilic period; [Neh 2:1](#); [Est 3:7](#)

^B [13:5](#) DSS, Sam, LXX, Syr add *Girgashites* and *Perizzites* ; [Jos 3:10](#)

^C [13:9](#) Lit *reminder between your eyes*

^D [13:16](#) Or *phylactery*

[«Exodus 13 | Exodus 15»](#)

14Then the LORD spoke to Moses: ² “Tell the Israelites to turn back and camp in front of Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea; you must camp in front of Baal-zephon, facing it by the sea. ³ Pharaoh will say of the Israelites: They are wandering around the land in confusion; the wilderness has boxed them in. ⁴ I will harden Pharaoh's heart so that he will pursue them. Then I will receive glory by means of Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD.” So the Israelites did this.

THE EGYPTIAN PURSUIT

⁵ When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, Pharaoh and his officials changed their minds about the people and said: “What have we done? We have released Israel from serving us.” ⁶ So he got his chariot ready and took his troops ^A with him; ⁷ he took six hundred of the best chariots and all the rest of the chariots of Egypt, with officers in each one. ⁸ The LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued the Israelites, who were going out defiantly. ^B ⁹ The Egyptians — all Pharaoh's horses and chariots, his horsemen, ^C and his army — chased after them and caught up with them as they camped by the sea beside Pi-hahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon.

¹⁰ As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up and there were the Egyptians coming after them! The Israelites were terrified and cried out to the LORD for help. ¹¹ They said to Moses: “Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? ¹² Isn't this what we told you in Egypt: Leave us alone so that we may serve the Egyptians? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.”

¹³ But Moses said to the people, “Don’t be afraid. Stand firm and see the LORD’s salvation that he will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians you see today, you will never see again. ¹⁴ The LORD will fight for you, and you must be quiet.”

ESCAPE THROUGH THE RED SEA

¹⁵ The LORD said to Moses, “Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to break camp. ¹⁶ As for you, lift up your staff, stretch out your hand over the sea, and divide it so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground. ¹⁷ As for me, I am going to harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them, and I will receive glory by means of Pharaoh, all his army, and his chariots and horsemen. ¹⁸ The Egyptians will know that I am the LORD when I receive glory through Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen.”

¹⁹ Then the angel of God, who was going in front of the Israelite forces, moved and went behind them. The pillar of cloud moved from in front of them and stood behind them. ²⁰ It came between the Egyptian and Israelite forces. There was cloud and darkness, it lit up the night, and neither group came near the other all night long.

²¹ Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The LORD drove the sea back with a powerful east wind all that night and turned the sea into dry land. So the waters were divided, ²² and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with the waters like a wall to them on their right and their left.

²³ The Egyptians set out in pursuit — all Pharaoh’s horses, his chariots, and his horsemen — and went into the sea after them. ²⁴ During the morning watch, the LORD looked down at the Egyptian forces from the pillar of fire and cloud, and threw the Egyptian forces into confusion. ²⁵ He caused their chariot wheels to swerve [A](#)[B](#) and made them drive [C](#) with difficulty. “Let’s get away from Israel,” the Egyptians said, “because the LORD is fighting for them against Egypt!”

²⁶ Then the LORD said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand over the sea so that the water may come back on the Egyptians, on their chariots and horsemen.” ²⁷ So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at daybreak the sea returned to its normal depth. While the Egyptians were trying to escape from it, the LORD threw them into the sea. ²⁸ The water came back and covered the chariots and horsemen, plus the entire army of Pharaoh that had gone after them into the sea. Not even one of them survived.

²⁹ But the Israelites had walked through the sea on dry ground, with the waters like a wall to them on their right and their left. ³⁰ That day the LORD saved Israel from the power of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. ³¹ When Israel saw the great power that the LORD used against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD and believed in him and in his servant Moses.

[«Exodus 13](#) | [Exodus 15](#) [»](#)

14:16 Did the Israelites pass through a marsh—a “sea of reeds”—and not the Red Sea? Many scholars have accepted this suggestion, but a full consideration of the biblical evidence leads to the conclusion that Israel escaped the armies of Pharaoh by passing through a large and dangerous body of water. The biblical text states that the waters were deep ([Is 63:13](#)) but that

God split them and made them stand “like a wall” (Ps 78:13) on either side of the fleeing Israelites (Ex 14:22,29). When the waters returned to their original position, they covered the Egyptians’ chariots, horses, and soldiers (v. 27; 15:1; Dt 11:4; Jos 24:7; Neh 9:11; Ps 78:53), thereby killing all the enemy (Ex 14:27-28,30; Ps 106:11). In the NT, Stephen, the apostle Paul, and the writer of Hebrews referred to the body of water as a sea (Ac 7:36; 1Co 10:1; Heb 11:29).

Commentators have noted that the Hebrew phrase *yam suph*, traditionally translated as “Red Sea,” can also mean “sea of reed.” While that translation is possible, the OT always employs this phrase to refer to a deep body of water east of Egypt and adjacent to the Sinai Peninsula. In 1Kg 9:26-28 Solomon is said to have built a fleet of trading ships that sailed on the Red Sea to the land of Ophir. Both the NT and the Septuagint translate *yam suph* as “Red Sea” (Ac 7:36; Heb 11:29) and not “sea of reeds,” or a marsh.

14:21 How could a dry path be created through the middle of the Red Sea? God performed a miracle, using, at least in part, the forces of nature. The biblical writer mentions the role of wind in this event, but that does not preclude the possibility that God used other aspects of nature of which we have no knowledge. The suggestion that a tsunami was responsible for the temporary displacement of water in the Red Sea area is interesting but does not account for the description of a “wall” of water on either side of the fleeing Israelites (vv. 22, 29). Possibly God augmented the forces of nature with supernatural activity to create a safe passage for Israel through the body of water.

14:25 Some scholars have suggested that most of the exodus narrative is fabricated, though it may contain kernels of historical truth. They reject the Bible’s claim that the Red Sea actually parted but accept the possibility that Egyptian chariots became mired in the muddy marshlands in pursuit of escaping Asiatic slaves, allowing them to escape.

Certainly the Bible indicates that the Egyptians had trouble with their chariots, but this is not portrayed as the primary reason the Israelites’ escape succeeded. Nine different books in the Bible (Ex, Dt, Jos, Ps, Is, Ac, 1Co, Heb) explicitly affirm, or clearly assume, that the Red Sea split apart, saving Israel but destroying their pursuers. Any approach to the Bible that selectively rejects the straightforward narrative in Exodus in order to produce a naturalistic explanation of events will create more problems than it solves. Such an approach requires one to assume that the writers of eight other books in the Bible got it wrong. It reflects unwarranted pride, crediting modern readers of the Bible with a better grasp of biblical events than those who witnessed and wrote about those events.

^A **14:6** Lit *people*

^B **14:8** Lit *with a raised hand*

^C **14:9** Or *chariot drivers*

^A **14:25** Sam, LXX, Syr read *He bound their chariot wheels*

^B **14:25** Or *fall off*

^C **14:25** Or *and they drove them*

ISRAEL'S SONG

15Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD. They said:

I will sing to the LORD,

for he is highly exalted;

he has thrown the horse

and its rider into the sea.

2The LORD is my strength and my song; [D](#)

he has become my salvation.

This is my God, and I will praise him,

my father's God, and I will exalt him.

3The LORD is a warrior;

the LORD is his name.

4He threw Pharaoh's chariots

and his army into the sea;

the elite of his officers

were drowned in the Red Sea.

5The floods covered them;

they sank to the depths like a stone.

6LORD, your right hand is glorious in power.

LORD, your right hand shattered the enemy.

7You overthrew your adversaries

by your great majesty.

You unleashed your burning wrath;

it consumed them like stubble.

⁸The water heaped up at the blast from your nostrils;

the currents stood firm like a dam.

The watery depths congealed in the heart of the sea.

⁹The enemy said:

“I will pursue, I will overtake,

I will divide the spoil.

My desire will be gratified at their expense.

I will draw my sword;

my hand will destroy [△](#) them.”

¹⁰But you blew with your breath,

and the sea covered them.

They sank like lead

in the mighty waters.

¹¹LORD, who is like you among the gods?

Who is like you, glorious in holiness,

revered with praises, performing wonders?

¹²You stretched out your right hand,

and the earth swallowed them.

¹³With your faithful love,

you will lead the people

you have redeemed;

you will guide them to your holy dwelling

with your strength.

¹⁴When the peoples hear, they will shudder;
anguish will seize the inhabitants of Philistia.

¹⁵Then the chiefs of Edom will be terrified;
trembling will seize the leaders of Moab;
all the inhabitants of Canaan will panic;

¹⁶terror and dread will fall on them.

They will be as still [B](#) as a stone
because of your powerful arm
until your people pass by, LORD,
until the people whom you purchased [C](#) pass by.

¹⁷You will bring them in and plant them
on the mountain of your possession;
LORD, you have prepared the place
for your dwelling;
Lord, [D](#) your hands have established the sanctuary.

¹⁸The LORD will reign forever and ever!

¹⁹ When Pharaoh's horses with his chariots and horsemen went into the sea, the LORD brought the water of the sea back over them. But the Israelites walked through the sea on dry ground. ²⁰ Then the prophetess Miriam, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women came out following her with tambourines and dancing. ²¹ Miriam sang to them:

Sing to the LORD,
for he is highly exalted;
he has thrown the horse
and its rider into the sea.

WATER PROVIDED

²² Then Moses led Israel on from the Red Sea, and they went out to the Wilderness of Shur. They journeyed for three days in the wilderness without finding water. ²³ They came to Marah, but they could not drink the water at Marah because it was bitter — that is why it was named Marah. ^E ²⁴ The people grumbled to Moses, “What are we going to drink? ” ²⁵ So he cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a tree. When he threw it into the water, the water became drinkable.

The LORD made a statute and ordinance for them at Marah, and he tested them there. ²⁶ He said, “If you will carefully obey the LORD your God, do what is right in his sight, pay attention to his commands, and keep all his statutes, I will not inflict any illnesses on you that I inflicted on the Egyptians. For I am the LORD who heals you.”

²⁷ Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs and seventy date palms, and they camped there by the water.

[«Exodus 14 | Exodus 16»](#)

15:3 Is God a “warrior” or the God of peace ([Rm 15:33](#)) and love ([2Co 13:11-14](#); [1Jn 4:8,16](#))? According to the Bible, he is all of these. Just as human beings, made in the image of God ([Gn 1:26-27](#)), are capable of participating in war yet also of working for peace, so God can and does do the same. As the God of perfect justice ([Gn 18:25](#); [Ps 145:17](#)), he will not let evil behavior go unpunished. When appropriate, he acts decisively against wrongdoers. God’s acts that put an end to the activities of the wicked are expressions of his perfect love for both them and their victims. His acts of judgment bring about a greater peace.

^D **15:2** Or *might*

^A **15:9** Or *conquer*

^B **15:16** Or *silent*

^C **15:16** Or *created*

^D **15:17** Some Hb mss, DSS, Sam, Tg read *LORD*

^E **15:23** = Bitter or Bitterness

[«Exodus 15 | Exodus 17»](#)

MANNA AND QUAIL PROVIDED

16The entire Israelite community departed from Elim and came to the Wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had left the land of Egypt. ² The entire Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. ³ The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the LORD’s hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat by pots of meat and ate all the bread we wanted. Instead, you brought us into this wilderness to make this whole assembly die of hunger! ”

⁴ Then the LORD said to Moses, “I am going to rain bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. This way I will test them to see whether or not they will follow my instructions. ⁵ On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days.” ^E

⁶ So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites: “This evening you will know that it was the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, ⁷ and in the morning you will see the LORD’s glory because he has heard your complaints about him. For who are we that you complain about us?” ⁸ Moses continued, “The LORD will give you meat to eat this evening and all the bread you want in the morning, for he has heard the complaints that you are raising against him. Who are we? Your complaints are not against us but against the LORD.”

⁹ Then Moses told Aaron, “Say to the entire Israelite community, ‘Come before the LORD, for he has heard your complaints.’” ¹⁰ As Aaron was speaking to the entire Israelite community, they turned toward the wilderness, and there in a cloud the LORD’s glory appeared.

¹¹ The LORD spoke to Moses, ¹² “I have heard the complaints of the Israelites. Tell them: At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will eat bread until you are full. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God.”

¹³ So at evening quail came and covered the camp. In the morning there was a layer of dew all around the camp. ¹⁴ When the layer of dew evaporated, there were fine flakes on the desert surface, as fine as frost on the ground. ¹⁵ When the Israelites saw it, they asked one another, “What is it?” because they didn’t know what it was.

Moses told them, “It is the bread the LORD has given you to eat. ¹⁶ This is what the LORD has commanded: ‘Gather as much of it as each person needs to eat. You may take two quarts ^A per individual, according to the number of people each of you has in his tent.’”

¹⁷ So the Israelites did this. Some gathered a lot, some a little. ¹⁸ When they measured it by quarts, ^B the person who gathered a lot had no surplus, and the person who gathered a little had no shortage. Each gathered as much as he needed to eat. ¹⁹ Moses said to them, “No one is to let any of it remain until morning.” ²⁰ But they didn’t listen to Moses; some people left part of it until morning, and it bred worms and stank. Therefore Moses was angry with them.

²¹ They gathered it every morning. Each gathered as much as he needed to eat, but when the sun grew hot, it melted. ²² On the sixth day they gathered twice as much food, four quarts ^C apiece, and all the leaders of the community came and reported this to Moses. ²³ He told them, “This is what the LORD has said: ‘Tomorrow is a day of complete rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD. Bake what you want to bake, and boil what you want to boil, and set aside everything left over to be kept until morning.’”

²⁴ So they set it aside until morning as Moses commanded, and it didn’t stink or have maggots in it. ²⁵ “Eat it today,” Moses said, “because today is a Sabbath to the LORD. Today you won’t find any in the field. ²⁶ For six days you will gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will be none.”

²⁷ Yet on the seventh day some of the people went out to gather, but they did not find any. ²⁸ Then the LORD said to Moses, “How long will you ^D refuse to keep my commands and instructions? ²⁹ Understand that the LORD has given you the Sabbath; therefore on the sixth day he will give you two days’ worth of bread. Each of you stay where you are; no one is to leave his place on the seventh day.” ³⁰ So the people rested on the seventh day.

³¹ The house of Israel named the substance manna. ^E It resembled coriander seed, was white, and tasted like wafers made with honey. ³² Moses said, “This is what the LORD has commanded: ‘Two quarts ^F of it are to be preserved throughout your generations, so that they may see the bread I fed you in the wilderness when I brought you out of the land of Egypt.’ ”

³³ Moses told Aaron, “Take a container and put two quarts ^G of manna in it. Then place it before the LORD to be preserved throughout your generations.” ³⁴ As the LORD commanded Moses, Aaron placed it before the testimony to be preserved.

³⁵ The Israelites ate manna for forty years, until they came to an inhabited land. They ate manna until they reached the border of the land of Canaan. ³⁶ (They used a measure called an omer, which held two quarts. ^H)

[« Exodus 15 | Exodus 17 »](#)

16:16 In the wilderness the Israelites apparently lived in both tents and shelters. Many of them probably did not have tents when they first left Egypt and so had to sleep in temporary structures they fashioned from available materials ([Lv 23:42-43](#)). However, they would have made tents for themselves as soon as possible after departing from Egypt.

16:31 The Bible compares the taste of manna with both honey and oil ([Nm 11:8](#)). Its flavor was evidently reminiscent of both substances. The comparisons suggest that manna, like many of today’s common foods, contained both fats and sugars. Which flavor predominated may have depended on how it was prepared.

^E **16:5** Lit *as gathering day to day*

^A **16:16** Lit *an omer*

^B **16:18** Lit *by an omer*

^C **16:22** Lit *two omers*

^D **16:28** The Hb word for *you* is pl, referring to the whole nation.

^E **16:31** = what?; [Ex 16:15](#)

^F **16:32** Lit *‘A full omer*

^G **16:33** Lit *a full omer*

^H **16:36** Lit *(The omer is a tenth of an ephah.)*

WATER FROM THE ROCK

17The entire Israelite community left the Wilderness of Sin, moving from one place to the next according to the LORD's command. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. ² So the people complained to Moses, "Give us water to drink."

"Why are you complaining to me?" Moses replied to them. "Why are you testing the LORD?"

³ But the people thirsted there for water and grumbled against Moses. They said, "Why did you ever bring us up from Egypt to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?"

⁴ Then Moses cried out to the LORD, "What should I do with these people? In a little while they will stone me!"

⁵ The LORD answered Moses, "Go on ahead of the people and take some of the elders of Israel with you. Take the staff you struck the Nile with in your hand and go. ⁶ I am going to stand there in front of you on the rock at Horeb; when you hit the rock, water will come out of it and the people will drink." Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel. ⁷ He named the place Massah ^A and Meribah ^B because the Israelites complained, and because they tested the LORD, saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

THE AMALEKITES ATTACK

⁸ At Rephidim, Amalek ^C came and fought against Israel. ⁹ Moses said to Joshua, "Select some men for us and go fight against Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the hilltop with God's staff in my hand."

¹⁰ Joshua did as Moses had told him, and fought against Amalek, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. ¹¹ While Moses held up his hand, ^D Israel prevailed, but whenever he put his hand ^D down, Amalek prevailed. ¹² When Moses's hands grew heavy, they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat down on it. Then Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side and one on the other so that his hands remained steady until the sun went down. ¹³ So Joshua defeated Amalek and his army ^E with the sword.

¹⁴ The LORD then said to Moses, "Write this down on a scroll as a reminder and recite it to Joshua: I will completely blot out the memory of Amalek under heaven."

¹⁵ And Moses built an altar and named it, "The LORD Is My Banner." ^F ¹⁶ He said, "Indeed, my hand is lifted up toward ^G the LORD's throne. The LORD will be at war with Amalek from generation to generation."

17:5-6 Providing enough water in a desert to quench the thirst of a group of more than six hundred thousand men, besides women and children, was a miracle of the highest order, all the

more impressive considering that Israel spent forty years in the desert. Moses's striking of the rock was not what produced the water but rather God standing with Moses at the rock ([v. 6](#)).

17:14 If God blotted out the remembrance of Amalek, why do we still know about them? Even the inclusion of this verse in the Bible ensures that Amalek would never be forgotten. It is clear that the phrase “completely blot out the memory” in this context means “to remove any concern that Amalek would pose a threat to another nation.” That promise was fulfilled during the days of King David ([1Sm 30:16-17](#)).

A 17:7 = Testing

B 17:7 = Quarreling

C 17:8 A semi-nomadic people descended from *Amalek*, a grandson of Esau; [Gn 36:12](#)

D 17:11 Sam, LXX, Syr, Tg, Vg read *hands*

E 17:13 Or *people*

F 17:15 = *Yahweh-nissi*

G 17:16 Or *hand was on*, or *hand was against* ; Hb obscure

[« Exodus 17 | Exodus 19 »](#)

JETHRO'S VISIT

18 Moses's father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian, heard about everything that God had done for Moses and for God's people Israel when the LORD brought Israel out of Egypt.

² Now Jethro, Moses's father-in-law, had taken in Zipporah, Moses's wife, after he had sent her back, ³ along with her two sons, one of whom was named Gershom ^H (because Moses had said, “I have been a resident alien in a foreign land”) ⁴ and the other Eliezer (because he had said, “The God of my father was my helper and rescued me from Pharaoh's sword”). ^I

⁵ Moses's father-in-law Jethro, along with Moses's wife and sons, came to him in the wilderness where he was camped at the mountain of God. ⁶ He sent word to Moses, “I, your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to you with your wife and her two sons.”

⁷ So Moses went out to meet his father-in-law, bowed down, and then kissed him. They asked each other how they had been ^J and went into the tent. ⁸ Moses recounted to his father-in-law all that the LORD had done to Pharaoh and the Egyptians for Israel's sake, all the hardships that confronted them on the way, and how the LORD rescued them.

⁹ Jethro rejoiced over all the good things the LORD had done for Israel when he rescued them from the power of the Egyptians. ¹⁰ “Blessed be the LORD,” Jethro exclaimed, “who rescued you from the power of Egypt and from the power of Pharaoh. He has rescued the people from under

the power of Egypt! ¹¹ Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods, because he did wonders when the Egyptians acted arrogantly against Israel.” ^A

¹² Then Jethro, Moses’s father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and sacrifices to God, and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat a meal with Moses’s father-in-law in God’s presence.

¹³ The next day Moses sat down to judge the people, and they stood around Moses from morning until evening. ¹⁴ When Moses’s father-in-law saw everything he was doing for them he asked, “What is this thing you’re doing for the people? Why are you alone sitting as judge, while all the people stand around you from morning until evening? ”

¹⁵ Moses replied to his father-in-law, “Because the people come to me to inquire of God. ¹⁶ Whenever they have a dispute, it comes to me, and I make a decision between one man and another. I teach them God’s statutes and laws.”

¹⁷ “What you’re doing is not good,” Moses’s father-in-law said to him. ¹⁸ “You will certainly wear out both yourself and these people who are with you, because the task is too heavy for you. You can’t do it alone. ¹⁹ Now listen to me; I will give you some advice, and God be with you. You be the one to represent the people before God and bring their cases to him. ²⁰ Instruct them about the statutes and laws, and teach them the way to live and what they must do. ²¹ But you should select from all the people able men, God-fearing, trustworthy, and hating dishonest profit. Place them over the people as commanders of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. ²² They should judge the people at all times. Then they can bring you every major case but judge every minor case themselves. In this way you will lighten your load, ^B and they will bear it with you. ²³ If you do this, and God so directs you, you will be able to endure, and also all these people will be able to go home satisfied.” ^C

²⁴ Moses listened to his father-in-law and did everything he said. ²⁵ So Moses chose able men from all Israel and made them leaders over the people as commanders of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. ²⁶ They judged the people at all times; they would bring the hard cases to Moses, but they would judge every minor case themselves.

²⁷ Moses let his father-in-law go, and he journeyed to his own land.

[«Exodus 17 | Exodus 19»](#)

^H [18:3](#) In Hb the name *Gershom* sounds like the phrase “a stranger there.”

^I [18:4](#) = My God Is Help

^I [18:7](#) Lit *other about well-being*

^A [18:11](#) Hb obscure

^B [18:22](#) Lit *lighten from on you*

^C [18:23](#) Lit *go to their place in peace*

ISRAEL AT SINAI

19In the third month from the very day the Israelites left the land of Egypt, they came to the Sinai Wilderness. ² They traveled from Rephidim, came to the Sinai Wilderness, and camped in the wilderness. Israel camped there in front of the mountain.

³ Moses went up the mountain to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain: “This is what you must say to the house of Jacob and explain to the Israelites: ⁴ ‘You have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. ⁵ Now if you will carefully listen to me and keep my covenant, you will be my own possession out of all the peoples, although the whole earth is mine, ⁶ and you will be my kingdom of priests and my holy nation.’ These are the words that you are to say to the Israelites.”

⁷ After Moses came back, he summoned the elders of the people and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him. ⁸ Then all the people responded together, “We will do all that the LORD has spoken.” So Moses brought the people’s words back to the LORD.

⁹ The LORD said to Moses, “I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, so that the people will hear when I speak with you and will always believe you.” Moses reported the people’s words to the LORD, ¹⁰ and the LORD told Moses, “Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow. They must wash their clothes ¹¹ and be prepared by the third day, for on the third day the LORD will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. ¹² Put boundaries for the people all around the mountain and say: Be careful that you don’t go up on the mountain or touch its base. Anyone who touches the mountain must be put to death. ¹³ No hand may touch him; ¹⁴ instead he will be stoned or shot with arrows and not live, whether animal or human. When the ram’s horn sounds a long blast, they may go up the mountain.”

¹⁴ Then Moses came down from the mountain to the people and consecrated them, and they washed their clothes. ¹⁵ He said to the people, “Be prepared by the third day. Do not have sexual relations with women.”

¹⁶ On the third day, when morning came, there was thunder and lightning, a thick cloud on the mountain, and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people in the camp shuddered. ¹⁷ Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. ¹⁸ Mount Sinai was completely enveloped in smoke because the LORD came down on it in fire. Its smoke went up like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain shook violently. ¹⁹ As the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him in the thunder.

²⁰ The LORD came down on Mount Sinai at the top of the mountain. Then the LORD summoned Moses to the top of the mountain, and he went up. ²¹ The LORD directed Moses, “Go down and warn the people not to break through to see the LORD; otherwise many of them will die. ²² Even the priests who come near the LORD must consecrate themselves, or the LORD will break out in anger against them.”

²³ Moses responded to the LORD, “The people cannot come up Mount Sinai, since you warned us: Put a boundary around the mountain and consecrate it.” ²⁴ And the LORD replied to him, “Go down and come back with Aaron. But the priests and the people must not break through to come up to the LORD, or he will break out in anger against them.” ²⁵ So Moses went down to the people and told them.

[«Exodus 18 | Exodus 20»](#)

19:2 Although scholars do not agree on the location of Mount Sinai, this is no reason to conclude that the events said to have taken place there never occurred. While the Bible records the names of many places where the Israelites stayed in the desert following their exodus from Egypt, those places are notoriously hard to identify. They camped only in tents or temporary shelters during their years in the wilderness, and there is no record that they built roads, permanent structures, or prepared fields for agricultural purposes. The mention of an oasis with twelve springs ([15:27](#)), while helpful, does not provide definitive information about which route the Israelites took to reach Mount Sinai. Thus scholars have suggested various sites in the northern, central, and southern portions of the Sinai Desert as well as at least one site in western Saudi Arabia.

19:11,18 Was the law given at Mount Sinai or Mount Horeb ([Dt 4:10-13](#))? Horeb and Sinai are two names for the same location. Early in the book of Exodus the Lord appeared to Moses at Horeb and promised him that the Israelites would worship God on that mountain ([3:1-12](#)). That promise was fulfilled in [chap. 19](#) when Israel came to Mount Sinai. Perhaps Horeb and Sinai were names given to the same site by different people groups. Numerous other locations mentioned in the Bible were known by more than one name (see [Gn 28:19](#); [31:47](#); [Jos 15:9-10,13,25,49,54,60](#)).

19:22 Since God had not yet established a priesthood for Israel (see [28:1](#)), the priests mentioned here were probably those who would later become the Levitical priests. The priestly role of offering sacrifice was not limited to men specifically set apart as priests. Cain and Abel, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob all acted as priests during their days. Israelites living after the time of Jacob may also have acted as priests on behalf of their families. Moses had previously told Pharaoh the Israelites were commanded to offer sacrifices ([5:3](#); [8:27](#); [10:25](#)), indicating that he knew some of his countrymen were authorized to perform priestly rituals at that time. Such action would be permissible until the family line of Levi, especially the line of Aaron, was officially designated for priestly service ([28:1](#); [Nm 3:6](#)).

^A **19:13** Or *it*

[«Exodus 19 | Exodus 21»](#)

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

20Then God spoke all these words:

² I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the place of slavery.

³Do not have other gods besides me.

⁴Do not make an idol for yourself, whether in the shape of anything in the heavens above or on the earth below or in the waters under the earth. ⁵ Do not bow in worship to them, and do not serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the fathers' iniquity, to the third and fourth generations of those who hate me, ⁶ but showing faithful love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commands.

¹²Honor your father and your mother so that you may have a long life in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

¹³Do not murder.

¹⁴Do not commit adultery.

¹⁵Do not steal.

¹⁶Do not give false testimony against your neighbor.

¹⁷Do not covet your neighbor's house. Do not covet your neighbor's wife, his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

THE PEOPLE'S REACTION

¹⁸ All the people witnessed [A](#) the thunder and lightning, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain surrounded by smoke. When the people saw it [B](#) they trembled and stood at a distance.

¹⁹ "You speak to us, and we will listen," they said to Moses, "but don't let God speak to us, or we will die."

²⁰ Moses responded to the people, "Don't be afraid, for God has come to test you, so that you will fear him and will not [C](#) sin." ²¹ And the people remained standing at a distance as Moses approached the total darkness where God was.

MOSES RECEIVES ADDITIONAL LAWS

²² Then the LORD told Moses, "This is what you are to say to the Israelites: You have seen that I have spoken to you from heaven. ²³ Do not make gods of silver to rival me; do not make gods of gold for yourselves.

²⁴ "Make an earthen altar for me, and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, your flocks and herds. I will come to you and bless you in every place where I cause my name to be remembered. ²⁵ If you make a stone altar for me, do not build it out of cut stones. If you use your chisel on it, you will defile it. ²⁶ Do not go up to my altar on steps, so that your nakedness is not exposed on it.

[« Exodus 19 | Exodus 21 »](#)

[20:1-17](#) God and Moses perceived obedience to the laws, not as a way of or precondition to salvation but as the grateful response of those who had already been saved. God did not reveal

the law to the Israelites in Egypt and then tell them that as soon as they had measured up to this standard, he would rescue them. On the contrary, by grace alone, through faith they crossed the Red Sea to freedom. All that was required was belief in God's promise that he would hold up the walls of water on either side and see them safely through to the other shore.

The Decalogue begins not with the first commandment but with a preamble: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the place of slavery" ([v. 2](#); [Dt 5:6](#)). Obedience to the Decalogue or any other law has never been intended as the way of salvation but as the appropriate response to salvation already received.

[20:4](#) This command ([Dt 4:23](#); [27:15](#)) prohibited Israel from shaping images of anything that might become an object of worship. Israel was to make no physical representations of the Lord or of any other being the nations around them might worship. Israel was to destroy any such objects made by others ([Ex 23:24](#); [34:13](#); [Dt 7:5](#); [12:3](#)). The prohibition of images for worship did not ban artistic expression nor prevent the production of elegant adornments used in the worship of the Lord such as the cherubim ([Ex 25:18-20](#)). The Lord created people with artistic skills which he intended them to use in representing the beauty of the world he created (e.g., Bezalel, [31:1-11](#); [36:1-2](#)). When he gave instructions to Moses for building the tabernacle, he commanded the Israelites to make beautiful objects of gold and silver and ornate clothing using the finest materials available. But God expects people to worship the Creator and not his creation (see [Rm 1:18-26](#)).

[20:5](#) Although this verse seems to say that God punishes children for the sins of their parents, that is not the case. God does not condemn children because of their parents' misbehavior (see [Dt 24:16](#); [Ezk 18:20](#)). However, children suffer the consequences of their parents' sinful choices. A parent's adultery, substance abuse, manipulation, or other dysfunctional behavior establishes a pattern that children model as they mature. The result can be a repetition of their parents' emotional brokenness leading to conflict, divorce, poverty, or other conditions that make their children's, and even their grandchildren's, lives difficult.

In this verse God suggests that one reason we should obey him is for the sake of our children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. Like ripples spreading across a pool of calm water, our actions have consequences for generations to come. We can create waves of difficulty or blessing ([v. 6](#)) according to the choices we make.

[20:8-11](#) How are Christians obligated to "remember the Sabbath day," or seventh day of the week? May a Christian work on Saturdays? The fourth commandment is unique among the Ten Commandments in containing both ceremonial and moral elements. It establishes a key element in a religious calendar, designating one day in seven as holy. But it is also moral, directing people to be imitators of God in his rest from the work of creation, and to use his gift of time for sacred purposes. Because it can be taken in both a ceremonial and moral sense, this commandment became a center of controversy in Jesus's ministry and continued to be so in the history of the church.

[20:12](#) The Bible consistently teaches that we should honor and obey our parents ([Lv 19:3](#); [Dt 5:16](#); [Pr 23:22](#); [Mt 15:4](#); [19:19](#); [Mk 7:10](#); [10:19](#); [Lk 18:20](#); [Eph 6:1-2](#); [Col 3:20](#)), following the example of Jesus himself ([Lk 2:51](#)). At the same time, we are taught to make God our highest authority, esteeming him above any earthly authority, including parents ([Mt 10:37](#)). On those

rare occasions when one must choose to reject parental authority in order to obey God, family conflicts will be inevitable (see [Lk 12:51-53](#)). In spite of the tension and potential consequences, it is necessary to follow God's way ([Ac 5:29](#)). Although Jesus speaks of hating our parents ([Lk 14:26](#)), the expression does not mean what we mean by "hate"; it means simply to avoid making them the highest authority in our lives.

[20:13](#) Should we never kill people or simply not commit murder? According to the Bible, death was not part of God's original plan for humanity but became part of the human experience as a result of humanity's sin ([Gn 2:17](#); [3:19](#); [Rm 5:12](#); [Heb 9:27](#)). All human beings are made in God's image ([Gn 1:26-27](#)), and therefore all human life is sacred and to be treated with special respect. At the same time, the law of Moses sanctions the taking of human life as a penalty for certain serious crimes committed against persons or God ([Gn 9:6](#); [Ex 21:12-17](#); [31:14-15](#); [35:2](#); [Lv 20:2,9-16,27](#); [24:16-17,21](#); [27:29](#); [Nm 35:33](#); [Dt 13:5-9](#); [21:21](#); [22:21](#)). The NT implicitly affirms the right of governmental authorities to impose the death penalty ([Rm 13:4](#)). The Bible's prescription of the death penalty in certain circumstances is aimed at preventing greater evils from occurring and thus preserves the principle of the sacredness of human life. Murder, the unauthorized taking of human life, is clearly what this command prohibits.

[20:14](#) If adultery is always wrong, why did God command a prophet to marry a promiscuous wife ([Hs 1:2](#))? The Prophet Hosea was not given permission to commit adultery; he was told to marry a woman who would be unfaithful after their marriage. The prophet's experience with his unfaithful wife became an object lesson in Israel's spiritual unfaithfulness toward God. Adultery, or sexual intercourse with another person's spouse, is always condemned in the Bible ([Gn 20:3](#); [Lv 18:20](#); [Dt 5:18](#); [Pr 6:32](#); [Mt 5:27-32](#); [19:18](#); [Jn 8:3-11](#); [Gl 5:19](#); [2Pt 2:14](#)). It was considered a crime so serious that it warranted the death penalty ([Lv 20:10](#); [Dt 22:22](#)).

[20:16](#) Strictly speaking, this commandment applies to perjury during a legal proceeding and not to speech in general. Nevertheless God, who is himself the Truth and speaks only the truth ([Ps 119:160](#); [Jn 1:14](#); [17:17](#)) expects people to tell the truth (see note on [Ex 1:19](#)). Yet the Bible records an instance where the Lord caused, or permitted, false prophets to lie ([1Kg 22:23](#)). That passage reflects the OT writers' tendency to attribute all things to God, recognizing that events could occur only if the Lord permitted them. King Ahab had hired false prophets to spread lies supporting his personal ambitions, and these prophets conveniently proclaimed messages in the Lord's name that agreed with the king's desires. The Lord permitted them to do what they were determined to do, to provide Ahab with the lie he wanted to hear—and which led to his death ([1Kg 22:34-37](#)). In this way God allowed a disobedient man to bring judgment upon himself.

[20:17](#) If God commanded people not to covet other peoples' property, why did he have the Israelites take the land of Canaan away from its inhabitants? Israel's conquest of Canaan was not to be based on the people's desire to take land owned by other people. The land was given by God as a gift to Abraham's descendants through Isaac, but it could only become theirs when the time for judgment against its inhabitants had come ([Gn 15:16](#)). Israel's invasion of Canaan and the destruction of its residents were not acts of covetousness but acts of divine judgment against the sinful culture of the inhabitants. Israel's possession of the land would also be based on their obedience to the Lord, and they would lose the land if they strayed too far from God's will for them ([Dt 28:15-68](#)) as the events of history reveal ([2Kg 17:6-23](#)).

[20:24](#) In this verse the Lord asks Israel to make a sacrificial altar of earth, but the instructions of [27:1,6-8](#) refer to bronze and wood. These passages need not be seen as contradictory. The transportable altar made of bronze and wood was box-shaped and hollow. Possibly a layer of earth was placed in the bottom before sacrifices were offered on it. The surface on which the sacrifice was laid would have been earthen, not bronze or wood. The earth could have been easily removed to lighten the altar for transporting to another location.

^A [20:18](#) Lit *saw*

^B [20:18](#) Sam, LXX, Syr, Tg, Vg read *smoke. The people (or they) were afraid,*

^C [20:20](#) Lit *that the fear of him may be in you, and you do not*

[« Exodus 20 | Exodus 22 »](#)

21 “These are the ordinances that you are to set before them:

LAWS ABOUT SLAVES

² “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 ^D without paying anything. ³ If he arrives alone, he is to leave alone; if he arrives with ^E 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.

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 ^F and then bring him to the door or doorpost. His master will pierce his ear with an awl, and he will serve his master for life.

⁷ “When a man sells his daughter as a concubine, ^G she is not to leave as the male slaves do. ⁸ If she 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. ⁹ Or if he chooses her for his son, he must deal with her according to the customary treatment of daughters. ¹⁰ If he takes an additional wife, he must not reduce the food, clothing, or marital rights of the first wife. ¹¹ And if he does not do these three things for her, she may leave free of charge, without any payment. ^H

LAWS ABOUT PERSONAL INJURY

¹² “Whoever strikes a person so that he dies must be put to death. ¹³ But if he did not intend any harm, ^A and yet God allowed it to happen, I will appoint a place for you where he may flee. ¹⁴ If a person schemes and willfully ^B acts against his neighbor to murder him, you must take him from my altar to be put to death.

¹⁵ “Whoever strikes his father or his mother must be put to death.

¹⁶ “Whoever kidnaps a person must be put to death, whether he sells him or the person is found in his possession.

¹⁷ “Whoever curses his father or his mother must be put to death.

¹⁸ “When men quarrel and one strikes the other with a stone or his fist, and the injured man does not die but is confined to bed, ¹⁹ if he can later get up and walk around outside leaning on his staff, then the one who struck him will be exempt from punishment. Nevertheless, he must pay for his lost work time ^C and provide for his complete recovery.

²⁰ “When a man strikes his male or female slave with a rod, and the slave dies under his abuse, ^D the owner must be punished. ^E ²¹ However, if the slave can stand up after a day or two, the owner should not be punished ^F because he is his owner’s property. ^G

²² “When men get in a fight and hit a pregnant woman so that her children are born prematurely but there is no injury, the one who hit her must be fined as the woman’s husband demands from him, and he must pay according to judicial assessment. ²³ If there is an injury, then you must give life for life, ²⁴ eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, ²⁵ burn for burn, bruise for bruise, wound for wound.

²⁶ “When a man strikes the eye of his male or female slave and destroys it, he must let the slave go free in compensation for his eye. ²⁷ If he knocks out the tooth of his male or female slave, he must let the slave go free in compensation for his tooth.

²⁸ “When an ox ^H gores a man or a woman to death, the ox must be stoned, and its meat may not be eaten, but the ox’s owner is innocent. ²⁹ However, if the ox was in the habit of goring, and its owner has been warned yet does not restrain it, and it kills a man or a woman, the ox must be stoned, and its owner must also be put to death. ³⁰ If instead a ransom is demanded of him, he can pay a redemption price for his life in the full amount demanded from him. ³¹ If it gores a son or a daughter, he is to be dealt with according to this same law. ³² If the ox gores a male or female slave, he must give thirty shekels of silver ^A to the slave’s master, and the ox must be stoned.

³³ “When a man uncovers a pit or digs a pit, and does not cover it, and an ox or a donkey falls into it, ³⁴ the owner of the pit must give compensation; he must pay to its owner, but the dead animal will become his.

³⁵ “When a man’s ox injures his neighbor’s ox and it dies, they must sell the live ox and divide its proceeds; they must also divide the dead animal. ³⁶ If, however, it is known that the ox was in the habit of goring, yet its owner has not restrained it, he must compensate fully, ox for ox; the dead animal will become his.

[« Exodus 20 | Exodus 22 »](#)

[21:2,7](#) Some have suggested that these verses contradict the command in [Lv 25:42](#), which forbids selling Israelites as slaves. However, the rules set forth in [Lv 25](#) do not prohibit Israelites from becoming slaves. Instead, they regulate situations in which Israelites had to sell themselves to other Israelites in order to pay debts. Israelites who became slaves had to be given rights and privileges normally associated only with hired workers.

21:10 Polygamy, like many other sins including divorce, is an expression of the hardness of people's hearts and is contrary to God's will (**Mt 19:8**). God's ideal from the beginning was for one man to marry one woman and for the couple to remain in an exclusive sexual relationship for as long as both partners were alive. Biblical evidence for this is found in the fact that God created woman as a uniquely suitable helper for one man—Adam (**Gn 2:18-24**). When the pair disobeyed God, they could no longer implement many aspects of God's plan for human life. Because of sin, conflict, oppression and death became part of the human landscape. People's sinful nature often leads to sexual misconduct. As in the case of Lamech, the first recorded polygamist (**Gn 4:19**), men will be inclined to take multiple sexual partners for themselves.

The law presented here and in other laws in the Torah is not meant to condone polygamy. It is not an expression of God's ideal but a concession to humanity's hard-heartedness. The law recognizes the male's sexual inclinations but seeks to limit the injury to women that could result; all wives must be given adequate food, clothing, and intimacy. Far from approving of polygamy, the law of Moses discourages it by placing high demands on anyone who chooses this option, and it preserves the essential rights of polygamy's potential victims.

21:20-21,26 The Bible does not condone slavery any more than it condones polygamy or divorce. Instead, it establishes humane limits for an existing, evil system. Slavery had long been a feature of human society. The Israelites were always to remember that they themselves had been the victims of this practice for an extended time (**Gn 37:28,36; Ex 1:8-14**) as slaves in Egypt (**Dt 5:15; 15:15; 16:12; 24:18,22**). Accordingly, Israelite slave owners were to treat their slaves in a fair and charitable manner. They were to be given a day of rest every week (**Ex 20:10**) and, as beings created in God's image, were expected to attend religious festivals (**Dt 12:12,18; 16:11**). Israelites who were slaves were to be treated with special benevolence and to be released after six years (**Ex 21:2; Dt 15:12**) or in the Year of the Jubilee (**Lv 25:40-41**), whichever came first. Female slaves who became wives to their owners or owner's sons were to be treated with all the respect and rights of a regular wife (**Ex 21:8-11**). When an Israelite's term of slavery had ended, he was to be given a gift (**Dt 15:13-14**). If slaves were physically abused by their owners, they were to be granted immediate freedom (**Ex 21:26-27**) and, unlike animals, the killing of a slave constituted a crime (**v. 20**).

21:23-25 Does the Bible teach that people should retaliate or that they should "turn the other cheek" (see **Mt 5:38-39; Lk 6:27-29**)? In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus contrasted a popular interpretation of the law of Moses with his own teachings. In doing this he was not saying that OT law was wrong, only that his adversaries' way of applying it to situations was wrong; they had missed its true intent by emphasizing the letter of the law.

The "eye for eye, tooth for tooth" passage did not require people to pay someone back for a wrong done to them. Its purpose was to establish limits for retaliation. The most one could do in response to knocking out a tooth was to knock out the other person's tooth; a person could not be killed for injuring someone's eye. As Jesus pointed out, a person who was wronged by another could choose not to retaliate for what had been done to him. Often such a response would be the best way to deal with the problem. In every case, it should be the first option considered.

21:29-30 This passage indicates that the person responsible for the death of another might be able to ransom his life; **Nm 35:31**, on the other hand, suggests that the death penalty could not be commuted. Biblical commentators have long noted that these two passages complement, rather

than contradict, each other. The passage teaches that a person whose negligence caused someone else's death would have to be punished, but their life might be spared. The passage in Numbers directs that anyone who has willfully taken someone else's life must be executed.

[D 21:2](#) Lit *to go forth*

[E 21:3](#) Lit *he is the husband of*

[E 21:6](#) Or *to God* ; that is, to his sanctuary or court

[G 21:7](#) Or *servant*

[H 21:11](#) She doesn't have to pay any redemption price.

[A 21:13](#) Lit *he was not lying in wait*

[B 21:14](#) Or *maliciously*

[C 21:19](#) Lit *his inactivity*

[D 21:20](#) Lit *hand*

[E 21:20](#) Or *must suffer vengeance*

[E 21:21](#) Or *not suffer vengeance*

[G 21:21](#) Lit *silver*

[H 21:28](#) Or *a bull, or a steer*

[A 21:32](#) About one pound of silver

[« Exodus 21 | Exodus 23 »](#)

LAWS ABOUT THEFT

22“When a man steals an ox or a sheep and butchers it or sells it, he must repay five cattle for the ox or four sheep for the sheep. ² If a thief is caught in the act of breaking in, and he is beaten to death, no one is guilty of bloodshed. ³ But if this happens after sunrise, the householder is guilty of bloodshed. A thief must make full restitution. If he is unable, he is to be sold because of his theft. ⁴ If what was stolen — whether ox, donkey, or sheep — is actually found alive in his possession, he must repay double.

LAWS ABOUT CROP PROTECTION

⁵ “When a man lets a field or vineyard be grazed in, and then allows his animals to go and graze in someone else's field, he must repay [B](#) with the best of his own field or vineyard.

⁶ “When a fire gets out of control, spreads to thornbushes, and consumes stacks of cut grain, standing grain, or a field, the one who started the fire must make full restitution for what was burned.

LAWS ABOUT PERSONAL PROPERTY

⁷ “When a man gives his neighbor valuables ^C or goods to keep, but they are stolen from that person’s house, the thief, if caught, must repay double. ⁸ If the thief is not caught, the owner of the house must present himself to the judges ^D to determine ^E whether or not he has taken his neighbor’s property. ⁹ In any case of wrongdoing involving an ox, a donkey, a sheep, a garment, or anything else lost, and someone claims, ‘That’s mine,’ ^F the case between the two parties is to come before the judges. ^G The one the judges condemn ^H must repay double to his neighbor.

¹⁰ “When a man gives his neighbor a donkey, an ox, a sheep, or any other animal to care for, but it dies, is injured, or is stolen, while no one is watching, ¹¹ there must be an oath before the LORD between the two of them to determine whether or not he has taken his neighbor’s property. Its owner must accept the oath, and the other man does not have to make restitution. ¹² But if, in fact, the animal was stolen from his custody, he must make restitution to its owner. ¹³ If it was actually torn apart by a wild animal, he is to bring it as evidence; he does not have to make restitution for the torn carcass.

¹⁴ “When a man borrows an animal from his neighbor, and it is injured or dies while its owner is not there with it, the man must make full restitution. ¹⁵ If its owner is there with it, the man does not have to make restitution. If it was rented, the loss is covered by ^I its rental price.

LAWS ABOUT SEDUCTION

¹⁶ “If a man seduces a virgin who is not engaged, and he sleeps with her, he must certainly pay the bridal price for her to be his wife. ¹⁷ If her father absolutely refuses to give her to him, he must pay an amount in silver equal to the bridal price for virgins.

CAPITAL OFFENSES

¹⁸ “Do not allow a sorceress to live.

¹⁹ “Whoever has sexual intercourse with an animal must be put to death.

²⁰ “Whoever sacrifices to any gods, except the LORD alone, is to be set apart for destruction.

LAWS PROTECTING THE VULNERABLE

²¹ “You must not exploit a resident alien or oppress him, since you were resident aliens in the land of Egypt.

²² “You must not mistreat any widow or fatherless child. ²³ If you do mistreat them, they will no doubt cry to me, and I will certainly hear their cry. ²⁴ My anger will burn, and I will kill you with the sword; then your wives will be widows and your children fatherless.

²⁵ “If you lend silver to my people, to the poor person among you, you must not be like a creditor to him; you must not charge him interest.

²⁶ “If you ever take your neighbor’s cloak as collateral, return it to him before sunset. ²⁷ For it is his only covering; it is the clothing for his body. ^A What will he sleep in? And if he cries out to me, I will listen because I am gracious.

RESPECT FOR GOD

²⁸ “You must not blaspheme God ^B or curse a leader among your people.

²⁹ “You must not hold back offerings from your harvest or your vats. Give me the firstborn of your sons. ³⁰ Do the same with your cattle and your flock. Let them stay with their mothers for seven days, but on the eighth day you are to give them to me.

³¹ “Be my holy people. You must not eat the meat of a mauled animal found in the field; throw it to the dogs.

[« Exodus 21 | Exodus 23 »](#)

22:25 Is it permissible to charge interest on loans? Charging interest was the normal practice in ancient western Asia. In Babylon people were permitted to charge twenty to fifty percent interest on loans of silver bullion or food. The OT also permitted Israelites to charge interest on loans made to non-Israelites (**Dt 23:20**), though the rate for such loans was not specified. But when it came to lending to fellow Israelites, the Lord’s people were to follow a different standard: interest was not to be charged on such loans. It seems that God was teaching his people not to profit from the hardship of their fellow Israelites.

^B **22:5** LXX adds *from his field according to its produce. But if someone lets his animals graze an entire field, he must repay* ; DSS, Sam also support this reading.

^C **22:7** Lit *silver*

^D **22:8** Or *to God*

^E **22:8** LXX, Tg, Vg read *swear*

^F **22:9** Lit *That is it*

^G **22:9** Or *before God*

^H **22:9** Or *one whom God condemns*

^I **22:15** Lit *rented, it comes with*

^A **22:27** Lit *skin*

[B 22:28](#) Or *judges*

[«Exodus 22 | Exodus 24»](#)

LAWS ABOUT HONESTY AND JUSTICE

23 “You must not spread a false report. Do not join [C](#) the wicked to be a malicious witness.

² “You must not follow a crowd in wrongdoing. Do not testify in a lawsuit and go along with a crowd to pervert justice. ³ Do not show favoritism to a poor person in his lawsuit.

⁴ “If you come across your enemy’s stray ox or donkey, you must return it to him.

⁵ “If you see the donkey of someone who hates you lying helpless under its load, and you want to refrain from helping it, you must help with it. [D](#)

⁶ “You must not deny justice to a poor person among you in his lawsuit. ⁷ Stay far away from a false accusation. Do not kill the innocent and the just, because I will not justify the guilty. ⁸ You must not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the clear-sighted and corrupts the words [E](#) of the righteous. ⁹ You must not oppress a resident alien; you yourselves know how it feels to be a resident alien because you were resident aliens in the land of Egypt.

SABBATHS AND FESTIVALS

¹⁰ “Sow your land for six years and gather its produce. ¹¹ But during the seventh year you are to let it rest and leave it uncultivated, so that the poor among your people may eat from it and the wild animals may consume what they leave. Do the same with your vineyard and your olive grove.

¹² “Do your work for six days but rest on the seventh day so that your ox and your donkey may rest, and the son of your female slave as well as the resident alien may be refreshed.

¹³ “Pay strict attention to everything I have said to you. You must not invoke the names of other gods; they must not be heard on your lips. [F](#)

¹⁴ “Celebrate a festival in my honor three times a year. ¹⁵ Observe the Festival of Unleavened Bread. As I commanded you, you are to eat unleavened bread for seven days at the appointed time in the month of Abib, [G](#) because you came out of Egypt in that month. No one is to appear before me empty-handed. ¹⁶ Also observe the Festival of Harvest [A](#) with the firstfruits of your produce from what you sow in the field, and observe the Festival of Ingathering [B](#) at the end of the year, when you gather your produce [C](#) from the field. ¹⁷ Three times a year all your males are to appear before the Lord GOD.

¹⁸ “You must not offer the blood of my sacrifices with anything leavened. The fat of my festival offering must not remain until morning.

¹⁹ “Bring the best of the firstfruits of your land to the house of the LORD your God.

“You must not boil a young goat in its mother’s milk.

PROMISES AND WARNINGS

²⁰ “I am going to send an angel before you to protect you on the way and bring you to the place I have prepared. ²¹ Be attentive to him and listen to him. Do not defy him, because he will not forgive your acts of rebellion, for my name is in him. ²² But if you will carefully obey him and do everything I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and a foe to your foes. ²³ For my angel will go before you and bring you to the land of the Amorites, Hethites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites, and Jebusites, and I will wipe them out. ²⁴ Do not bow in worship to their gods, and do not serve them. Do not imitate their practices. Instead, demolish them ^D and smash their sacred pillars to pieces. ²⁵ Serve the LORD your God, and he ^E will bless your bread and your water. I will remove illnesses from you. ²⁶ No woman will miscarry or be childless in your land. I will give you the full number of your days.

²⁷ “I will cause the people ahead of you to feel terror ^F and will throw into confusion all the nations you come to. I will make all your enemies turn their backs to you in retreat. ^G ²⁸ I will send hornets ^H in front of you, and they will drive the Hivites, Canaanites, and Hethites away from you. ²⁹ I will not drive them out ahead of you in a single year; otherwise, the land would become desolate, and wild animals would multiply against you. ³⁰ I will drive them out little by little ahead of you until you have become numerous ^I and take possession of the land. ³¹ I will set your borders from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean Sea, ^J and from the wilderness to the Euphrates River. ^K For I will place the inhabitants of the land under your control, and you will drive them out ahead of you. ³² You must not make a covenant with them or their gods. ³³ They must not remain in your land, or else they will make you sin against me. If you serve their gods, it will be a snare for you.”

[«Exodus 22 | Exodus 24»](#)

[23:7](#) If the Israelites were not to kill the innocent, why were they ordered to kill Canaanite children ([Dt 7:1-2](#); [20:16-17](#))? This verse is part of a larger section that provides guidance to judges when trying cases in Israel: in courts of law the innocent were not to be punished. But the elimination of entire cultural groups as punishment for long-term institutionalized sin was not considered a legal matter. It was an issue of divine judgment following centuries of unacceptable conduct. God ordered the Israelites to eliminate cultures that had institutionalized despicable sin. Canaanite cultures were steeped in a religion that was polytheistic, idolatrous, and highly immoral. As part of their religious corruption, those cultures permitted human sacrifice and practiced cultic prostitution (worship of their “gods” involved intercourse with women attached to their temples). All of this cultural perversity was offensive to God and was to be brought to a complete end when the iniquity of the inhabitants of Canaan was complete ([Gn 15:16](#)).

[23:10-11](#) The produce of the Israelites’ land was to be left for the poor and the animals, but it could also be eaten by the landowner’s family during the seventh year ([Lv 25:6](#)). The landholder was to be considerate of the needs of the poor. They, too, must be given access to the food needed to sustain them. To assure that there would be enough food for all in the seventh year, the landowner and his family were to stockpile surplus grain from the previous year ([Lv 25:21-22](#)).

^C **[23:1](#)** Lit *join hands with*

^D [23:5](#) Or *load*, you must refrain from leaving it to him; you must set it free with him

^E [23:8](#) Or *and subverts the cause*

^F [23:13](#) Lit *mouth*

^G [23:15](#) March–April; called Nisan in the post-exilic period; [Neh 2:1](#); [Est 3:7](#)

^A [23:16](#) The *Festival of Harvest* is called Festival of Weeks elsewhere; [Ex 34:22](#). In the NT it is called Pentecost; [Ac 2:1](#).

^B [23:16](#) The *Festival of Ingathering* is called Festival of Shelters elsewhere; [Lv 23:34-36](#).

^C [23:16](#) Lit *labors*

^D [23:24](#) Probably the idols

^E [23:25](#) LXX, Vg read *I*

^F [23:27](#) Lit *will send terror of me ahead of you*

^G [23:27](#) Or *I will give your enemies to you by the neck*

^H [23:28](#) Or *send panic*

^I [23:30](#) Lit *fruitful*

^J [23:31](#) Lit *the Sea of the Philistines*

^K [23:31](#) Lit *the River*