



♪ Why “Delight in the law of the LORD”?

אשחר

Vav Resh Cheth Shin Mem

(MASHACHARU)

“Seek Him Early”

Proverbs 8:17

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▷ Why “Delight in the law of the LORD”?

How do you feel when you hear the words "statutes" or "laws"?

Without compulsion, how many people would seriously study the student handbook rules? When signing a telecom contract, how many people carefully read through all the fine print? Do we have similar feelings towards the laws in the Old Testament Pentateuch — finding them uninteresting to contemplate, boring, tedious, or perhaps outdated and useless? Since Christians aren't ancient Jews, does this mean the Old Testament laws have no reference value for us?

I once had these same doubts and showed little interest in the laws recorded in the Pentateuch. I couldn't understand why the Israelites so valued and appreciated these laws (Psalms 1 and 119). However, the longer I've been a disciple, the more interested I've become in these Old Testament laws. After all, Jesus said, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Matthew 5:17). The God of the Old Testament is the same God of the New Testament. When we set aside our preconceptions about the law and eagerly seek to understand the God behind it, we truly find it sweeter than honey (Psalm 19:10)!

The church has established "Resting Weeks" to encourage disciples to study Scripture, meditate, reflect, and pray more. Through this two-week devotional journal, by studying the Old Testament laws together, let us deepen our understanding of the God behind the law. Then when we sing "Rejoice! Rejoice! I love the Lord's law" and "I will meditate on Your law day and night," we can praise the Lord with both voice and heart in genuine harmony.

In Christ,
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P.S. This English Version is translated by AI.

▷ Do We Still Need to Follow Old Testament Commandments Today?

(Source: https://henryau.org/2016/05/21/ot_ordinance/)

Q: Do we still need to follow Old Testament laws today? For example: The Ten Commandments? Sacrifices? Food laws?

A: We need to understand that Old Testament laws can generally be divided into several categories:

1. Moral Law

Moral laws reflect God's holy and righteous character. What God considered sin in the Old Testament isn't considered sinless in the New Testament. Examples include: no murder, no adultery, no theft, honoring parents, loving neighbors, showing mercy to the poor, etc. These laws are reaffirmed by Jesus and the apostles in the New Testament¹, so they still apply to us today. However, it's worth noting that New Testament references to the Ten Commandments never mention the "keep the Sabbath" command (Sabbath being Friday evening to Saturday evening), and the New Testament repeatedly emphasizes that loving God and loving others summarizes all Old Testament laws².

Additionally, while certain sins carried death penalties in Old Testament Israel (such as adultery, incest, homosexual acts, and bestiality in Leviticus 18), in the New Testament era, because God's people are no longer part of a national government (old Israel) but belong to the church, punishment is left to local government laws³. Church discipline ranges from admonition to, at most, excommunication⁴.

2. Religious Laws

Some Old Testament laws concern worship purity and



impurity, such as what foods to eat, what clothes to wear, what things not to touch, and temporary worship restrictions for violations⁵. These laws demonstrate that humans cannot approach a holy God on their own. Jesus's arrival showed that people could approach a holy God through Him. He broke impurity rules by touching "unclean" lepers, healing women with bleeding issues, and raising "defiling" dead bodies. All "uncleanness" laws became unnecessary after Jesus. In fact, many Old Testament passages indicate that these laws pointed to values God prioritizes more, such as obedience, mercy, and repentance⁶.

The Old Testament also contains many religious laws about the Sabbath, festivals, and sacrifices, all pointing to Christ's work on earth and His atoning sacrifice on the cross. Since Christ has fulfilled these laws⁷, people in the New Testament era no longer need to follow them⁸, as Jesus Himself is the perfect, once-for-all sacrifice⁹. Following these Old Testament religious laws today would actually deny the effectiveness of Jesus's work for us.

3. Civil Laws

God rescued Israel from slavery in Egypt and established them as a nation, giving them laws to maintain order and protect life (such as establishing cities of refuge, requiring roof parapets, leaving harvest gleanings for the poor¹⁰). But this nation was destroyed by Assyria and Babylon in Old Testament times due to sin, so these regulations naturally no longer apply (which is why the Pharisees couldn't execute Jesus under their law). Moreover, New Testament believers no longer belong to one nation and government but to the church, so the responsibility for rewards and punishments falls to believers' respective nations³.

Nevertheless, we can still understand God's heart through these laws, understanding His value for human life and compassion for the poor. For example, while we're no longer an agricultural society and the law about "not harvesting to the edges" might

seem meaningless, understanding God's intent in Old Testament laws reminds today's business people not to forget the needs of the poor.

Conclusion: Simply put, only Old Testament moral laws still apply to us today, and most have been reaffirmed in the New Testament (such as no adultery¹¹, no murder, etc.). With Jesus's coming to fulfill the Old Testament and establish a new covenant with His blood, Old Testament religious regulations like purity laws, food restrictions, sacrifices, and festivals have been abolished¹², as we can now approach God through Jesus's blood. Additionally, Old Testament civil laws and their punishments no longer apply following ancient Israel's destruction, and New Testament believers are no longer limited to Israel but spread across all nations. However, studying Old Testament laws can still help us understand God's justice, love, and holiness.

1. Matthew 22:37-40; Romans 13:8-10; Galatians 5:14; James 2:8
2. Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:12-17
3. In the Corinthian church, a believer married his stepmother, and Paul severely rebuked the church for their tolerance and instructed them to expel that person from the church. See: 1 Corinthians 5:1; 2 Corinthians 2:7-11
4. For example: Leviticus Chapter 11
5. 1 Samuel 15:21-22; Psalms 50:12-15, 51:17; Hosea 6:6
6. Matthew 5:17-18; Luke 24:44
7. Colossians 2:16-17; Hebrews 10:19
8. 1 Corinthians 5:7; Hebrews 7:27, 10:14, 10:18
9. Numbers Chapter 35; Leviticus 19:9, 23:22; Deuteronomy 22:8
10. Matthew 5:27-30; 1 Corinthians 6:9-20; 1 Timothy 1:8-11
11. Mark 7:19; Romans 14:20; 1 Corinthians 8:8; Colossians 2:16-28

▷ Detective-Style Bible Reading Method (O.I.L.) - Old Testament Laws



How can we apply the detective-style reading method (O.I.L.) when studying Old Testament laws? This time, imagine that the subject of your investigation is the Lord Jehovah. What you need to understand is not "what" laws He established, but "why" He established these laws, and how do these laws reveal His character? Furthermore, how do these laws demonstrate how He views those who are in covenant with Him, and how He views others?



1. Observe 🔎

- Who is this ordinance directed at?
- Are there any reasons mentioned for observing this ordinance?
- Are there any mentioned punishments for not observing this ordinance?
- What situations (current or potential) does this ordinance reflect?
- How does this ordinance relate to its immediate context? How does it relate to the circumstances of that time?
- Are there similar ordinances mentioned elsewhere?

2. Investigate 🧠 ?

- Who is this law directed at?
- Who was this law established to protect? Why?

- What does this law reveal about what God values? What does God detest? What is God's character like?
- As far as you know, did the relevant people observe this law? What were their outcomes?
- If you lived in that time and everyone followed this commandment, what would society look like?
- Do you think this law represents God's ultimate ideal? Beyond these regulations or in the New Testament era, did Jesus express any higher ideals?

3. Learn/Live

- Although these laws were not written specifically for us in modern times, what can we learn about God from them?
- What human weaknesses do these laws reflect? Are they still applicable to modern people?
- Regarding the cultural background of these laws, which aspects are very different from modern situations? Which aspects are similar?
- Do I value the people whom God values? Do I value what God values? What reflections does this bring to me?
- What important principles have I learned that can be applied to today's situations?

▷ The Code of Hammurabi and Old Testament Laws

The laws in the Old Testament (or Hebrew Bible) and the Pentateuch (or Torah) are not the earliest legal codes in the world. In neighboring Mesopotamia, there were several ancient law codes, among which the Code of Hammurabi (circa 1754 BCE) is the most well-known and most often compared with the Old Testament. This is because, compared to the Code of Hammurabi, other codes are incomplete, and although the Code of Hammurabi isn't the earliest, it's closest to Moses' time, helping us understand the customs and culture of that period. For example: when Abram's wife Sarai couldn't conceive (Genesis 16:2-3), she suggested her husband marry her servant Hagar to bear children for her. This practice is also mentioned in Article 146 of the Code of Hammurabi:

"If a man takes a wife and she gives a maid servant to her husband and she bears children, if that maid servant claims equality with her mistress because she has borne children, her master shall not sell her for money, but he may keep her as a slave, reckoning her among the maid servants."

The Code of Hammurabi contains 282 laws, generally divided into four categories: economic law, family law, criminal law, and civil law. According to rabbinical counting, the Old Testament contains 613 commandments, of which 248 are positive ("You shall...") and 365 are negative ("You shall not..."). Comparing the two, many laws are similar, for example:

"If a man destroys the eye of another man, his eye shall be



destroyed." (Article 196 - ["Eye for eye"])

"If a man knocks out the tooth of a man of his own rank, his tooth shall be knocked out." (Article 200 - ["Tooth for tooth"])

"If anyone fails to meet a claim for debt, and sells himself, his wife, his son, and daughter for money or gives them away to forced labor, they shall work for three years in the house of the buyer or the master, and in the fourth year they shall be set free." (Article 117 - compared to Israel's six years of work and freedom in the seventh year)

The Israelites didn't emerge in a vacuum; their thoughts and culture shared many similarities with neighboring regions of the same era. While meditating on Old Testament laws, comparing them with similar provisions in the Code of Hammurabi helps us better understand the cultural practices of that time and reveals how God's laws were more just and more loving.



The Code of Hammurabi stele (stone pillar) is currently housed in the Louvre Museum in Paris,

▷ Table of Contents

Foreword / 2

Do We Still Need to Follow Old Testament Commandments Today? / 4

Detective-Style Bible Reading Method (O.I.L.) - Old Testament Laws / 7

The Code of Hammurabi and Old Testament Laws / 9

First Week (26/1 - 1/2)

Day 1	26/1 (Sun)	<u>Law: Is it Love or Duty? Is it Wisdom or Rules? / 12</u>
Day 2	27/1 (Mon)	<u>Law and Love: What Kind of God is He? / 15</u>
Day 3	28/1 (Tue)	<u>How Does God View Those in Need? (Part 1) / 19</u>
Day 4	29/1 (Wed)	<u>How Does God View Those in Need? (Part 2) / 23</u>
Day 5	30/1 (Thu)	<u>Are God's Laws Unchangeable? / 27</u>
Day 6	31/1 (Fri)	<u>Not My Original Intent / 32</u>
Day 7	1/2 (Sat)	<u>The Sacredness of Human Life / 37</u>

Second Week (2/2 - 8/2)

Day 8	2/2 (Sun)	<u>Gender Discrimination? / 41</u>
Day 9	3/2 (Mon)	<u>Laws Protecting Women / 46</u>
Day 10	4/2 (Tue)	<u>Does God Love People with Disabilities? / 52</u>
Day 11	5/2 (Wed)	<u>What is God's View on Slavery? / 56</u>
Day 12	6/2 (Thu)	<u>This is My Father's World / 63</u>
Day 13	7/2 (Fri)	<u>Against "Maximizing Utility" / 68</u>
Day 14	8/2 (Sat)	<u>Other Laws / 72</u>

Postscript: Love is the Fulfillment of the Law / 77



☞ Day 1 : Is it Love or Duty? Is it Wisdom or Rules?

● Scripture Reading: Exodus 20:1-6, Deuteronomy 4:5-9

Exodus 20:1-6 - The Beginning of the Ten Commandments

1 And God spoke all these words: 2 "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. 3 You shall have no other gods before me. 4 You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. 5 You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, 6 but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

● Questions for Reflection

- ▶ Did God give the law before or after saving Israel from Egypt? Did He expect them to follow the law before or after His saving grace? Why is this significant? Is obedience a condition for relationship or a response to relationship?
- ▶ What is the purpose of verse 2? What does it remind the Israelites of? What kind of relationship does God desire to have with Israel?
- ▶ Do we realize that we need to understand the Old Testament commandments and instructions within the entire narrative context of "Israel being saved and leaving the house of slavery"?
- ▶ Have we mistakenly equated Old Testament "law" with modern legislation or school rules? What law would mention relationship and love with the lawgiver?
- ▶ Which comes first - love or the promise of marriage? Except



for arranged marriages, people generally fall in love first, then make vows and promises. Is God's covenant with Israel similar?

- ▶ When we think about God's law, do we think of love or duty (rules)?
- ▶ Did Jesus die for our sins on the cross before or after we followed Him? Is this similar to the relationship between God and Israel in the Old Testament era?
- ▶ Why do some people believe that following the law is meant to earn salvation or God's love?
- ▶ When we choose not to sin, are we only considering rules and regulations, or are we thinking about our relationship with God and others?

Deuteronomy 4:5-9

5 See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the LORD my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. 6 Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." 7 What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him? 8 And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today? 9 Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them.

● Questions for Reflection

- ▶ Did you know that the original word for "law" תֹּרַה (Torah) actually means "guidance" or "instruction"?
- ▶ According to scripture, how does God want Israel to view His statutes and ordinances?

- ▶ What's the difference between viewing the law as meaningless restrictions versus seeing it as loving wisdom from a savior who rescued us?
- ▶ Some people would pay \$19 million to have lunch with Warren Buffett just to hear his advice and wisdom. Do we have the same eagerness to gain wisdom and understanding from God's law?
- ▶ Besides the wisdom and understanding gained from the law, what else did God want Israel to take pride in that made them different from other nations?
- ▶ Proverbs 9:10 says "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." Have we separated God's wisdom from our relationship with Him? Can we apply God's laws in isolation while ignoring our relationship with Him? Is it possible to just follow some principles without needing God?

● Prayer

- ▶ May we see the wisdom and goodness of God revealed in His law.
- ▶ May we appreciate and humbly learn to imitate God's character.

● Suggested Action:

- ▶ Read Psalm 1 and Psalm 119 to learn from the ancient Israelites' reverence and gratitude for the law.



♪ Day 2 : Law and Love: What Kind of God is He?

◎ Scripture Reading: Exodus 19:3 - 6; Deuteronomy 10:17 - 19; 1 Peter 2:9 - 10; James 2:1 - 10

Exodus 19:3 - 6 - The kingdom of priests, the holy people

3 Then Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain and said, "This is what you are to say to the descendants of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: 4 'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. 5 Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, 6 you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."

◎ Questions for Reflection

- ▶ What was God's ultimate purpose in choosing the people of Israel? What relationship did He want them to have with all nations of the world?
- ▶ Priests are the bridge between people and God. What was God's deeper meaning when He wanted Israel to become a "kingdom of priests"? What kind of influence did God expect this kingdom of priests to have?
- ▶ Against this background, why did God give the law to the Israelites? What kind of people did He want them to become?

Deuteronomy 10:17 - 19 - God's self-introduction

17 For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. 18 He defends the cause



of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. ¹⁹ And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt.

● Questions for Reflection

- ▶ According to Deuteronomy 10:17-19, how does the Lord God introduce Himself?
- ▶ What does it mean when He describes Himself as "God of gods," "Lord of lords," and "the great God"? (Reference: 1 Corinthians 8:4-6)
- ▶ "Mighty and awesome": Is this also your impression of God? Does following such a God give you confidence? The Israelites witnessed God's mighty miracles in Egypt firsthand, so why did they often lose faith in the wilderness? What reminder does this give us?
- ▶ "Shows no partiality" and "accepts no bribes": These are characteristics God specifically mentions about Himself beyond His power. What does this teach us?
- ▶ Among those who worship other gods, many offer various things hoping to earn the deities' blessings. Isn't this a form of bribery? What would the world be like if God were powerful but showed favoritism and could be bought? We might not try to bribe God with money or sacrifices, but do we unconsciously try to "exchange" our service or contributions for something from God?
- ▶ "Defends the cause of the fatherless and widow, and loves the foreigner": The "great God" cares for the most needy - is this our understanding of "power"? Who do powerful people typically value most? How does this differ from God's character? Who do we value, and do we reflect God's character?

- ▶ Does this emphasis on the poor and needy orphans and widows align with Jesus' actions and apostolic teachings in the New Testament? (Reference: Galatians 2:10)
- ▶ Which groups and social classes did Jesus serve most? Are our focus areas similar to Jesus'? Do we show enough concern for the poor and society's vulnerable? How can we change? How can we help those in need in our church and neighborhood?
- ▶ James 2:1-10 speaks against "showing favoritism" because we worship Jesus. Did people who worshiped God in the Old Testament have similar beliefs? What reminder does this passage from James give you?

1 Peter 2:9 - 10 - The kingdom of priests of the New Testament

9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

◎ Questions for Reflection

- ▶ Compare Exodus 19:3-6 with 1 Peter 2:9-10. What similarities do these passages share? What do they reveal about God's expectations for the church and Christians?
- ▶ The "kingdom of priests" has transferred from ancient Israel in the Old Testament to the church in the New Testament. As Gentiles, we were originally not His people, not chosen, yet in God's plan we became "true Israelites" and "true Adam." When Jesus, the "true vine," came, God's plan for the Gentiles was fulfilled (ref: Matthew 28:18-20). Are we

grateful for this? How can we fulfill our role as "priests" and encourage reconciliation between people and God?

◎ Prayer

- ▶ Offer praise and gratitude to God for His power, righteousness, and love.
- ▶ Reflect on whether we show favoritism or wrongly try to "bribe" God through our service. Pray that our hearts become more like God's heart.
- ▶ Pray that we become more like God in showing mercy to the poor and marginalized "foreigners."
- ▶ Pray for those who need the gospel and God's love.

◎ Suggested Actions

- ▶ During the "Resting Weeks":
 - ▶ 1. Consider ways to give to those in need within your community. Think about how to take action together with your brothers and sisters in Christ.
 - ▶ 2. Try calling or inviting people who need the gospel, letting them know that both you and God love them. °



♪ Day 3 : How Does God View Those in Need? (Part 1)

◎ Scripture Reading: Exodus 22:21 - 27; Leviticus 19:9 - 10; Deuteronomy 24:10 - 15

Exodus 22:21-27

21 "Do not mistreat or oppress a foreigner, for you were foreigners in Egypt. 22 Do not take advantage of the widow or the fatherless. 23 If you do and they cry out to me, I will certainly hear their cry. 24 My anger will be aroused, and I will kill you with the sword; your wives will become widows and your children fatherless. 25 If you lend money to one of my people among you who is needy, do not treat it like a business deal; charge no interest. 26 If you take your neighbor's cloak as a pledge, return it by sunset, 27 because that cloak is the only covering your neighbor has. What else can they sleep in? When they cry out to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate.

◎ Questions for Reflection

- ▶ "Do not mistreat or oppress a foreigner": Why does God care about foreigners? Is He only concerned about Israelites?
- ▶ "For you were foreigners in Egypt": God wants more than simple obedience from Israel in treating others well - He wants them to understand the foreigner's heart. Why?
- ▶ "Do not take advantage of the widow or the fatherless", "If you do...": What constitutes "taking advantage" of widows and orphans? Why do people treat them this way? Is it intentional or merely negligence?
- ▶ "My anger will be aroused, and I will kill you with the sword":



Is God's "fierce anger" simply about Israelites breaking His rules, or is He genuinely defending those who cannot defend themselves?

- ▶ While Israelites experienced being foreigners, they might not understand what it's like to be widows or orphans. Does God allow them to ignore these helpless people because of this? Why does God issue such severe warnings?
- ▶ Why doesn't God allow Israelites to charge interest when lending to poor countrymen? What problems is this preventing?
- ▶ Collecting debts and requiring collateral seems fair and reasonable. Why does God require creditors to return the cloak (collateral) to the poorest before sunset? What does this reveal about God's character? Which is more important - justice or mercy? (ref: James 2:12-13)
- ▶ God wants Israel to consider not just the correctness of their actions but also how their actions affect others' circumstances. What does this teach us?
- ▶ When does God say He will intervene for justice? Some theologians say God has no emotions, but many scriptures, including these, show God being moved by our emotions (e.g., Luke 11:8; Matthew 18:26-27). How should this affect our prayer life?

Leviticus 19:9-10

9 When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. 10 Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the foreigner. I am the Lord your God.

● Questions for Reflection

- ▶ The text explicitly forbids landowners or farmers from harvesting the edges of their fields, picking up fallen fruit, or completely stripping their vineyards - these must be left for the poor and foreigners. Why does God command leaving these for the poor and foreigners to gather themselves, rather than simply giving them a portion of the harvest? What's the difference between these two approaches, both for the owners and the beneficiaries?
- ▶ Why does God specify this particular method of helping the poor? What factors is God considering? What expectations does God have for the poor themselves?
- ▶ Is God only concerned about the poor's practical needs for survival? What else does He care about? What insights does this provide for those who want to help others?

Deuteronomy 24:10 - 11, 14 - 15

10 When you make a loan of any kind to your neighbor, do not go into their house to get what is offered to you as a pledge. 11 Stay outside and let the neighbor to whom you are making the loan bring the pledge out to you.

14 Do not take advantage of a hired worker who is poor and needy, whether that worker is a fellow Israelite or a foreigner residing in one of your towns. 15 Pay them their wages each day before sunset, because they are poor and are counting on it. Otherwise they may cry to the Lord against you, and you will be guilty of sin.

● Questions for Reflection

- ▶ Why does God forbid creditors from entering debtors' homes to collect collateral? What protection does this provide for debtors? According to this text, can creditors freely take people as collateral? How does this restrict creditors?

- ▶ Imagine if these laws weren't in place to protect the poor - beyond their financial hardships, what other harm might they suffer? Try to empathize with those who were protected by these laws.
- ▶ Isn't the command against withholding wages one of the oldest labor laws in history? The text specifically states that withholding wages is oppression (whether against Israelites or foreigners). At that time, daily wages equaled a day's food for the worker or their family, which is why payment was required the same day.
- ▶ Once again, when does God say He will intervene? Beyond requiring us to respect His laws, what else does God want us to value about others?



☞ Day 4 : How Does God View Those in Need? (Part 2)

- **Scripture Reading: Leviticus 14:21 - 22; Exodus 30:14 - 16; Exodus 23:3, 6; Deuteronomy 15:1 - 4, 8 -11**

Leviticus 14:21 - 22 - Sacrifice of the poor with severe skin diseases

21 "If, however, they are poor and cannot afford these, they must take one male lamb as a guilt offering to be waved to make atonement for them, together with a tenth of an ephah of the finest flour mixed with olive oil for a grain offering, a log of oil, 22 and two doves or two young pigeons, such as they can afford, one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering.

● Questions for Reflection

- ▶ In the Old Testament, certain things made people unclean (e.g., natural events like childbirth, certain diseases, or touching corpses; but not including moral sins). Since Jehovah dwelt among the Israelites in the tabernacle, unclean people couldn't approach it or participate in worship. Sin offerings and burnt offerings were established to make people clean again so they could rejoin community worship.
- ▶ Why did God require even poor people to participate in offerings according to their means? Wouldn't it be more practical and reasonable to exempt the poor completely? Is participating in worship a responsibility or a privilege? Is this requirement respecting the poor or exploiting them?
- ▶ Jesus was also born into a poor family, as we can see from his parents' offering after his birth (Leviticus 12:8; Luke 2:20-25).



Why did the King of kings and Lord of lords, God's Son, come to earth in such humble circumstances? What does this reveal about God's heart?

- ▶ What does it mean that poor people also had to make offerings after being cleansed? Can we be equally grateful regardless of our limited circumstances?
- ▶ Do you agree that being able to give is also a human need?

Exodus 30:14 - 16 - The rich and the poor give the same gift

14 All who cross over, those twenty years old or more, are to give an offering to the Lord. 15 The rich are not to give more than a half shekel and the poor are not to give less when you make the offering to the Lord to atone for your lives. 16 Receive the atonement money from the Israelites and use it for the service of the tent of meeting. It will be a memorial for the Israelites before the Lord, making atonement for your lives.

Exodus 23:3 - Don't show favoritism to the poor

3 do not show favoritism to a poor person in a lawsuit.

Leviticus 19:15 - Don't show partiality to the poor

15 "Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly."

● Questions for Reflection

- ▶ When taking a census, God expected everyone over twenty years old to give silver to the sanctuary. What does the principle "the rich shall not give more and the poor shall not give less" reveal about how God treats them? Although scripture records God blessing some with wealth, did the rich receive more of God's favor? In fact, did the Law provide more protection for the rich or the poor?

- ▶ God established laws to help the poor and restricted lending rules to protect them through hardship, yet He didn't completely exempt them from participation in giving. Is this different from what we might expect?
- ▶ God expected justice not to oppress the poor (Leviticus 23:6), but equally stated that the poor should not be shown favoritism in legal matters. What does this reveal about God's character?

Deuteronomy 15:1-4, 8-11

1 At the end of every seven years you must cancel debts. 2 This is how it is to be done: Every creditor shall cancel any loan they have made to a fellow Israelite. They shall not require payment from anyone among their own people, because the Lord's time for canceling debts has been proclaimed. 3 You may require payment from a foreigner, but you must cancel any debt your fellow Israelite owes you. 4 However, there need be no poor people among you, for in the land the Lord your God is giving you to possess as your inheritance, he will richly bless you,

8 Rather, be openhanded and freely lend them whatever they need. 9 Be careful not to harbor this wicked thought: "The seventh year, the year for canceling debts, is near," so that you do not show ill will toward the needy among your fellow Israelites and give them nothing. They may then appeal to the Lord against you, and you will be found guilty of sin. 10 Give generously to them and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to. 11 There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your fellow Israelites who are poor and needy in your land.

● Questions for Reflection

- ▶ In the Old Testament, during release years (like the Sabbatical year every seven years or Jubilee every fifty years), debts were forgiven, slaves

were freed, and land returned to original owners. Why do you think God established these laws? What goal does the text mention God had in mind? Under what conditions could this goal be achieved? How do we understand the tension between verses 4 and 11?

- ▶ Imagine: at worst, the poor could start fresh every seven years. How would they feel? Beyond stress relief, what hope would this bring? Modern laws also have "bankruptcy protection," but how does this differ from the "release year" or "Jubilee"? Who bears responsibility?
- ▶ "Be careful not to harbor evil thoughts": Do you think God's laws only addressed external behavior? Have you noticed how many Old Testament laws also made demands on people's inner hearts and even emotions? How does this differ from our common understanding of Old Testament laws?
- ▶ Wouldn't some people exploit "loopholes" in these laws causing creditors to suffer losses? If this happened, who would compensate the creditors?
- ▶ There's a Chinese saying: "Resenting the rich and despising the poor," meaning people tend to envy or even hate those who are wealthy or successful, while looking down upon or avoiding those who are poor or of lower status. After reading these laws concerning the rich and poor, what reminders do we receive?





❖ Day 5 : Are God's Laws Unchangeable?

● **Scripture Reading: Numbers 27:1 - 11; 36:1 - 7; Leviticus 17:1 - 4; Deuteronomy 12:15-16**

Numbers 27:1 - 11 - The Request of Zelophehad's Daughters

1 The daughters of Zelophehad son of Hepher, the son of Gilead, the son of Makir, the son of Manasseh, belonged to the clans of Manasseh son of Joseph. The names of the daughters were Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milkah and Tirzah. They came forward 2 and stood before Moses, Eleazar the priest, the leaders and the whole assembly at the entrance to the tent of meeting and said, 3 "Our father died in the wilderness. He was not among Korah's followers, who banded together against the Lord, but he died for his own sin and left no sons. 4 Why should our father's name disappear from his clan because he had no son? Give us property among our father's relatives." 5 So Moses brought their case before the Lord, 6 and the Lord said to him, 7 "**What Zelophehad's daughters are saying is right.** You must certainly give them property as an inheritance among their father's relatives and give their father's inheritance to them. 8 "Say to the Israelites, 'If a man dies and leaves no son, give his inheritance to his daughter. 9 If he has no daughter, give his inheritance to his brothers. 10 If he has no brothers, give his inheritance to his father's brothers. 11 If his father had no brothers, give his inheritance to the nearest relative in his clan, that he may possess it. This is to have the force of law for the Israelites, as the Lord commanded Moses.'"

● **Questions for Reflection**

- ▶ Ancient Israel was a patriarchal society where land and property were inherited through sons. Daughters were typically cared for through marriage, so orphans who lost their parents and widows who lost their

husbands were among the most unprotected groups in society (along with foreigners who had no relatives and thus little power). Therefore, they needed the most legal protection (refer to Day Three's content).

- ▶ While God's justice, goodness, and love never change, are His laws unchangeable?
- ▶ Like neighboring nations, Israel was patriarchal, and the law stipulated land distribution based on male numbers (Numbers 26:52-56), yet Zelophehad had no sons. Why did his daughters dare to claim inheritance for themselves and their deceased father? What does this reflect about their view of God's laws (refer to Day One's content)? How did they understand God? If God's laws were merely unchangeable or unmodifiable statutes, would they have approached Moses?
- ▶ Why didn't Moses dismiss them by saying "this is what the law states"? Why didn't he make a private decision but instead sought the Lord's opinion? Do you think he felt the daughters' request was reasonable?
- ▶ How did God respond? "What Zelophehad's daughters are saying is right." God didn't reject them simply because they were women (who had lower status in ancient culture), but instead acknowledged their valid argument. Zelophehad's daughters raised a situation not previously addressed by the law, but according to the spirit of the law, every family entering Canaan was meant to have their own land. The daughters understood God's intention, Moses likewise believed it aligned with God's purpose, and ultimately God even addressed situations involving other descendants and brothers.
- ▶ The Lord God, as sovereign of heaven and earth, was willing to reason with humans. We see multiple instances of God interacting with different people, willing to accept human feedback (though not always granting their wishes). Do we see God's humility? (Reference: Cain - Genesis 4:13-15; Abraham - Genesis 18:23-33; Moses - Exodus 32:11;

Numbers 14:13; Ezekiel - Ezekiel 4:12-15). If God is so humble and willing to reason, how should we interact with others (especially children, spouses, subordinates)?

Numbers 36: 1 - 7 - The tribe of Manasseh raises questions about the amended law

1 The family heads of the clan of Gilead son of Makir, the son of Manasseh, who were from the clans of the descendants of Joseph, came and spoke before Moses and the leaders, the heads of the Israelite families. 2 They said, "When the Lord commanded my lord to give the land as an inheritance to the Israelites by lot, he ordered you to give the inheritance of our brother Zelophehad to his daughters. 3 Now suppose they marry men from other Israelite tribes; then their inheritance will be taken from our ancestral inheritance and added to that of the tribe they marry into. And so part of the inheritance allotted to us will be taken away. 4 When the Year of Jubilee for the Israelites comes, their inheritance will be added to that of the tribe into which they marry, and their property will be taken from the tribal inheritance of our ancestors." 5 Then at the Lord's command Moses gave this order to the Israelites: **"What the tribe of the descendants of Joseph is saying is right.** 6 This is what the Lord commands for Zelophehad's daughters: They may marry anyone they please as long as they marry within their father's tribal clan. 7 No inheritance in Israel is to pass from one tribe to another, for every Israelite shall keep the tribal inheritance of their ancestors."

◎ Questions for Reflection

- ▶ The previous matter of amending the law due to Zelophehad having no sons was not yet concluded, because according to the culture at that time, when a daughter married, her property would become part of her husband's household, which would contradict God's original intention of distributing land by tribes. With this understanding, the tribal leaders of Zelophehad's daughters came to consult Moses.

- ▶ "What the tribe of the descendants of Joseph is saying is right": This was God's response. Our God is a God of reason, who encourages people to reason (even Job wanted to reason with God in his suffering).
- ▶ Why did the Bible preserve these two examples? How does this deepen our understanding of Old Testament laws?
- ▶ Jewish culture highly values education, especially the study of Laws and scriptures. Children are taught from a young age to question and think, which cultivated the Jews' strong analytical spirit. Jews believe the Laws is living, and through debate and interpretation, the Laws remains relevant to life in different eras. Do we value God's Old Testament laws in the same way?

Leviticus 17: 1 - 4 - Laws for Slaughtering Livestock During the Wilderness Journey

1 The Lord said to Moses, 2 "Speak to Aaron and his sons and to all the Israelites and say to them: 'This is what the Lord has commanded: 3 Any Israelite who sacrifices an ox, a lamb or a goat in the camp or outside of it 4 instead of bringing it to the entrance to the tent of meeting to present it as an offering to the Lord in front of the tabernacle of the Lord—that person shall be considered guilty of bloodshed; they have shed blood and must be cut off from their people.

Deuteronomy 12: 15 - 16 - Updates After Entering the Promised Land

15 Nevertheless, you may slaughter your animals in any of your towns and eat as much of the meat as you want, as if it were gazelle or deer, according to the blessing the Lord your God gives you. Both the ceremonially unclean and the clean may eat it. 16 But you must not eat the blood; pour it out on the ground like water.



● Questions for Reflection

- ▶ Comparing the two sets of laws: after entering Canaan, people could slaughter animals for meat in their own cities (except for sacrificial offerings); but previously in the wilderness, they had to bring all their livestock to the Tabernacle as offerings (peace offerings) before they could eat them. Why was there such a change?
- ▶ Consider this: when the tribes dispersed to every corner of the Promised Land, would "centralized slaughter" still be practical? Should there be different approaches for two distinctly different situations - wandering in the wilderness versus settling in a permanent home?
- ▶ After settling in Canaan, while residents could freely slaughter animals for meat, there were some principles that remained unchanged - did you notice them?



☞ Day 6 : Not My Original Intent

- **Scripture Reading: Genesis 2:24; Levitius 18:18; 21:15 - 17;
Deuteronomy 17:14 - 15, 24:1 - 4; 1 Samuel 8:6 - 9**

Genesis 2:24 - God Establishes Marriage

24 That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

Leviticus 18:18 - Prohibition Against Marrying Sisters Simultaneously

18 Do not take your wife's sister as a rival wife and have sexual relations with her while your wife is living.

Deuteronomy 21:15-17 - Rights of the Firstborn

15 If a man has two wives, and he loves one but not the other, and both bear him sons but the firstborn is the son of the wife he does not love, 16 when he wills his property to his sons, he must not give the rights of the firstborn to the son of the wife he loves in preference to his actual firstborn, the son of the wife he does not love. 17 He must acknowledge the son of his unloved wife as the firstborn by giving him a double share of all he has. That son is the first sign of his father's strength. The right of the firstborn belongs to him.

● **Questions for Reflection**

- ▶ How should we understand "the two will become one flesh" in Genesis 2:24? Do you think this conflicts with polygamy and divorce?
- ▶ In Israeli culture, women would leave their birth families to join their husband's family (similar to most modern cultures). However, notice

that in this verse, "man" refers to the male, reminding that men should leave their birth families to establish a new family with their wife. How can we understand these two aspects?

- ▶ Why was the law in Leviticus 18:18 necessary? If God's intention was monogamy, why did the law only prohibit marrying a wife's sister while the wife was still living? What was this law trying to protect?
- ▶ In Genesis, who married two sisters as wives? Wasn't it Jacob, the ancestor of Israel? What happened to those two sisters? Why didn't God stop Jacob from marrying two sisters, but later issued this law? Does God's non-intervention indicate His approval?
- ▶ What was Deuteronomy 21:15-17 trying to protect? Does the existence of this law mean God favored polygamy? Or was God protecting unloved wives and their descendants within that society's context? Among the examples of polygamy in the Old Testament, which one had a good outcome?
- ▶ Why didn't God use His laws to overturn the practice of polygamy altogether? How should we understand God's interaction with humanity?

Deuteronomy 17:14-15 - The Law About Kings

14 When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you and have taken possession of it and settled in it, and you say, "Let us set a king over us like all the nations around us," 15 be sure to appoint over you a king the Lord your God chooses. He must be from among your fellow Israelites. Do not place a foreigner over you, one who is not an Israelite.

1 Samuel 8:6-9 - God's Response to Israel's Request for a King

6 But when they said, "Give us a king to lead us," this



displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the Lord. ⁷ And the Lord told him: "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. ⁸ As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you. ⁹ Now listen to them; but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will claim as his rights."

◎ Questions for Reflection

- ▶ Why did God establish laws about appointing kings? When it says "Let us set a king over us like all the nations around us": Do you think God wanted Israel to be like the surrounding nations? Does establishing rules for kingship mean God wanted Israel to have a king, or was He trying to minimize the potential harm of kingship?
- ▶ By Samuel's time, the Israelites actually demanded a king. From the dialogue between the prophet and God, can you see whether God was pleased with their request for a king? What was God's true intention?
- ▶ Why didn't God simply establish a law prohibiting kingship? Would that have been feasible? Can regulations alone effectively control human behavior?

Deuteronomy 24:1 -4 - Laws About Divorce

¹ If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, ² and if after she leaves his house she becomes the wife of another man, ³ and her second husband dislikes her and writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, or if he dies, ⁴ then her first husband, who divorced her, is not allowed to marry her again after she has been defiled. That would be detestable in the eyes of the Lord. Do not bring sin upon the land the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance.

Matthew 19:3-8 - Jesus' Teaching on Divorce

3 Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?" 4 "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' 5 and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? 6 So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate." 7 "Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?" 8 Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning."

● Questions for Reflection

- ▶ Does Deuteronomy 24's divorce regulation indicate God's approval of divorce, or was it meant to protect rejected wives? If a husband despised his wife but couldn't divorce her, what harmful situations might the wife face? Was allowing divorce with a certificate, enabling the woman to remarry and secure her livelihood, choosing the lesser of two evils?
- ▶ Regarding Deuteronomy 24:1's "something indecent" (ervat davar: literally "nakedness of thing"): Traditionally understood as related to adultery. By New Testament times, rabbis were divided: 1. Shammai's school: only adultery justified divorce. 2. Hillel's school: "any cause" divorce permitted, even for burning food or developing wrinkles
- ▶ Jesus clearly opposed Hillel's interpretation (Matthew 19:3). He reaffirmed God's original intention for marriage (Matthew 19:4-5), opposing "any cause" divorce and stating that remarriage after such divorce constituted adultery (Matthew 19:9).
- ▶ How did Jesus interpret the divorce laws? Was divorce God's original intention? What does "hardness of hearts" mean? Was this wisdom or compromise?

- ▶ The law as wisdom versus mere regulation: Abraham came from Ur of Babylonia, and Israelites lived under Egyptian culture for generations. Could new regulations alone completely transform ingrained cultural practices?
- ▶ Consider America's abolition of slavery through civil war (their slavery system was harsher than biblical times). Even with a Black president later, did racism completely disappear?
- ▶ Old Testament laws were progressive compared to surrounding cultures, but why didn't they immediately abolish slavery, monarchy, patriarchy? Was God's accommodation to human limitations ("hardness of hearts") grace or injustice?
- ▶ God provided regulations for things He didn't desire: divorce, monarchy, slavery. Should we view Old Testament laws as God's ultimate ideal, or like Jesus, understand God's original intention?





▷ Day 7: The Sacredness of Human Life

◎ **Scripture Reading: Genesis 9:3 - 6; Exodus 20:13; 21:12 - 14, 28 - 32; 22:2 - 3; Deuteronomy 19:3 - 6; 22:8**

Genesis 9:3-6 - Animals and Humans

3 Everything that lives and moves about will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything. 4 But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it. 5 And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each human being, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of another human being. 6 Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind.

Exodus 20:13 - Ten Commandments

13 You shall not murder.

Exodus 21:12-14 - Intentional Murder

12 Anyone who strikes a person with a fatal blow is to be put to death. 13 However, if it is not done intentionally, but God lets it happen, they are to flee to a place I will designate. 14 But if anyone schemes and kills someone deliberately, that person is to be taken from my altar and put to death.

◎ **Questions for Reflection**

- ▶ Why couldn't people eat meat with blood? God wanted Israel to respect life, so animal blood was reserved for altar purification during sacrifices. Blood represents life, whether human or animal; since God is the giver of life, even after sacrifices, the animal's blood was to be poured on the ground (Deuteronomy 12:24).

- ▶ Before the law was given, "shedding blood" was already forbidden, with the consequence that those who shed blood would face the same fate. Not only was human-on-human murder prohibited, but God would also hold animals accountable for killing humans, as reflected in Old Testament law. What does this reveal about God's view of human life?
- ▶ Jesus said, "All who draw the sword will die by the sword" (Matthew 26:52). How does this parallel these laws?
- ▶ Why were murder and accidental killing treated differently? What does this reveal about God's perspective?
- ▶ "If a person is killed, the community should pay one mina of silver to their relatives" (Hammurabi Code #24 - Babylon, circa 1780 BC). How does this differ from Old Testament law? If murder could be resolved with money, wouldn't this allow the wealthy to act with impunity?
- ▶ The wine in communion represents Jesus' blood. While Israelites were forbidden from drinking blood, why could disciples drink "Jesus' blood" during communion? What does this symbolize?

Exodus 21:28-29 - Laws about Animals that Injure Humans

28 If a bull gores a man or woman to death, the bull is to be stoned to death, and its meat must not be eaten. But the owner of the bull will not be held responsible. 29 If, however, the bull has had the habit of goring and the owner has been warned but has not kept it penned up and it kills a man or woman, the bull is to be stoned and its owner also is to be put to death.

Deuteronomy 22:8 - Responsibility to Prevent Deaths)

8 When you build a new house, make a parapet around your roof so that you may not bring the guilt of bloodshed on your house if someone falls from the roof.

● Questions for Reflection

- ▶ Why did the law specify "man" or "woman"? Was there any difference in handling these cases? Was the victim's social status specified?
- ▶ Why was the bull that killed someone to be stoned and its meat not eaten? What did this symbolize?
- ▶ If an owner knew their bull was prone to goring but allowed it to kill someone, they would face capital punishment. What does such a severe penalty represent?
- ▶ "If a bull gores someone to death while walking in the street, the case shall not be pursued." (Hammurabi Code #250 - Babylon, circa 1780 BC). How does this differ from Old Testament law?
- ▶ "If someone's bull was known to gore, and the district was notified, but the owner neither trimmed its horns nor restrained it, and it kills a free person, they shall pay half a mina of silver." (Hammurabi Code #251 - Babylon, circa 1780 BC). How does this compare with Old Testament law?
- ▶ The requirement for parapets on roofs to prevent deaths - what does this reveal about God's value of human life? Was God only concerned about house safety, or was this just one example of a broader principle?
- ▶ Even today, we frequently hear news of fatal industrial accidents. What can we learn from these ancient regulations?

Exodus 22:2-3 - Laws about Theft and Break-ins

² If a thief is caught breaking in at night and is struck a fatal blow, the defender is not guilty of bloodshed; ³ but if it happens after sunrise, the defender is guilty of bloodshed. Anyone who steals must certainly make restitution, but if they have nothing, they must be sold to pay for their theft.

Deuteronomy 19:3-6 - Laws about Cities of Refuge

3 Build roads to them and divide into three parts the land the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance, so that anyone who kills someone may flee there. 4 This is the rule concerning anyone who kills a person and flees there for safety—anyone who kills a neighbor unintentionally, without malice aforethought. 5 For instance, a man may go into the forest with his neighbor to cut wood, and as he swings his ax to fell a tree, the head may fly off and hit and kill his neighbor. That man may flee to one of these cities and save his life. 6 Otherwise, the avenger of blood might pursue him in a rage, overtake him if the distance is too great, and kill him even though he is not deserving of death, since he did it to his neighbor without malice aforethought.

◎ Questions for Reflection

- ▶ Previously, we learned that killing someone generally resulted in capital punishment. Why was killing a thief who breaks in at night not considered a crime? What was the purpose of this law? Who was it protecting?
- ▶ Why was killing a thief during daylight considered a crime? What's the logic behind this? How did this prevent potential false accusations?
- ▶ "If someone breaks into a house (for theft), they should be put to death and buried at the point of break-in" (Hammurabi Code #21 - Babylon, circa 1780 BC). The Old Testament laws were more lenient - what does this reveal about God's view of human life versus property?
- ▶ "If someone is caught in the act of robbery, they shall be put to death" (Hammurabi Code #2 - Babylon, circa 1780 BC). The Old Testament laws were more lenient - what values does this reflect?
- ▶ Why did God establish "cities of refuge"? How did this impact:
 1. The victims' families?
 2. Those who killed accidentally and their families?
 3. The judicial system's need to distinguish between manslaughter and murder?





▷ Day 8: Gender Discrimination?

- **Scripture Reading: Genesis 1:27, 5:1 - 2; Exodus 20:12; 21:29; Leviticus 27:1 - 7; 19:32; 10: 13 - 14**

Leviticus 27:1-7 - Are women worth less?

1 The Lord said to Moses, 2 "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'If anyone makes a special vow to dedicate a person to the Lord by giving the equivalent value, 3 set the value of a **male** between **the ages of twenty and sixty** at **fifty shekels** of silver, according to the sanctuary shekel. 4 For a **female**, set her value at **thirty shekels**; 5 for a person between **the ages of five and twenty**, set the value of a **male** at **twenty shekels** and of a **female** at **ten shekels**; 6 for a person **between one month and five years**, set the value of a **male** at **five shekels** of silver and that of a **female** at **three shekels** of silver; 7 for a person **sixty years old or more**, set the value of a **male** at **fifteen shekels** and of a **female** at **ten shekels**.

Leviticus 19:32 - Respect for the Elderly

32 Stand up in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the Lord.

● Questions for Reflection

- ▶ Why were the monetary values different between men and women of the same age group? Why were women valued lower? Did this reflect that women were worth less in God's eyes?
- ▶ If viewed this way, wouldn't this show not only gender discrimination but also age discrimination, since those over sixty were valued less? Is this interpretation correct?

- ▶ How does Leviticus 19:32 address the elderly? How should they be treated? The command to respect the elderly is paired with revering God - what does this indicate about the value of older people?
- ▶ Leviticus 27 is often misunderstood, leading some to think the Old Testament authors simply valued women less than men. But is this interpretation correct? In context, this chapter describes:
 - ▶ A system for Israelites to make voluntary donations to the sanctuary
 - ▶ Different rates based on practical economic capacity
 - ▶ Part of a broader system including offerings of animals, houses, or land
 - ▶ A flexible system allowing multiple ways to contribute
- ▶ The different values based on age and gender reflected:
 - ▶ Agricultural society's labor realities
 - ▶ Physical labor requirements
 - ▶ Economic earning capacity in that historical context
 - ▶ Not spiritual worth or human dignity
- ▶ Leviticus 27:1-7 wasn't about "pricing" different groups, but rather:
 - ▶ A practical guide for voluntary sanctuary contributions
 - ▶ An inclusive system allowing everyone to participate
 - ▶ Separate from required offerings like tithes or animal sacrifices
 - ▶ Based on economic realities, not spiritual worth

Genesis 1:27-28 - Men and women both created in God's image

27 So God created **mankind** in his own image, in the image of God he created **them**; **male** and **female** he created them. 28 God blessed them and said to **them**, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea

and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

Genesis 5:1-2 - Men and women both created in God's image

¹ This is the written account of Adam's family line. When God created **mankind**, he made **them** in the likeness of God. ² He created them **male** and **female** and blessed **them**. And he named them "Mankind" when they were created.

● Questions for Reflection

- ▶ Why did God create both male and female? Couldn't one gender suffice? Was it purely for reproduction?
- ▶ According to Genesis 2:22-23, woman was created from man, but in these passages, in whose image was woman created?
- ▶ Does man being created first indicate higher value? Is this a valid interpretation? Following this logic, after Adam, all humans came from women - so how can the argument that women are worth less stand?
- ▶ The power struggle between men and women came after the Fall (Genesis 3:16). What was God's original intent for the relationship between men and women? Were "be fruitful and multiply" and "have dominion over the earth" meant for only one gender? What can we reflect on from this?
- ▶ "If a man strikes and kills a free woman, his daughter shall be put to death" (Hammurabi Code #210 - Babylon, circa 1780 BC). When a woman is killed, and the punishment is death for the killer's daughter rather than the killer themselves - how does this differ from Old Testament law?

Exodus 20:12 -From the Ten Commandments, about honoring parents

12 "Honor your **father** and your **mother**, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you."

Exodus 21:29 - Equal punishment for killing man or woman

29 If, however, the bull has had the habit of goring and the owner has been warned but has not kept it penned up and it kills a **man** or **woman**, the bull is to be stoned and its owner also is to be put to death.

Leviticus 10:13-14 - Priests' sons and daughters could eat from offerings

13 Eat it in the sanctuary area, because it is your share and your sons' share of the food offerings presented to the LORD; for so I have been commanded. 14 But you and your sons and your daughters may eat the breast that was waved and the thigh that was presented. Eat them in a ceremonially clean place; they have been given to you and your children as your share of the Israelites' fellowship offerings.

● Questions for Reflection

- ▶ Even though ancient Israel was a patriarchal society where fathers and husbands held higher leadership positions and greater authority (e.g., Numbers 30), did the Ten Commandments make any gender distinction in honoring parents? Why did God place such importance on honoring parents?
- ▶ The commandment to "Honor your father and mother" appears multiple times in the Law (Exodus 20:12, Leviticus 19:3, Deuteronomy 5:16). Isn't the Law about regulating behavior? Can "honor" be regulated? What constitutes "honor"? Or have we misunderstood the essence of Old Testament Law? What does this law promise?
- ▶ Jesus also reaffirmed this commandment in the New Testament. Have you fulfilled this commandment? How can you grow in



this area?

- ▶ If God doesn't show gender preference, why were only men allowed to be priests? Is this related to circumcision? Yet the Old Testament had female prophets and judges, and uncircumcised Israeli women were still considered "God's people" in the Old Testament era. Was this God accommodating contemporary culture, or was there deeper meaning (ref: Day 6 devotional content)?
- ▶ In the New Testament era, all believers are priests (1 Peter 2:5,9; Revelation 1:6, 5:10, 20:6). Unlike circumcision, New Testament baptism (Colossians 2:11-13) is available to both men and women, and God's Spirit is poured out on both (Acts 2:17).
- ▶ If God's ultimate ideal isn't gender discrimination, have we properly understood God's intentions? How can I promote cooperation between men and women according to God's original purpose? How can interactions between brothers and sisters in the church witness to this beautiful picture?



❖ Day 9: Laws Protecting Women

- **Scripture Reading: Exodus 21:2, 7 - 11; Deuteronomy 21:10 - 14; 22:13 - 19, 25 - 29; 24:5**

Exodus 21:2, 7-9 -Laws Concerning Female Servants

2 "If you buy a Hebrew servant, he is to serve you for six years. But in the seventh year, he shall go free, without paying anything.

7 "If a man sells his daughter as a servant, she is not to go free as male servants do. **8** If she does not please the master who has selected her for himself, he must let her be redeemed. He has no right to sell her to foreigners, because he has broken faith with her. **9** If he selects her for his son, he must grant her the rights of a daughter.

● Questions for Reflection

- ▶ Why could male servants go free in the seventh year (verse 2), while female servants "could not go free like male servants"? Under what circumstances would a father sell his daughter as a servant?
- ▶ In that cultural context, what was the role of female servants? "If the master selected her for himself" and "if he selects her for his son" - it seems the female servant would either become the master's concubine or his son's concubine?
- ▶ If she became someone's concubine, would "going free in the seventh year" be protection or harm? How did the law protect these female servants?
- ▶ In other words, the law protected female servants from abuse, allowing them to only marry the master or his son as a wife/concubine, with guaranteed rights as a wife or daughter-in-law. Even if she later became

displeasing to the master, she could not be arbitrarily sold to others. In a patriarchal society, this provided significant protection!

Exodus 21:9-11 - Marriage Rights of Female Servants

9 If he selects her for his son, he must grant her the rights of a daughter. 10 If he marries another woman, he must not deprive the first one of her **food, clothing** and **marital rights**. 11 If he does not provide her with these three things, she is to go free, without any payment of money.

Deuteronomy 24:5 - One Year Marriage Leave for Soldiers

5 If a man has recently married, he must not be sent to war or have any other duty laid on him. For one year he is to be free to stay at home and **bring happiness to the wife** he has married.

◎ Questions for Reflection

- ▶ If a female servant became a wife to the master (or his son) and he married another woman, what protection did the law provide? What needs was the husband obligated to fulfill?
- ▶ If the law protected these basic rights for a servant-turned-wife, shouldn't regular wives have at least the same rights? In polygamous marriages, if husbands couldn't neglect their first wife, shouldn't this be a basic requirement for all husbands toward their wives?
- ▶ When these three basic conditions weren't met, the female servant could go free without payment. What options did regular wives have under similar circumstances? From these passages, how do we understand God's expectations for husbands in marriage?
- ▶ Deuteronomy 24:1 mentions divorce certificates given by husbands to wives, but doesn't specify if wives could do the same. Exodus 21:11

provides insight into conditions under which women could leave marriages.

- ▶ Deuteronomy 24:5 - why were newly married soldiers given such generous treatment with a one-year leave? What was the reasoning behind this?
- ▶ "To bring happiness to his wife" - whose welfare was this leave considering? The husband's or wife's? Who was it trying to protect?
- ▶ In the New Testament era, were expectations for husbands increased or decreased (Ephesians 5:28-31)? What do you notice?
- ▶ How much does God value marriage? Are our hearts aligned with God's on this matter?

Deuteronomy 22:13-19 - Prohibition Against Husband's False Accusations of Wife

13 If a man takes a wife and, after sleeping with her, dislikes her 14 and slanders her and gives her a bad name, saying, "I married this woman, but when I approached her, I did not find proof of her virginity," 15 then the young woman's father and mother shall bring to the town elders at the gate proof that she was a virgin. 16 Her father will say to the elders, "I gave my daughter in marriage to this man, but he dislikes her. 17 Now he has slandered her and said, 'I did not find your daughter to be a virgin.' But here is the proof of my daughter's virginity." Then her parents shall display the cloth before the elders of the town, 18 and the elders shall take the man and punish him. 19 They shall fine him a hundred shekels of silver and give them to the young woman's father, because this man has given an Israelite virgin a bad name. She shall continue to be his wife; he must not divorce her as long as he lives.

● Questions for Reflection

- ▶ What protection did this law provide for women? What aspects of her life did it protect?
- ▶ The law shows that a man couldn't succeed with false accusations based solely on his word, and would instead lose his right to divorce. If Deuteronomy 24:1's "indecent thing" truly meant any situation, why would the husband specifically use accusations of lost virginity to slander his newly wedded wife?
- ▶ What does this reveal about God's expectations for sexual ethics at that time? Under what circumstances would a woman not receive this protection?

Deuteronomy 22:25-29 - Laws Concerning Rape Victims

25 But if out in the country a man happens to meet a young woman pledged to be married and rapes her, only the man who has done this shall die. 26 Do nothing to the woman; she has committed no sin deserving death. This case is like that of someone who attacks and murders a neighbor, 27 for the man found the young woman out in the country, and though the betrothed woman screamed, there was no one to rescue her.

28 If a man happens to meet a virgin who is not pledged to be married and rapes her and they are discovered, 29 he shall pay her father fifty shekels of silver. He must marry the young woman, for he has violated her. He can never divorce her as long as he lives.

● Questions for Reflection

- ▶ For a betrothed young woman, the rapist's punishment was death (verse 25). How severe is this? What does this reveal about God's hatred toward those who harm women!

- ▶ Why would anyone want to punish the victim? What responsibility does this passage attribute to the assaulted woman? Could a betrothed woman who was raped still marry her promised husband? Why? How does this differ from modern perspectives?
- ▶ For an unbetrothed virgin who was raped, why did she have to marry her attacker? If the rapist was executed instead, would the woman who lost her virginity have any chance of marriage in that culture? Besides her virginity, what else did she lose?
- ▶ This shows how God's laws addressed human needs. In an era where women needed to establish families and have children for security in old age, did forcing the attacker to marry and never divorce the victim help prevent even greater harm to the assaulted woman?

Deuteronomy 21:10-14 - Protecting the Dignity of Captured Women

10 When you go to war against your enemies and the Lord your God delivers them into your hands and you take captives, 11 if you notice among the captives a beautiful woman and are attracted to her, you may take her as your wife. 12 Bring her into your home and have her shave her head, trim her nails 13 and put aside the clothes she was wearing when captured. After she has lived in your house and mourned her father and mother for a full month, then you may go to her and be her husband and she shall be your wife. 14 If you are not pleased with her, let her go wherever she wishes. You must not sell her or treat her as a slave, since you have dishonored her.

● Questions for Reflection

- ▶ Did God allow Israeli soldiers to freely assault enemy women even during wartime? Did God separate sex from marriage?

- ▶ From the time a soldier noticed a female captive to marrying her, a full month was required. What do you think was the purpose of this waiting period?
- ▶ Even for a captive, God did not allow men to use and abandon her, and even if she was later sent away, she could not be exploited for profit. From these laws, how do you see God protecting women, who were more vulnerable in that era? Do we understand God's heart in this matter?



▷ Day 10: Does God Love People with Disabilities?

- **Scripture Reading:** Exodus 4:10 - 11; Leviticus 19:14; 21:16 - 23; Isaiah 35:5 - 6; Matthew 11:4 - 5; John 9:1-3

Leviticus 21:16-23 - Priests with Disabilities Among Aaron's Descendants

16 The Lord said to Moses, 17 "Say to Aaron: 'For the generations to come none of your descendants who has a defect may come near to offer the food of his God. 18 No man who has any defect may come near: no man who is blind or lame, who has a disfigured face or any deformity, 19 no man who has a crippled foot or hand, 20 or who is hunchbacked or dwarfed, or who has any eye defect, or who has festering or running sores or damaged testicles. 21 No descendant of Aaron the priest who has any defect is to come near to present the food offerings to the Lord. He has a defect; he must not come near to offer the food of his God. 22 He may eat the most holy food of his God, as well as the holy food; 23 yet because of his defect, he must not go near the curtain or approach the altar, and so desecrate my sanctuary. I am the Lord, who makes them holy.'"

● Questions for Reflection

- ▶ Based on these regulations, some interpret that God dislikes people with disabilities. But which specific group of people were these regulations targeting? What was their role? What activities did these regulations restrict for people with disabilities? Were there any restrictions on their participation?
- ▶ Among the listed conditions, "crippled foot or hand," "festering or running sores, or damaged testicles" - were these congenital or acquired conditions? What significance does this have?

- ▶ If we view this passage as God "discriminating" against people with disabilities by preventing them from entering the sanctuary to make offerings, then those excluded were far more than just them - it also included normal non-Aaronic descendants (including other Levites from the tribe of Levi), all women, and others.
- ▶ "Holy" means "set apart." Why did God have such specifically high requirements for priests who were closest to Him? Why could those with disabilities, though unable to make offerings, still eat the most holy food because they were Aaron's descendants?
- ▶ In this light, is "disability" God's "ultimate ideal state" for humans? Those who were sick or who touched human or animal corpses also couldn't approach the sanctuary - what does this reveal about the living God's ultimate ideal for humans? When will humans receive this "perfect body"?

Exodus 4:10-11 - God's Response to Moses' Reluctance to Accept His Commission

10 Moses said to the Lord, "Pardon your servant, Lord. I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue." 11 The Lord said to him, "Who gave human beings their mouths? Who makes them deaf or mute? Who gives them sight or makes them blind? Is it not I, the Lord?"

● Questions for Reflection

- ▶ When Moses tried to refuse God's commission by citing his lack of speaking ability, how did God respond? How would you understand this scripture: 1. Did God deliberately create some people to be mute, deaf and blind, so Moses' poor speaking ability was God's intentional doing?

Or 2. Whether it's those who are "mute, deaf, blind" or Moses who considered himself "slow of speech," they were all created by God, so when God says you can do it, you can?

- ▶ How do these two different interpretations affect our view of God and our view of ourselves?
- ▶ Do you often feel discouraged about your own shortcomings (whether physical, capability-related, or temperamental)? Have you complained about why God made you this way? How would God want you to think about this? Have you considered that you could fulfill your mission as the person God created you to be?

Leviticus 19:14

14 "Do not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block in front of the blind, but fear your God. I am the Lord."

● Questions for Reflection

- ▶ Which people does this law protect? Is it only the deaf and blind, or does it include the mute, lame, or anyone with disabilities? Why?
- ▶ "Putting a stumbling block in front of the blind" - is the purpose simply to cause harm? If harm was the only intent, why not directly attack them since they can't see? Does this involve an element of mockery?
- ▶ Why is it forbidden to "curse the deaf"? It causes no physical harm to them, and since they can't hear it, it shouldn't even cause emotional harm. But who does hear it? Who knows about it?
- ▶ According to the scripture, why shouldn't we do these things? When God uses only His name "I am the Lord" to warn against "mistreating people with disabilities," what does this reveal about how God views them?
- ▶ Does God only prohibit bullying people with disabilities, with no restrictions on mistreating able-bodied but vulnerable people? Have we

cursed others behind their backs, or mocked people without their knowledge, intending to harm or humiliate them?

John 9:1-3

1 As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. 2 His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" 3 "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him."

● Questions for Reflection

- ▶ While the Old Testament never states that congenital disabilities are consequences of sin, people always want to know "who is responsible for the problem." What was Jesus's answer?
- ▶ If God caused disabilities due to people's sins, yet His son Jesus went around healing people with disabilities, wouldn't this contradict the Father's will? Through His healing ministry, was Jesus indicating that God is the source of the problem, or the solution? Does Jesus's healing represent God's desire for people to be without defects in the end times?
- ▶ Following Exodus 4:11, God didn't deliberately create some people with disabilities. All deficiencies ultimately stem from the disorder of this sinful world with its aging, sickness, death, and unredeemed state (Romans 8:18-25). God wants us to treat those who are unfortunate with compassion and respect.
- ▶ As a church, what support can we provide to meet the needs of members with disabilities, enabling them to be fully involved in the church community?



▷ Day 11: What is God's View on Slavery?

◎ **Scripture Reading: Exodus 21:20 - 21, 26, 27, 32; Leviticus 25:39 - 49, 55; Deuteronomy 15:12 - 18; 23:15 - 16**

Exodus 21:20-21

20 "Anyone who beats their male or female slave with a rod must be punished if the slave dies as a direct result, 21 but they are not to be punished if the slave recovers after a day or two, since the slave is their property.

Exodus 21:32

32 If the bull gores a male or female slave, the owner must pay thirty shekels of silver to the master of the slave, and the bull is to be stoned to death.

Leviticus 25:44-46

44 "Your male and female slaves are to come from the nations around you; from them you may buy slaves. 45 You may also buy some of the temporary residents living among you and members of their clans born in your country, and they will become your property. 46 You can bequeath them to your children as inherited property and can make them slaves for life, but you must not rule over your fellow Israelites ruthlessly.

◎ **Questions for Reflection**

- ▶ The slave system in Old Testament law reflected the reality of ancient society. In that culture, slaves were generally viewed as property rather than full persons, leading masters to abuse their slaves at will. Why didn't God use the law to abolish this unjust system entirely? Taking Hong Kong as an example, can illegal labor issues be completely

eliminated just through legislation? Do laws ultimately protect vulnerable groups or those who exploit them? What is the root cause of slavery? In a society without social security or welfare, would extremely poor people prefer to starve or become slaves? In ancient societies with frequent wars, would prisoners of war prefer slavery or execution?

- ▶ As mentioned in Day 6's devotional, God worked within the social structures of the time, but this wasn't His ultimate intention. The core purpose of the law was to limit exploitation and abuse, gradually promoting higher moral standards. By the New Testament era, God Himself took the form of a servant (Philippians 2:5-8), and Christians were baptized into one body regardless of social status, receiving the same Spirit and becoming God's children (Acts 2:8; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:26-28). This understanding eventually led to the complete abolition of systematic slavery in modern times.
- ▶ Compare the Old Testament slave laws with those of other nations at that time - what were the differences?
- ▶ Exodus 21:20 specified that deliberately causing a slave's death through severe injury had consequences (though "punishment" wasn't clearly defined); children of slaves had to be purchased separately rather than automatically belonging to the master. Do you know of other laws that protected slaves?

Deuteronomy 15:12-18 - Hebrew slave regulations

12 If any of your people—Hebrew men or women—sell themselves to you and serve you six years, in the seventh year you must let them go free. 13 And when you release them, do not send them away empty-handed. 14 Supply them liberally from your flock, your threshing floor and your winepress. Give to them as the LORD your God has blessed you. 15 Remember that you were slaves in

Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you. That is why I give you this command today. ¹⁶ But if your servant says to you, "I do not want to leave you," because he loves you and your family and is well off with you, ¹⁷ then take an awl and push it through his earlobe into the door, and he will become your servant for life. Do the same for your female servant. ¹⁸ Do not consider it a hardship to set your servant free, because their service to you these six years has been worth twice as much as that of a hired hand. And the LORD your God will bless you in everything you do.

● Questions for Reflection

- ▶ In the Old Testament era, when Hebrews fell into financial difficulties or debt, they could choose to sell themselves as servants (though Hebrews were not allowed to actively buy their own people as slaves). Why did the Old Testament law set limits on the duration of servitude? If they were merely viewed as property, why set time limits? Why share wealth with them? Why weren't these provisions applied to foreign slaves? If these rules applied to foreigners too, wouldn't it lead to abuse or a large influx of slaves?
- ▶ God expected Israelites to treat their fellow Hebrew servants well, and in the ideal situation, servants would even be reluctant to leave their masters.
- ▶ How did God convince the Israelites to share their wealth and grant freedom to servants after six years of work?
- ▶ Hong Kong has many foreign domestic workers (mainly female helpers) from overseas. Are we treating them well?

Leviticus 25:39-43, 47-49, 55 - Israelites must not be sold to foreigners

39 If any of your fellow Israelites become poor and sell themselves to you, do not make them work as slaves. 40 They are to be treated as hired workers or temporary residents among you; they are to work for you until the Year of Jubilee. 41 Then they and their children are to be released, and they will go back to their own clans and to the property of their ancestors. 42 Because the Israelites are my servants, whom I brought out of Egypt, they must not be sold as slaves. 43 Do not rule over them ruthlessly, but fear your God.

47 If a foreigner residing among you becomes rich and any of your fellow Israelites become poor and sell themselves to the foreigner or to a member of the foreigner's clan, 48 they retain the right of redemption after they have sold themselves. One of their relatives may redeem them: 49 An uncle or a cousin or any blood relative in their clan may redeem them. Or if they prosper, they may redeem themselves.

55 For the Israelites belong to me as servants. They are my servants, whom I brought out of Egypt. I am the LORD your God.

● Questions for Reflection

- ▶ In cases of extreme poverty, Israelites could be sold as servants, similar to foreign slaves. In such cases, the period of servitude would exceed seven years, but what was the maximum limit before these fellow countrymen had to be set free? Was it permissible to resell them to foreigners? Why not?
- ▶ "If a foreigner residing among you becomes rich": This shows that in Israelite society at that time, even foreign servants had the opportunity to become wealthy. The passage indicates that they could even end up owning local people as servants. Why did God expect Israelites to redeem their fellow countrymen from foreign ownership?

Exodus 21:26-27 - Those who harm their slaves must set them free

26 If a man hits a manservant or maidservant in the eye and destroys it, he must let them go free to compensate for the eye. 27 And if he knocks out the tooth of a manservant or maidservant, he must let them go free to compensate for the tooth.

● Questions for Reflection

- ▶ "If someone damages another person's slave's eye or breaks a slave's bone, they must pay half the slave's value" (Code of Hammurabi, Article 199 - circa 1780 BCE Babylon). Ancient Babylonian law addressed compensation for injuring others' slaves but didn't mention consequences for injuring one's own slaves, and the compensation was paid to the slave owner rather than the injured person.
- ▶ "If someone strikes a female slave causing miscarriage, they must pay two shekels of silver" (Code of Hammurabi, Article 213 - circa 1780 BCE Babylon). Causing a female slave to miscarry, in other words killing her unborn child, resulted in compensation.
- ▶ "If that female slave dies, they must pay one-third mina of silver" (Code of Hammurabi, Article 214 - circa 1780 BCE Babylon). There's no mention of compensation for killing male slaves. Why was compensation required for killing female slaves? Was it because female slaves were often concubines?
- ▶ Comparing the Old Testament with these three ancient Babylonian laws, what are the differences?
- ▶ Many Old Testament laws used case law. While eyes and teeth are mentioned here, would freedom also be granted for damaging a servant's ear or nose? If losing just one tooth required granting freedom, wasn't the potential loss significant for masters who abused their servants? Would this restraint discourage them from easily resorting to violence?

Deuteronomy 23:15-16 - Those who harbor runaway slaves must provide refuge to them

15 If a slave has taken refuge with you, do not hand them over to their master. 16 Let them live among you wherever they like and in whatever town they choose. Do not oppress them.

● Questions for Reflection

- ▶ "If anyone harbors a runaway slave from the palace or from a free citizen, and does not bring them forth at the public proclamation of the major-domus, that householder shall be put to death" and "If he keeps the slave in his house, and the slave is later found, he shall be put to death" (Code of Hammurabi, Articles 16 & 19 - circa 1780 BCE Babylon). The penalty for harboring runaway slaves was death! How many people would dare shelter an unfamiliar slave? With such severe punishment, whose interests were being protected?
- ▶ "If anyone captures a runaway slave in the field and returns them to their owner, the slave's owner shall pay him two shekels of silver" (Code of Hammurabi, Article 17 - circa 1780 BCE Babylon). This encouraged people to capture runaway slaves. How would people likely behave for such a reward?
- ▶ Compare these ancient Babylonian slave laws with Old Testament slave regulations. Did the Old Testament laws protect slaves or owners' interests? Why this difference?
- ▶ While other nations of that time viewed slaves merely as property, and Babylonian law protected slave owners' interests, Old Testament regulations tended to protect slaves' rights. Why?
- ▶ What circumstances typically drove slaves to flee from their masters? If living conditions were adequate, would there be any incentive to become a fugitive? The regulation in Deuteronomy 23:15 protected abused slaves

from being returned to face greater harm. While Old Testament law required lost livestock to be returned to owners, humans were different - runaway slaves didn't need to be returned. This regulation was disadvantageous to masters and favored the more vulnerable slaves, without even requiring a trial, preventing the wealthy and powerful from having the upper hand. This regulation encouraged masters to treat their slaves well. Do you see how God protects the vulnerable? In today's society, who needs our protection?



▷ Day 12: This is My Father's World

● **Scripture Reading: Leviticus 25:6 - 7, 22:27 - 28; Deuteronomy 5:14; 22:6 - 7; 25:4; Proverbs 12:10; 1 Corinthians 9:8 - 11**

Deuteronomy 25:4

4 Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain.

● Questions for Reflection

- ▶ In ancient agricultural times, cattle were the main labor force. Threshing was an agricultural task where grain was separated by having oxen walk on it or pull equipment. While working, oxen would sometimes eat some of the grain, but muzzling would prevent them from eating. What reasons might make an owner want to muzzle their ox? Why would God make a specific law about this situation? What does this reveal about God's view of animals?
- ▶ What's problematic about making cattle work for humans while preventing them from sharing in some of the fruits of their labor? Is 'maximizing profit' a value that God wants us to pursue?
- ▶ God's laws prohibited the exploitation of servants and required owners to provide for servants when they left, sharing the wealth they helped create (refer to yesterday's devotional content). Is the spirit of this law similar?"

1 Corinthians 9:8-11

8 Do I say this merely on human authority? Doesn't the Law say the same thing? 9 For it is written in the Law of Moses: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." Is it about oxen

that God is concerned? ¹⁰ Surely he says this for us, doesn't he? Yes, this was written for us, because whoever plows and threshes should be able to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest. ¹¹ If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you?

● Questions for Reflection

- ▶ Do some people think that Old Testament laws are no longer useful for New Testament Christians? But is this Paul's view? Why did he quote this law? What principle was Paul applying when he used this law?
- ▶ Where else can this principle be applied? Does this principle apply to today's "Animal Protection Laws"? How can this principle be applied to "Labor Laws"?

Leviticus 25:6-7 - The produce of the Sabbatical year is also meant for livestock and animals

⁶ Whatever the land yields during the sabbath year will be food for you—for yourself, your male and female servants, your hired worker and temporary resident who live among you, ⁷ as well as for your livestock and the wild animals in your land. Whatever the land produces may be eaten.

Deuteronomy 5:14 - The Sabbath is also for animals to rest

¹⁴ but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your ox, your donkey or any of your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns, so that your male and female servants may rest, as you do.

Proverbs 12:10 - Righteous and Wicked

¹⁰ The righteous care for the needs of their animals, but the kindest acts of the wicked are cruel.

● Questions for Reflection

- ▶ During the Sabbatical year, Israelites stopped farming and ate what grew naturally from the land. Why were they commanded to share the harvest not only with servants and workers, but also with livestock and wild animals? What character traits did God want to develop in the Israelites?
- ▶ Why did God want "oxen, donkeys, and livestock" to rest together on the Sabbath? Does this suggest the Sabbath was meant for more than just worship? What role did these animals play in society? What does this teach us about how we should view working animals?
- ▶ How does Proverbs 12:10 define "righteous" and "wicked" people? A person's goodness should extend to affect even their animals, and the opposite is also true. How we treat those who are powerless and unable to resist - both people and animals - reflects what's in our hearts.
- ▶ God expected people to share not just material resources but also rest time with animals. He didn't want people to maximize profits ("earn to the extreme") or exploit resources ("use to the extreme"). Has our society overworked animals, over-exploited resources, or overworked employees in pursuit of maximum utilization?
- ▶ Have we considered the needs of housewives and mothers, ensuring they get adequate rest?
- ▶ Many Hong Kong families employ domestic helpers. How can these laws inspire us to treat these foreign workers who have left their homes to work here?

Deuteronomy 22:6-7

6 If you come across a bird's nest beside the road, either in a tree or on the ground, and the mother is sitting on the young or on the eggs, do not take both the mother and the young. 7 You may take the young, but be sure to let the mother go, so that it may go well with you and you may have a long life.

● Questions for Reflection

- ▶ What do you think is the spirit behind this law? Why "do not take both the mother and the young"? What's problematic about that? Why release the mother rather than the young? What would happen if it were the other way around?
- ▶ This example illustrates moral and ethical principles. Just because we rarely encounter bird nests today, does that mean we can't apply these principles or their spirit? How can we apply this law in modern society?
- ▶ God gave animals to humans for food (Genesis 9:3) and for helping with production, work, exploration, and companionship. Do we view animals as God's gifts to this world? Try to imagine what the world would be like without animals. Are we grateful and performing our stewardship duties to protect Earth's ecology? Or are we over-extracting and exploiting due to greed?
- ▶ In recent years, society often promotes "sustainable development" - does this law also embody this concept?

Leviticus 22:27-28

27 When a calf, a lamb or a goat is born, it is to remain with its mother for seven days. From the eighth day on, it will be acceptable as a food offering presented to the Lord. 28 Do not slaughter a cow or a sheep and its young on the same day.

● Questions for Reflection

- ▶ Since God required Israelites to sacrifice their firstborn cattle and sheep, why did He specify that they "must stay with their mother for seven days"? Was it because God wanted them to grow more meat to become better sacrifices? Or was God concerned about the mother who lost her firstborn? Why?
- ▶ "Do not slaughter a mother animal and its young on the same day": Cattle and sheep would eventually be slaughtered anyway, so why did God require people to follow this rule? What considerations might be behind this? Even in dealing with animals, what kind of heart does God want us to have?



▷ Day 13: Against "Maximizing Utility"

● **Scripture Reading: Exodus 20:8 - 10; 34:21; Leviticus 19:9 - 10; 25:1 - 7, 8 - 13, 23 - 24**

Exodus 20:8-10 - Establishing the Sabbath

8 "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns.

Exodus 34:21 - Observing Sabbath Even During Plowing and Harvest

21 "Six days you shall labor, but on the seventh day you shall rest; even during the plowing season and harvest you must rest.

● **Questions for Reflection**

- ▶ How does God view work and rest? What about you? Do you have a balance between labor and rest? Note that in ancient times, people "worked from sunrise to sunset," and even with lamplight at home, they didn't work endlessly.
- ▶ Why did God establish the Sabbath? Was it solely to give people time to worship? When everyone stops working, what can they enjoy? What does God want people to enjoy? What does rest mean to you? Is it entertainment? Or is it time to enjoy leisure, nature, relationships with others, and personal reflection?

- ▶ The 24/7 lifestyle is now popular. How does this affect our physical and mental well-being? Have instant messaging, social media, and streaming content's 24/7 presence stifled our spiritual rest and meditation space?
- ▶ Planting and harvesting were the most important times in agricultural societies - the "peak season." Shouldn't people work overtime during these periods? Yet people were still required to rest? What values of God does this reflect? Why did God require all living creatures to have rest time? Did God want us to achieve less, or did He believe this was our "sustainable" lifestyle?

Leviticus 19:9-10 - Do Not Reap to the Edges of Your Field

9 "When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. 10 Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the foreigner. I am the Lord your God.

● Questions for Reflection

- ▶ Why didn't God allow them to harvest to the edges of their fields or gather all the fruit? Why weren't they even allowed to pick up what had fallen to the ground? Isn't this very wasteful? Why should I share the fruits of my labor with people who aren't related to me?
- ▶ Are the results of our labor solely due to our own merit? Have we considered God's blessing and provision behind it all?

Leviticus 25:1-7 - The Sabbath Year

1 The Lord said to Moses at Mount Sinai, 2 "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'When you enter the land I am going to give you, the land itself must observe a sabbath to the Lord. 3 For six years sow your fields, and for six years prune your vineyards

and gather their crops. ⁴ But in the seventh year the land is to have a year of sabbath rest, a sabbath to the Lord. Do not sow your fields or prune your vineyards. ⁵ Do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the grapes of your untended vines. The land is to have a year of rest. ⁶ Whatever the land yields during the sabbath year will be food for you—for yourself, your male and female servants, and the hired worker and temporary resident who live among you, ⁷ as well as for your livestock and the wild animals in your land. Whatever the land produces may be eaten.

● Questions for Reflection

- ▶ God established the Sabbath year where people didn't need to engage in agricultural work for a year, living only on what grew naturally (Leviticus 25:20-22), and had to release their fellow countrymen who were servants, sharing the fruits of past labor with them - is this cost-effective? Wouldn't it be doubly difficult to hire new servants afterward? Is God concerned about efficiency or other aspects?
- ▶ Servants who worked for six years gained freedom and could escape poverty to start anew. How do you think they felt? What's the difference between having and not having the hope of knowing when you'll be released?
- ▶ Not farming or tending vineyards for a year, eating only what the land produces naturally - was this to remind them who the true provider was? Was God trying to train them to trust Him? Did He want them to learn faith like the birds of the air (Matthew 6:26; Luke 12:24)?
- ▶ How do you feel about not being able to control things yourself, but instead having to eat whatever is available? How would you feel if you had to observe a Sabbath year? What benefits might come from this practice?

Leviticus 25:10-13 - The Year of Jubilee

10 Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you; each of you is to return to your family property and to your own clan. 11 The fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you; do not sow and do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the untended vines. 12 For it is a jubilee and is to be holy for you; eat only what is taken directly from the fields. 13 In this Year of Jubilee everyone is to return to their own property.

Deuteronomy 25:23-24 - The Land Must Not Be Sold Permanently

23 "The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you reside in my land as foreigners and strangers. 24 Throughout the land that you hold as a possession, you must provide for the redemption of the land."

◎ Questions for Reflection

- ▶ Not only was there a Sabbath year every seven years, but in the fiftieth year there was also a Jubilee, when all Israelites who had sold themselves into slavery or sold their land for survival could regain their freedom and reclaim their property. Why didn't God allow permanent land sales? What did He want people to understand about land ownership?
- ▶ Since ancient times, land has affected people's livelihoods, especially in agricultural societies. If wealthy people couldn't accumulate land from others permanently, but had to return it eventually, wouldn't this prevent "land monopolies"? Fifty years is approximately a lifetime. What was this law trying to protect?
- ▶ Even if the previous generation had to sell their land due to poverty, the next generation could start fresh. Do you see God's gracious intention for the Israelites in this?



▷ Day 14: Other Laws

- **Scripture Reading:** Exodus 22:28; Levitius 19:17 - 18; 19:19; 24:17 - 22; Deuteronomy 22:9 - 12; 25:1 - 3

Leviticus 19:17-18 - Returning Evil with Kindness

17 "Do not hate a fellow Israelite in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in their guilt. 18 Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.

● Questions for Reflection

- ▶ God's laws not only direct how people should act, but also guide how their hearts should be. What's the relationship between "not hating your brother in your heart" and "rebuking your neighbor"? Does expressing your dissatisfaction help release inner hatred?
- ▶ Do people tend to harbor resentment and find it difficult to express their grievances? Why? Do you find this challenging? What are the benefits of being able to do this?
- ▶ Isn't "love your neighbor as yourself" a New Testament teaching (Matthew 19:18, 22:39; Mark 12:31, 39; Galatians 5:14; Romans 13:9; James 2:8)? It appears this was already present in Old Testament law.
- ▶ How can one avoid revenge and instead love others as oneself? The passage concludes simply with "I am the Lord" - does this suggest that without reverence for God, this is impossible for humans?
- ▶ These laws don't just tell people to stop doing wrong but command them to do what benefits others around them.

Exodus 22:28 - Do Not Curse God or Leaders

28 "Do not blaspheme God or curse the ruler of your people.

● Questions for Reflection

- ▶ While "do not blaspheme God" is understandable, why "do not curse the ruler of your people"? How does God want us to treat authority? Doesn't God know there are bad leaders?
- ▶ What's distinctive about these laws compared to the previous section? Many Old Testament laws don't specify consequences for disobedience, especially those concerning internal matters like "love," "hate," and "cursing," which aren't easily detected or prosecuted. Are these laws meant for punishment or character formation?

Leviticus 24:17-22 - Eye for Eye, Tooth for Tooth

17 "Anyone who takes the life of a human being is to be put to death. 18 Anyone who takes the life of someone's animal must make restitution—life for life. 19 Anyone who injures their neighbor is to be injured in the same manner: 20 fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. The one who has inflicted the injury must suffer the same injury. 21 Whoever kills an animal must make restitution, but whoever kills a human being is to be put to death. 22 You are to have the same law for the foreigner and the native-born. I am the Lord your God."

● Questions for Reflection

- ▶ Leviticus 19:18 states "do not take revenge," referring to personal vengeance. When someone is wronged, a just society needs fair and righteous judgments to reward good and punish evil. What principles does this passage establish?

- ▶ "Eye for eye, tooth for tooth": What are the benefits of this rule? What does it limit?
- ▶ Hammurabi's Code has similar content: "If a man destroys the eye of another man of the same class, his own eye shall be destroyed," "If he breaks another man's bone, his bone shall be broken," "If he destroys the eye of a commoner or breaks the bone of a commoner, he shall pay one mina of silver," "If he knocks out the teeth of another man of the same class, his own teeth shall be knocked out," "If he knocks out the teeth of a commoner, he shall pay one-third of a mina of silver" (Articles 196, 197, 198, 200, 201 - circa 1780 BCE Babylon). How does this compare and contrast with Old Testament law?
- ▶ "The same law applies to both the native-born and the foreigner": How does this differ from Babylonian law?
- ▶ "As they have done, so it shall be done to them" is a regulation ensuring fair sentencing for offenders, but Jesus calls us to think in reverse: "Do to others what you would have them do to you" (Matthew 7:12). What's the difference between these two principles?

Deuteronomy 25:1-3 - The Goal of Judgment

1 When people have a dispute, they are to take it to court and the judges will decide the case, acquitting the innocent and condemning the guilty. 2 If the guilty person deserves to be beaten, the judge shall make them lie down and have them flogged in his presence with the number of lashes the crime deserves, 3 but the judge must not impose more than forty lashes. If the guilty party is flogged more than that, your fellow Israelite will be degraded in your eyes.

● Questions for Reflection

- ▶ While this doesn't deny that evil-doers need to be judged, condemned, and punished, what are the two limitations placed on sentencing? What does this reflect?
- ▶ Later, to strictly observe this law, Jews limited flogging to "forty lashes minus one" to ensure they wouldn't exceed forty lashes due to miscounting. The Jews flogged Paul "forty lashes minus one" five times (2 Corinthians 11:24). While they adhered to the numerical limit of the law, was their judgment of Paul just?
- ▶ God is concerned not only with punishing wrongdoing but also with preserving the dignity of those being punished. Do you think God established punishment merely for retribution, or does it also serve educational and rehabilitative purposes?
- ▶ How might the spirit of these laws be reflected in modern prison or correctional policies?

Leviticus 19:19 - Do Not Mix Different Kinds

19 "Keep my decrees. Do not mate different kinds of animals. Do not plant your field with two kinds of seed. Do not wear clothing woven of two kinds of material.

Deuteronomy 22:9-12

9 Do not plant two kinds of seed in your vineyard; if you do, not only the crops you plant but also the fruit of the vineyard will be defiled. 10 Do not plow with an ox and a donkey yoked together. 11 Do not wear clothes of wool and linen woven together. 12 Make tassels on the four corners of the cloak you wear.

● Commentary

- ▶ These Old Testament laws are among the most puzzling, and skeptics often use them to criticize the rationality of Old Testament laws. However, if we understand the ancient concept of the Divine Realm, these laws become much clearer.
- ▶ Leviticus 19:19 "Do not mate different kinds of animals" and Deuteronomy 22:10 "Do not plow with an ox and donkey" may seem different but convey the same meaning. "Plowing" is actually referring to mating, as it was a euphemism for sexual relations in ancient times (Judges 14:18).
- ▶ The basic principle behind these laws involves an ancient Near Eastern concept: mixed things belonged to the divine realm. Sacred creatures were combinations of different animals (like the cherubim on the ark, Ezekiel 10:14), and fabrics woven from two types of thread were used in the tabernacle and priests' sacred garments. The basic principle was that sacred things should not be used for common or secular purposes, so ordinary people were not permitted to make such combinations.
- ▶ The tabernacle's lower covering and the veil closing off the sanctuary were made of mixed linen and wool. The high priest's ephod, breastplate, and sash contained the same mixture (Exodus 28:26, 39); for ordinary priests, this mixture was limited to their sash (Exodus 39:29). Israelites were permitted to add one blue woolen thread to their linen tassels, a practice approved by the rabbis. While the material was linen, the blue thread had to be wool. For common people, this single mixed-material tassel served as a symbol of divine kingship. (Jacob Milgrom, Leviticus 17-22: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, Vol. 2, p.1659)

▷ Postscript: Love is the Fulfillment of the Law

Marcion (circa 85-160 AD) was a second-century Christian heretical leader. One of his erroneous teachings claimed that the God of the Old Testament and the Father in the New Testament were two different gods: the Old Testament "Creator" (Demiurge) was just but severe, while the God revealed by Jesus was the supreme, benevolent God. Thus, he rejected the entire Old Testament, accepting only a modified version of Luke's Gospel and portions of Paul's letters, removing what he considered any Old Testament elements. He was the first to attempt establishing his own version of the "Christian canon."

When we lack a deep understanding of the Old Testament background and laws, we might develop similar misunderstandings. How did Jesus and Paul view the Old Testament law?

"Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (Matthew 22:37-40)

"Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not murder,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not covet,' and whatever

other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law." (Romans 13:8-10)

Jesus and Paul understood the law as principles of "loving God" and "loving your neighbor as yourself." Through the scripture readings of the past two weeks, I hope readers can see God's wisdom, love, and mercy behind the law. However, the Old Testament laws were not God's ultimate ideal for humanity, but rather wise instructions adapted to that era due to human weakness and hardheartedness. As I better understand the culture of Old Testament times and imagine the circumstances then, I increasingly appreciate the wisdom in the law and God's love for Israel.

"Blessed is the one whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night." (Psalm 1:2)

May we also become the blessed ones the psalmist describes. May God's grace and peace be with you!

In Christ,
Henry Au, Pastor and Teacher
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