

The Laws of Moses (1450 – 1400 BCE)

Laws of Special Crimes

Crimes Against a Person

Crimes Against Property

Readings: Exodus 21:12-16, 18-27; 22:1-4; Leviticus 24:17, 24:19-21; Numbers 35:9-34; Deuteronomy 5:19; 19:1-14; 22:25-29; 24:7; 25:11-12

Reflections:

- It is hard to imagine a world without police or a prison system. Everything has to be rectified in the moment. For a nomadic people setting up a new community, the laws reveal a type of mercy uncommon in the ancient world: the requirement of multiple witnesses, the protection of slaves' rights, and cities of refuge. All of these reveal a heart for truth and mercy even within a world where immediate, corporal punishment is the primary means of maintaining law and order.
- With this said, it still falls far short of what we have in Christ. Eye for eye, life for life is fully enforced. Slaves are property and can be beaten. This is compassionate compared to societies that used slaves for human sacrifice but falls a long way short of what we see in Christ, "No slave or free."
- It is interesting to note the reference to someone's ally and "God lets it happen." It does suggest that God at times does intervene to prevent bad things from happening and at other times, he lets it happen as a part of the fallen condition of the planet.
- Blood being spilt defiles the land. God, although he holds life and death in his hands, is not a God of death but rather a God of life. Nature is tied to our sinfulness and is not meant to have blood spilt on it. It goes against God's created order.
- Note that God has no prisons for criminals but he does have cities of refuge for those in need of protection. It shows his emphasis on saving people.
- Kidnapping was closely aligned with slavery.
- Slaves' rights are basic but they are there. As previously mentioned, other ancient societies used them for human sacrifices so this goes a long way to show God's desire to protect them. Still, it seems sad that God allowed them to be viewed as property.

- Women have rights as well, and protection against abuse and neglect. Again, it seems quite basic but compared to other societies this shows a fundamental desire to protect the weak and vulnerable.
- It is funny that there is actually a severe law against women grabbing a man's testicles when attempting to defend her husband. I guess there was a problem with this. 😊
- Many of these laws are hard for us to identify with because we live in a completely different time, with different options, and with a different cultural understanding. We must be careful not to impose back our western democratic perspective but seek to understand these laws within the broader context of that period. These laws were viewed as radically merciful even though today they fall far short of our cultural standards that have been shaped by the values of Jesus' teaching.