*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

August 3 - 8

*Exodus Chapters Twenty-One and Twenty-Two*

**Monday, August 3 Exodus 20:22-26**

*“Regarding idols and altars”*

The reiteration of the first two commandments indicates their importance for understanding what follows, not only in this brief passage about idols and altars, but to the rest of what is known as the Book of the Covenant (Exodus 20:22-23:19), a section of Exodus that covers a wide variety of legal issues, including worship, protection of property, and personal injury. Both the Ten Commandments and the Book of the Covenant begin the same way, with a declaration that God and God alone is worthy of Israel’s worship and is therefore to be obeyed.

The specific regulations for the building of altars probably reflect the awareness of the nature and shape of altars that the nations surrounding Israel would build to their gods. The use of earth or uncut stone for the worship of Israel’s God would contrast with the elaborately constructed and decorated altars to idols. The problem with stepped altars is not simply a matter of prudishness or social embarrassment; it is also a statement against pagan cultic practices which often included sexual rituals.

*We worship you alone, Lord, and we are blessed. Amen.*

**Tuesday, August 4 Exodus 21:1-11**

*“Regarding Hebrew slaves”*

It seems that people, even Israelites who had been freed from Egyptian slavery, could be owned by other Israelites. The reason for this is not given us by the writer. His focus is on the proper treatment of these slaves and it is here that Israel’s humanitarian thrust may be placed in contrast to the nations around them, particularly Egypt. For one thing, there is no perpetual slavery for Israelite men. In the seventh year (a clear application of the fourth commandment), a male slave is to go free without any legal obligation. The only stipulation is that he go as he came. If he came with a wife, she leaves with him. If a wife was given to him, she and any children must remain.

Modern readers will have misgivings not only regarding the reality of Hebrew slavery, but also the unequal treatment of males and females. While male slaves may go free in the seventh year, female slaves may not. Moreover it seems that Hebrew fathers could sell their own daughters into slavery. Again, we are not given reasons for these social conditions.

*All who live on the lowest rungs of the social ladder, Lord, are to be treated properly. Amen.*

**Wednesday, August 5 Exodus 21:12-27**

*“Regarding humans injuring other humans”*

This section deals with the proper treatment of fellow Israelites – this time personal injury in general. It is helpful to think of these laws as an application of the fifth (parents) and sixth (murder) commandments, though we should not apply this formula too rigidly. The kidnapping law in verse 16 probably falls under the eighth commandment (stealing).

The first point made here is a distinction between an intentional, premeditated killing and unintentional, accidental killing. The former is met with nonnegotiable punishment. If the latter happens, however, such a person will have the opportunity to take refuge in some not yet specified location (“cities of refuge,” described in more detail in Numbers 35:6-32).

One’s conduct toward one’s parents is also prominent here. Death is mandated to anyone who attacks/strikes or curses his or her parents. The word translated “attacks/strikes” can also mean

“kills,” and that may be what is in mind here. What it means to curse one’s parents is ambiguous, although a curse is more than mere words; a curse is words backed by harmful actions.

*We honor your commandments, Lord, when we protect the welfare of other. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

August 3 - 8

*Exodus Chapters Twenty-One and Twenty-Two*

**Thursday, August 6 Exodus 21:28-36**

*“Regarding injuries involving animals”*

We move from injuries inflicted between human beings (slave and free) to injuries involving animals, either inflicted by them or to them. These laws also indicate the value of a slave’s life. Two types of bulls are referred to, the one that gores a human in an isolated incident and the one who has had a habit of goring. In the first case, the bull is put to death but the owner is not held responsible. In the second case, both the bull and the owner must be put to death. A payment option may be exercised, however, thus “redeeming” the negligent owner’s life. If, however, the bull gores a servant, the bull is killed but the owner has only to pay a fine of thirty shekels of silver to the owner of the deceased slave.

Whereas injury by animals as a result of human negligence deserves some recompense, so too injury done to animals by negligent humans. We are not told why someone would dig or uncover a pit. The point is simply that, like the loss of a slave, the loss of an animal means a financial loss for the owner. Hence, some financial compensation is in order.

*We take proper care, Lord, not to cause others financial loss. Amen.*

**Friday, August 7 Exodus 22:1-8**

*“Regarding matter of property”*

The subject of the first part of this section is stealing and the killing of the intruder, which is only permissible at night. The logic behind this law seems to be that if the intruder is identifiable, the penalty for their crime should be left to the proper authorities. Perhaps this law is intended to discourage vigilante justice. Moreover, death is not the proper penalty for thievery. That killing the thief at night is permissible appears to give the victim great liberty to defend his own property, as well as preventing the potential threat to himself and his family. Also included here are laws that deal with matters of restitution.

Negligence is also a crime. We saw this in the previous section regarding animals injuring or killing humans. Since damage to property is in view here rather than personal injury, the penalty is material restitution rather than death. Whatever is damaged, whether by grazing or fire, must be paid back in kind. Lastly, trust is an important matter. When someone entrusts you with something for safekeeping, you are ultimately responsible.

*We respect the property of others, Lord. Amen.*

**Saturday, August 8 Exodus 22:9-17**

*“Regarding matters of compensation”*

In cases of wrongful possession, when it can be proved that someone is in illegal possession of someone else’s property, that person will pay double. If the safekeeping of livestock is involved, the matter is more complicated. With animals there is always the potential of death or injury. In this case, it must first be settled whether the one entrusted was immediately responsible. This is determined by the taking of an oath before the Lord. If the person is innocent, no restitution is required. If the person has been irresponsible in his care, there must be compensation for the loss.

When a virgin who is not pledged to be married is seduced by a man (implying consent on her part rather than rape), she shall become that man’s wife. In this situation the wronged party is the father, for he is the one who has suffered the loss of the bride price that a man would pay to him in order to marry his daughter. That is why the man who seduced the woman will have to make restitution to him, not to her. Marriage, which would help the woman to save face, is something the father can refuse, but the bride-price must be paid to him nonetheless.

*There should be just compensation for those who wrongly suffer loss, Lord. Amen.*