
Exodus 22; John 1; Job 40; 2 Corinthians 10

WE SHALL DO WELL to reflect on a little of the case law found in the Pentateuch—beginning now with some of the laws of restitution found in **Exodus 22:1-15**.

Thieves must not only pay back what they stole, but something extra as well (22:1, 4). This extra amount is not only a punishment for them, but compensates the victim for the sense of being violated, or for the inconvenience of being deprived of whatever had been stolen. Zacchaeus understood the principle, and his repentance was demonstrated by his resolution to make restitution fourfold, and give generously to the poor (Luke 19:1-10).

If a thief cannot pay back what he has stolen, the law demanded that he be sold into slavery to pay for his theft (22:3). Slavery in this culture had economic roots. There were no modern bankruptcy laws, so a person might sell *himself* into slavery to deal with outstanding debts. But in Israel, slavery was not normally to be open-ended: it was supposed to come to an end in seven-year cycles (21:2-4).

The succeeding verses lay out the restitution to be made for various offenses, with exceptions included to make the law flexible enough to handle the hard cases or delicate cases (e.g., 22:14-15). In some instances, conflicting claims must be brought before a judge, who is charged with discerning who is telling the truth. For instance, if someone gives his neighbor his silver or goods for safekeeping, and then that neighbor claims that they were stolen from him by a thief, a judge must determine whether the neighbor is telling the truth, or is himself a thief. If the thief is caught, he must pay back double. If the judge determines that the neighbor is a liar, the neighbor must himself pay back double the amount (22:7-9).

When the crime is theft, *restitution* most directly preserves the notion of *justice*. Where thieves are simply sent to prison, it will not be long before experts debate whether the purpose of prison is remedial, therapeutic, educational, custodial (for the preservation of society), or vengeful. A sentence directly related to the crime preserves the primacy of *justice*. The same is true, of course, of the much maligned *lex talionis*, the “eye for an eye” statute (21:23-25) that was not an excuse for a personal vendetta but a way of giving the courts punishments that exactly fitted the crime. This sense of justice needing to be satisfied permeates the Old Testament treatments of sin and transgression as well, ultimately preparing the way for an understanding of the cross as the sacrifice that meets the demands of justice (cf. Rom. 3:25-26).

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Exodus 23; John 2; Job 41; 2 Corinthians 11



WHEN THE JEWISH LEADERS question Jesus' right to cleanse the temple as he did, and demand that he provide some authority for his action, he replies, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days" (John 2:19).

Only John's gospel records this early exchange. According to the Synoptics, at Jesus' trial this utterance was vaguely recalled by those who wanted him done away with on the capital charge of temple desecration. That their memories of the event were a little fuzzy accords well with the fact that Jesus uttered these words at the *beginning* of his ministry, perhaps two years and more before his arrest and trial.

But what did Jesus mean by these words? His opponents thought he was referring to the literal temple, and judged his claim ludicrous (2:20). According to John, not even the disciples understood what he was talking about at the time. When John wrote his gospel, of course, he knew, and he records his conclusion: "But the temple he had spoken of was his body" (2:21). But he faithfully records, "After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken" (2:22).

Several things follow:

(1) John is often accused of anachronism, of reading back into the time of Jesus events and beliefs that developed only later. This is singularly unlikely. No evangelist is more persistent than John (at least sixteen times) in carefully distinguishing what the disciples understood back *then* (during Jesus' ministry) and what they understood only *later*.

(2) The turning point in their understanding of Jesus' words was the combination of his resurrection from the grave, and a fresh grasp of and belief in the Scripture (2:22). Because Jesus died and rose again, they were forced to think of Jesus the Messiah in more than merely regal or triumphal categories. Both the events and Jesus' own tutelage of them taught them that the Messiah was to be not only the Davidic King, but the Suffering Servant. The old covenant mandate of a priestly system, sacrifices, a day of atonement, a Passover lamb, a peculiar temple constructed to a specific design laid down by God himself—all forced them to recognize that their earlier reading of Scripture (what we call the Old Testament) had been terribly reductionistic. Now they could see that the Old Testament temple, the meeting place between God and his covenant people, pointed to the ultimate "meeting place," the ultimate Mediator. Jesus would occupy this role by virtue of his death and resurrection—the "temple" would be destroyed, and rebuilt.

(3) Jesus himself is the source of this "hermeneutic," this way of reading Old Testament Scripture.

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Exodus 24; John 3; Job 42; 2 Corinthians 12



IT IS NOT EASY TO SORT OUT some of the sequence of events in these chapters of Exodus. What is clear is that God graciously provides enough of the revelation of his covenant that the people agree to its terms (Ex. 24). More of its stipulations, especially with respect to the tabernacle and priestly arrangements, are spelled out in the next chapters. Moses' long departure on the mountain begins about this time, and precipitates the fickle rebellion that produces the idol of the golden calf (Ex. 32), which brings Moses down the mountain, smashing the tablets of the Ten Commandments. We shall reflect on those events in due course.

Here we must think through several elements of this covenant ratification.

(1) The Israelites would have already been familiar with *suzerainty covenants* that were not uncommon in the ancient world. A regional power or a superpower would impose such a treaty on lesser nations. Both sides would agree to certain obligations. The lesser power agreed to abide by the rules set down by the stronger power, pay certain taxes, maintain proper allegiance; the greater power would promise protection, defense, and loyalty. Often there was an introduction that spelled out the past history, and a postscript that threatened curses and judgments on whichever side broke the covenant.

(2) Parts of Exodus and Deuteronomy in particular mirror these covenants. Some elements in this chapter are unique. What is clear, however, is that the people themselves agree to the covenantal stipulations that Moses carefully writes out: "We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey" (24:7). Thus later rebellion reflects not merely a flighty independent spirit, but the breaking of an oath, the trashing of a covenant. They are thumbing their nose at the treaty of the great King.

(3) To strengthen the allegiance of the covenantal community, God graciously discloses himself not only to Moses but to Aaron and his sons, and to seventy elders. Whenever Old Testament writers say that certain people "saw God" (24:10-11) or the like, inevitably there are qualifications, for as this book says elsewhere, no one can look on the face of God and live (33:20). Thus when we are told that the elders saw the God of Israel, the only description is "something like" a pavement "under his feet" (24:10). God remains distanced. Yet this is a glorious display, graciously given to deepen allegiance, while a special mediating role is preserved for Moses, who alone goes all the way up the mountain.

(4) The covenant is sealed with the shedding of blood (24:4-6).

(5) Throughout the forty days Moses remains on the mountain, the glory of the Lord is visibly displayed (24:15-18). This anticipates developments in later chapters.

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Exodus 25; John 4; Proverbs 1; 2 Corinthians 13

EXODUS 25 AND JOHN 4 are canonically tied together.

The former begins the instructions for the construction of the tabernacle and its accoutrements (Ex. 25—30). The tabernacle is the forerunner of the temple, built in Solomon's day. Repeatedly in these chapters God says, "See that you make them according to the pattern shown you on the mountain," (25:40) or "Set up the tabernacle according to the plan shown you on the mountain" (26:30) or the like. The epistle to the Hebrews picks up on this point. The tabernacle and temple were not arbitrary designs; they reflected a heavenly reality. "This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: 'See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain'" (Heb. 8:5).

John 4 finds Jesus in discussion with a Samaritan woman. Samaritans believed that the proper place to worship God was not Jerusalem, home of the temple, but on Mounts Gerizim and Ebal, since these were the last places stipulated for such worship when the people entered the land (Deut. 11:29; Josh. 8:33). They did not accept as Scripture the texts concerning the monarchy. The woman wants to know what Jesus thinks: Is the appropriate place for worship these mountains, near where they are standing, or Jerusalem (John 4:20)?

Jesus insists that the time is dawning when neither place will suffice (4:21). This does not mean that Jesus views the Samaritan alternative as enjoying credentials equal to those of Jerusalem. Far from it: he sides with the Jews in this debate, since they are the ones that follow the full sweep of Old Testament Scripture, including the move from the tabernacle to the temple in Jerusalem (4:22). "Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks" (4:23).

This means: (1) With the coming of Christ Jesus and the dawning of the new covenant, appropriate worship will no longer be tied to a specific geographic location. Implicitly, this announces the obsolescence of the temple. Worship will be as geographically extensive as the Spirit, as God himself who is spirit (4:24). (2) Worship will not only be "in spirit" but "in truth." In the context of this gospel, this does not mean that worship must be sincere ("true" in that sense); rather, it must be in line with what is ultimately true, the very manifestation of truth, Jesus Christ himself. He is the "true light" (1:9), the true temple (2:19-22), the true bread from heaven (6:25ff.), and more. True worshipers worship in spirit and in truth.

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Exodus 26; John 5; Proverbs 2; Galatians 1

ONE OF THE MOST STRIKING biblical passages dealing with what it means to confess that Jesus Christ is the Son of God is **John 5:16-30**.

In a preindustrial culture, the majority of sons do what their father does. A baker's son becomes a baker; a farmer's son becomes a farmer. This stance—like father, like son—enables Jesus on occasion to refer to his own followers as “sons of God.” Thus Jesus declares, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called *sons of God*” (Matt. 5:9). In other words, God himself is the supreme peacemaker; therefore, people who are peacemakers act, in this respect, like God, and therefore can be designated, in this respect, “sons of God.”

That is the kind of functional category with which Jesus begins in John 5:17. When challenged about his “working” on the Sabbath, he does not offer a different reading of what “Sabbath” means, or suggest that what he was doing was not “work” but some deed of mercy or necessity; rather, he justifies his “working” by saying that he is only doing what his Father does. His Father works (even on the Sabbath, or providence itself would cease!), and so does he.

His interlocutors perceive that this is an implicit claim to equality with God (5:18). Yet almost certainly they misunderstand Jesus in one respect. They think the claim blasphemous, because it would make Jesus into *another* God—and they are quite right to hold that there is but one God. Jesus responds with two points. *First*, he insists he is functionally dependent on his Father: “the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing” (5:19). Jesus is not another “God-center”: he is functionally subordinate to his Father. Yet *second*, this functional subordination is itself grounded in the fact that *this* Son does *whatever* the Father does (5:19). Christians may be “sons of God” in certain respects; Jesus is the unique Son, in that “whatever the Father does the Son also does.” If the Father creates, so does the Son: indeed, the Son is the Father's agent in creation (1:2-3). In the following verses, the Son, like the Father, raises people from the dead, and is the Father's agent in the final judgment.

Muslims with little grasp of Christian theology think the Christian Trinity is made up of God, Mary, and Jesus: God copulated with Mary and produced Jesus. They think the notion bizarre and blasphemous, and they are right. But this is not what we hold, nor what Scripture teaches. I wish they could study John 5.

I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

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BEFORE WE MEET:

1. In the past week what did you learn about God from what you read?
2. In the past week what did you learn about people from what you read?
3. In the past week what is one question you have from what you read?

Exodus 27; John 6; Proverbs 3; Galatians 2


JESUS DECLARES HIMSELF TO BE the “bread of life” (John 6:35), the “bread of God” (6:33).

The language is metaphorical, of course. That is made clear by John 6:35, where the metaphor is unpacked just a little: “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.” One normally *eats* bread; one does not “come” to bread or “believe” in bread. Thus what Jesus means by eating this bread of life must be largely equivalent to what it means to come to Jesus and believe in him.

This “bread of life discourse” (as it is called) follows the feeding of the five thousand (6:1-15). There Jesus provides bread and fish to the hungry masses. These were the staple foods of Galilee; he provided what was needed to sustain life. But in this gospel the evangelist points out that Jesus’ miracles are not mere events of power, they are significant: they point beyond themselves, like signs. This miracle points to the fact that Jesus not only *provides* bread, but rightly understood he is bread. He is the staple apart from which there is no real life at all.

Further, he is the ultimate “manna” (6:30-33). His interlocutors remind him that Moses provided manna, “bread from heaven” (Ex. 16), and they want him to do the same. After all, he had done it the day before in the feeding of the five thousand. If Jesus has performed the miracle once, why not again—and again and again? Isn’t that what Moses did?

But Jesus insists the ultimate source of the “bread from heaven” was not Moses but God, and the ultimate “bread from heaven” was not the manna of the wilderness years, but the One who came down from heaven—Jesus himself. After all, everyone who ate the manna in the wilderness died. Those who eat the ultimate bread from heaven, the antitype of the manna, never die.

People in an agrarian culture understand that almost everything they eat is something that has died. We think of food as packaged things. The reality is that when you eat a hamburger, you are eating a dead cow, dead wheat, dead lettuce, dead tomatoes, dead onions, and so forth. The chief exception is the odd mineral, like salt. Jesus’ audience, and John’s readership, understood that other things die so that we may live; if those other things don’t die, we do. Jesus gives his life so that we may live; either he dies, or we do. He is the true bread from heaven who gives his life “for the life of the world” (6:51).

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Exodus 28; John 7; Proverbs 4; Galatians 3



THE PRIESTLY GARMENTS God prescribes (Ex. 28) are strange and colorful. Perhaps some of the details were not meant to carry symbolic weight, but were part of the purpose of the ensemble as a whole: to give Aaron and his sons “dignity and honor” as they discharge their priestly duties (28:2, 40).

Some of the symbolism is transparent. The breastpiece of the high priest’s garment was to carry twelve precious or semi-precious stones, set out in four rows of three, “one for each of the names of the sons of Israel, each engraved like a seal with the name of one of the twelve tribes” (28:21).

The breastpiece is also called “the breastpiece of decision” (28:29). This is probably because it carries the Urim and Thummim. Perhaps they were two stones, one white and one black. They were used in making decisions, but just how they operated no one is quite sure. On important matters, the priest would seek the presence and blessing of God in the temple, and operate the Urim and Thummim, which would come out one way or the other and thus, under God’s sovereign care, provide direction. Thus over his heart the priest simultaneously carries the names of the twelve tribes “as a continuing memorial before the LORD,” and the Urim and Thummim, “whenever he enters the presence of the LORD,” thus always bearing “the means of making decisions for the Israelites over his heart before the LORD” (28:29-30).

On the front of his turban, Aaron is to affix a plate of pure gold. On it will be engraved the words, “HOLY TO THE LORD” (28:36). “It will be on Aaron’s forehead, and he will bear the guilt involved in the sacred gifts the Israelites consecrate, whatever their gifts may be. It will be on Aaron’s forehead continually so that they will be acceptable to the LORD” (28:38). This assumes that the “sacred gifts the Israelites consecrate” were primarily sin offerings of various sorts, offered to atone for guilt. The priest, even by the symbolism embodied in his garments, conveys this guilt into the presence of the holy God, who alone can deal with it. The text implies that if the priest does not exercise this role, the sacrifices the Israelites offer will *not* be acceptable to the Lord. The priestly/sacrificial/temple structure hangs together as a complete system.

In due course these meditations will reflect on passages that announce the impending obsolescence of this system, which thereby becomes a prophetic announcement of the ultimate priest, the ultimate covenant community, the ultimate authority for giving direction, the ultimate offering, the ultimate temple. There is no limit to his “dignity and honor” (cf. Rev. 1:12-18).

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