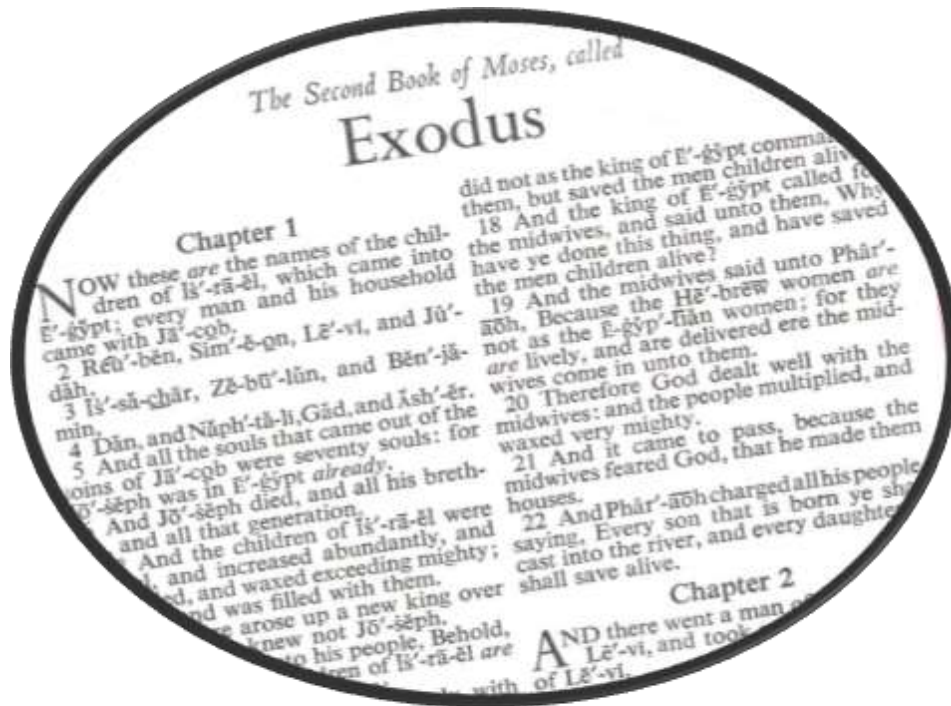


EXODUS – WEEK 15

RULES FOR LIVING



F. Michael Slay

A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

Exodus 22:16–23:22 – Rules for Living

Here we get more laws and rules. They support good family and neighborly relationships.

These rules are remarkably similar to modern laws and “advice”. Not surprisingly, these rules have passed the test of time.

We’re pleased to provide *the DEEP* studies in PDF format at no charge. We hope you will find them helpful and encouraging as you press on in your journey toward spiritual maturity in the Lord.

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Thank you.

Exodus 22:16–23:22 – Rules for Living
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1 Exodus 22:16-20 (NKJV)

“If a man entices a virgin who is not betrothed, and lies with her, he shall surely pay the bride-price for her to be his wife. If her father utterly refuses to give her to him, he shall pay money according to the bride-price of virgins.

“You shall not permit a sorceress to live.

“Whoever lies with an animal shall surely be put to death.

“He who sacrifices to any god, except to the LORD only, he shall be utterly destroyed.”

Once again, we see the law favoring women; the responsibility for pre-marital sex lands entirely on the man. The bride-price is very steep (more than a year’s wages) and the girl’s father can call off the wedding and still get the bride price. This should make any man think twice.

However, if the woman is betrothed, this is equivalent to adultery and the penalty is much worse.

“If a young woman who is a virgin is betrothed to a husband, and a man finds her in the city and lies with her, then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city, and you shall stone them to death with stones, the young woman because she did not cry out in the city, and the man because he humbled his neighbor’s wife; so you shall put away the evil from among you.

“But if a man finds a betrothed young woman in the countryside, and the man forces her and lies with her, then only the man who lay with her shall die.” – Deuteronomy 22:23-25 (NKJV)

God’s law doesn’t shy away from capital punishment. This stuff is important to Him – much more important than long lives for disobedient people. The last three verses in today’s passage also reflect that. These things are nowhere near being capital crimes in our society.

These harsh punishments seem to only make sense from God’s point of view. Too bad that’s beyond our vision. We’re stuck in our human, temporal perspective, which sees these punishments as too severe.

Part of the process of growing in Christ is maturing our perspective. Even though we can’t understand God’s ways, we can come to appreciate them and be comfortable with them. Still, that’s a big change.

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, – Romans 12:2a (NKJV)

Conversion can’t be the only part of our growth in Christ that’s a transformative; Romans was written to Christians. So, what is Paul telling us to do in Romans 12?

Ask God to transform you. Sanctification is hard work, but it’s not our hard work.

2 Exodus 22:21-31 (ESV)

“You shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. You shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child. If you do mistreat them, and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry, and my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless.

“If you lend money to any of my people with you who is poor, you shall not be like a moneylender to him, and you shall not exact interest from him. If ever you take your neighbor's cloak in pledge, you shall return it to him before the sun goes down, for that is his only covering, and it is his cloak for his body; in what else shall he sleep? And if he cries to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate.

“You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people.

“You shall not delay to offer from the fullness of your harvest and from the outflow of your presses. The firstborn of your sons you shall give to me. You shall do the same with your oxen and with your sheep: seven days it shall be with its mother; on the eighth day you shall give it to me.

“You shall be consecrated to me. Therefore you shall not eat any flesh that is torn by beasts in the field; you shall throw it to the dogs.”

Note that these laws don't include any schedule of punishment – there's no, “he shall pay double,” no, “eye for eye, tooth for tooth.” Suddenly, the law shifts gears and, for these offenses, God is going to execute judgment when He *hears their cry*. Why are these laws different?

They are not civil laws; they're rules for godly living. They set a higher standard than what is required for the functioning of a civilized society. While God promises to execute severe penalties for breaking some of these rules, that's up to Him. And, these rules are strictly for Israelites; foreigners are exempt.

This starts a pattern that will carry through the whole Old Testament, and often seems puzzling – God holds his people to a higher standard. He frequently punishes Israel harshly for minor offenses while letting other nations off (or punishing them similarly but for much greater crimes).

It's actually a blessing, but it sure doesn't feel like one.

Christians also get this “higher standard” treatment – and can be just as annoyed by it. Unfortunately, there are some preachers who think we aren't held to a higher standard and instead get health and wealth. This contradicts Jesus's warnings, Acts, the epistles, and all of Church history.

So, we know being a Christian isn't a picnic but do we appreciate it? Are trials frustrating or an honor?

Ask God to help you see the struggles we face for what they really are.

Ask Him to mature your attitude about challenges of being a servant of Christ.

3 Exodus 23:1-9 (NKJV)

“You shall not circulate a false report. Do not put your hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness. You shall not follow a crowd to do evil; nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after many to pervert justice. You shall not show partiality to a poor man in his dispute.

“If you meet your enemy’s ox or his donkey going astray, you shall surely bring it back to him again. If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden, and you would refrain from helping it, you shall surely help him with it.

“You shall not pervert the judgment of your poor in his dispute. Keep yourself far from a false matter; do not kill the innocent and righteous. For I will not justify the wicked. And you shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the discerning and perverts the words of the righteous.

“Also you shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the heart of a stranger, because you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”

As with the previous passage, these are not laws with specific schedules of punishment, but rules for righteous living for God’s people.

And these rules hold Israel (and us) to an even higher standard than that. Even your *enemy's* ox must be rescued in times of trouble. The same rule holds if *you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden*. This goads people into being better than they feel like being.

Also, we must treat the poor fairly. *You shall not pervert the judgment of your poor in his dispute*. So, how do you apply this in a modern wealthy nation? We don’t have the kind of poor that existed back then.

I learned what real poverty looks like on my business trips to Brazil. The town we were in (San Jose dos Compos) has, right smack in the middle of it, a neighborhood known as the black hole. At night, the black hole is totally dark and the rest of the town is a lighted ring around it.

The black hole is a valley with no electricity, partly because it’s a flood plain. The people who live there are poorer than most Americans can even imagine. They have few possessions and little income. People like these frequently get hit by misfortunes and injustices.

This passage commands us to not add to that. God holds a special place in His heart for the poor.

Our poor may not be a poor as the folks that lived in the black hole but they’re poor enough. We are commanded, in no uncertain terms, to minister to them.

But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? – 1 John 3:17 (NKJV)

If we don’t minister to those in need, people won’t be attracted to our message – nor should they be.

4 Exodus 23:10-12 (NKJV)

“Six years you shall sow your land and gather in its produce, but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave, the beasts of the field may eat. In like manner you shall do with your vineyard and your olive grove. Six days you shall do your work, and on the seventh day you shall rest, that your ox and your donkey may rest, and the son of your female servant and the stranger may be refreshed.”

The magnificent thing about this passage is that it gives the purpose for these practices – and the purpose is rest and refreshment. The rules sound like they are designed to honor the week of creation. Yes, but the text details compassion based reasons.

A pattern is becoming evident that is quite the opposite of the popular perception of Old Testament law. The groups that were typically downtrodden at that time (e.g., women, slaves, the poor, even livestock) are blessed by the law.

The Old Testament was dozens of centuries ahead of its time. Those who argue it should have been even more modern need to consider the limitations of communication. Concepts can be so advanced they make no sense to the listener.

You can't explain snow to a Bahamian and you can't explain Heaven to anyone. The whole Bible has to be dumbed down to a level we can handle.

Most folks think that Jesus instituted a new covenant that reversed (or at least radically changed) a lot of the old covenant. But what Jesus really did was understand the old covenant, fulfill it, and explain it to us (like what He did on the road to Emmaus).

The Old Testament law is a treasure trove of wisdom.

Praise the LORD that we even have the Old Testament. Imagine how difficult it was to preserve scripture before Gutenberg's invention of movable type. There were some times when the preservation of God's word seemed near extinction.

Of course God had this all planned out, but it's still a marvel to study. The Dead Sea Scrolls are a case in point. With all the fighting that has gone on in that region, their preservation is amazing.

Thank God for inspiring people to write His word down, and for giving us those incredibly dedicated saints who preserved that word (Old and New Testaments).

Also, be challenged to be the kind of saint who could have that level of commitment to God's word. If that scares you, good; it scares me too.

If you really allow God to use you, all bets are off. You can't know what's going to happen next.

5 Exodus 23:13-19 (NKJV)

“And in all that I have said to you, be circumspect and make no mention of the name of other gods, nor let it be heard from your mouth.

“Three times you shall keep a feast to Me in the year: You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread (you shall eat unleavened bread seven days, as I commanded you, at the time appointed in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt; none shall appear before Me empty); and the Feast of Harvest, the firstfruits of your labors which you have sown in the field; and the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you have gathered in the fruit of your labors from the field.

“Three times in the year all your males shall appear before the Lord GOD.

“You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with leavened bread; nor shall the fat of My sacrifice remain until morning. The first of the firstfruits of your land you shall bring into the house of the LORD your God. You shall not boil a young goat in its mother’s milk.”

These rules are all religious. None make any sense secularly. Because boiling *a young goat in its mother's milk* is so creepy, many think this must have been a pagan practice that God bans here. However, no evidence of this practice has turned up, so commentators don't recommend taking this expression literally. It's better understood as a ban on eating meat and cheese together.

Importantly, God says, *“Three times in the year all your males shall appear before the Lord GOD.”* Both YHVH and Adonai are used here. Other translations say, “... before the LORD your God.” This is highly specific and personal.

It means that each feast involves sacrifice before the LORD, in the tabernacle. While, *“None shall appear before Me empty,”* is in reference to the feast of the unleavened bread, in context it refers to all three feasts. Similarly, *“The first of the firstfruits of your land you shall bring into the house of the LORD your God,”* is a general rule, even though it sounds like it only applies to the Feast of Harvest.

These appearances before the LORD are more important than the celebrations they are associated with.

Appearing before the LORD is meant to be serious and intimidating. Yet we appear before the LORD every time we pray. Are you ever intimidated by that? Do you wonder if your prayers are proper?

Every Christian should periodically take stock of their prayer life. Am I praying regularly enough? Am I praying reverently enough? Is my prayer life edifying? What impact is my prayer life having on my spiritual growth?

This is a great topic to take up with your pastor or other spiritual mentor. They're sure to be helpful. Spiritually mature Christians almost invariably have a strong prayer life.

It has a lot to do with how they became mature.

6 Exodus 23:20-22 (NKJV)

“Behold, I send an Angel before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. Beware of Him and obey His voice; do not provoke Him, for He will not pardon your transgressions; for My name is in Him. But if you indeed obey His voice and do all that I speak, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries.”

This passage contains valuable clues to one of the great mysteries of the Old Testament. Often the appearance of an angel leaves the reader wondering, “Was that just an angel, or a theophany, or what?” Some passages are clear; others are not. Here, God is sending an angel but he carries great authority.

God equates the angel’s voice with God’s voice when He says, *“Beware of Him and obey His voice.”* The angel’s words are God’s words. That’s not surprising, since “angel” means “messenger”. Relaying God’s words is pretty much what angels do.

But God says, *“My name is in Him.”* What does that mean? Obviously, *“My name is in Him,”* means something important. So, who is this guy?

Many commentators think that this is the LORD himself. That’s why the NKJV capitalizes the pronouns in this passage. God also says, *“do not provoke Him, for He will not pardon your transgressions.”* At minimum, God has given this angel some kind of pardon power. Also, any rebellion would be *against Him*.

On the other hand, the LORD himself appears many times in Exodus (e.g., in a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night) and Moses simply describes those incidents as the LORD appearing. Sometimes Moses uses “the angel of the LORD” (Ex 3:2) or “the glory of the LORD” (Ex. 24:16) to describe the LORD showing up, but not just “an Angel.”

I don’t suppose this can be fully understood this side of eternity, but clearly *“My name is in Him”* denotes a significant delegation of power and authority.

That fits. Names mean a lot.

We are called Christians. God’s name is in us. That means something. I suspect we have more power and authority than we realize. The great saints certainly did. If Jesus is our Lord and the Holy Spirit lives in us, then we are His messengers. So, what are we supposed to do with that?

Not just sit back and enjoy God’s blessings, that’s for sure. We were saved for a purpose. Do you know your calling? Have you figured out your Personal Mission Field?

<https://www.ailbe.org/resources/videos/item/8441-personal-mission-field>

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. Have you ever had a post-conversion experience that felt transformative?
2. Ever looked back on a trial that was annoying at the time, but in retrospect realized its good purpose?
3. What's the deepest poverty you've seen?
4. Can you imagine dedicating your whole life to making a copy of the Bible by hand? Do you know anyone who seems that dedicated?
5. Have you found something that helps make your prayer life stronger?
6. Why do you think God saved you?

Items for prayer: