

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian Church,  
10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

**DHW BIBLE CLASS  
LESSON 18  
EXODUS  
CHAPTERS 22-23**

**INTRODUCTION**

*“Now these are the judgements, which thou shalt set before them,”* God told Moses. In the previous chapter, God had listed a series of judgements that relate to various areas of human relationship. Now in these two chapters, the list continues. More judgements are given. These judgements concern fairness and justice in acts like the loss of livestock or other property through carelessness of people, thefts, breach of trust or anything borrowed, seduction, sorcery, sexual offences, sacrificing to false gods. Some judgements concern a compassion for the poor and fatherless, the oppressed, and the foreigners. This list ends with the injunction to the people to consecrate themselves and their resources three times in a year through observing the three major feasts of the LORD.

Although these judgements were given to Israel in the Old Testament, they are nevertheless very valuable and precious to us in the New Testament. They are the judgements of God and not

man. As such, the principles underlying these judgements are pure, perfect and profitable. These two chapters (22:1-23:19) are outlined in detail according to the description given by the divine author. The commentary will be on the main focus of each section rather than dealing with each judgement as they are presented.

**OUTLINE**

**A. JUDGEMENTS ON THEFT  
(22:1-4)**

1. The compensation for selling a stolen ox or sheep was five-fold or four-fold respectively (v.1)
2. Injury to a burglar (vv.2-3)
  - a. If the burglar broke in at night, and if he should be killed, he might not be avenged (2)
  - b. If the burglar broke in the daytime, and if he should be killed he might be avenged, but if he was not killed, he should compensate for the theft, and if he had no means, he must be sold (3)
3. If caught red-handed, the thief should restore double (v.4)

**B. JUDGEMENTS ON PROPERTY  
(22:5-6)**

1. Wilfully letting one's animals to feed on another's field and destroy it, full restitution must be made (v.5)

2. Accidental destruction of another's field must be fully restored (v.6)

**C. JUDGEMENTS ON BREACH OF TRUST (22:7-15)**

1. Deposits of money or valuables given to someone for safe-keeping (vv.7-8)
  - a. If stolen and the thief be found, the thief must restore double (7)
  - b. If the thief was not found, the person in trust would be brought before the judges who would make judgement of his innocence (8)
2. Disputes between two parties laying claim to lost animals or things (v.9)
  - a. Both parties to be brought before the judges (9a)
  - b. The guilty party must restore double ((b)
3. Sending an animal for safe-keeping (vv.10-13)
  - a. If the animal died or was hurt or lost, both parties must come before God and take an oath denying wrong-doing (10-11a)
  - b. The judges would decide and no restitution was required (11b)
  - c. If the animal were stolen, the keeper must compensate the owner (12)

- d. If it be torn to pieces, and on ground of its evidence, the keeper did not need to compensate (v.13)

4. Lending and borrowing an item (vv.14-15)
  - a. If a man borrowed any item, and the thing was damaged or the animal died, and if the owner was not involved, the borrower must make restitution (14)
  - b. If the owner was with the item in question, the borrower was absolved from compensating (15)

**D. JUDGEMENTS ON SEXUAL IMMORALITY (22:16-17, 19)**

1. If a man seduced a young lady who was not betrothed, he must marry her (v.16)
2. If the father of the young lady refused to give her to him, the man must pay the dowry (v.17)
3. If any person committed sexual sin with an animal, he must be put to death (v.19)

**E. JUDGEMENTS ON CIVIL AND RELIGIOUS OBLIGATIONS (22:18-23:9)**

1. A witch must not be allowed to live (v.18)
2. Anyone who made sacrifices to false gods must be put to death (v.20)

3. A stranger must be treated with sympathy and love (v.21; 23:9)
  4. Widows and orphans (vv.22-24)
    - a. Mistreatment of any kind forbidden (22)
    - b. God's wrath would be upon those who mistreated them (23-24)
  5. The moneylender to the poor must lend without interest and collateral (vv.25-27)
  6. God or the ruler must not be reviled and cursed (v.28)
  7. God must be presented what was rightfully His (vv.29-30)
    - a. The first fruits of the land (29a)
    - b. The first-born of children (29b)
    - c. The first-fruit of animals (30)
  8. Holiness unto God must be maintained by not eating the meat of animals torn by beasts (v.31)
  9. Other people must be treated with judicial integrity (23:1-3)
    - a. One must not bear false report (v.1)
    - b. One must not be a party with the multitude to do evil (v.2)
    - c. One must not treat the poor unjustly (v.3)
  10. An enemy must be shown kindness (23:4-5)
    - a. If his animal strayed away, bring it back to him (v.4)
    - b. If his ass could not bear its burden, help him (v.5)
  11. All people must be treated with fairness (23:6-7)
    - a. The poor must not be deprived of justice (6)
    - b. Be not a party to put down the innocent and the righteous (v.7)
  12. One must not accept a bribe (23:8)
- F. CEREMONIAL LAWS ON SABBATHS AND SACRED FEASTS (23:10-19)**
1. The people must allow the land to rest in the seventh year (23:10-13)
    - a. The people worked on the land for six years (10)
    - b. In the seventh year, the land was to rest, and also their vineyards and oliveyards so that the poor and the beasts of the field could glean the fields (11)
    - c. They must not work on the sabbath, and this applied to their children, servants, strangers and animals (12)
    - d. They must be diligent in keeping these laws (13)
  2. The people must congregate together on three major feasts (23:14-19)

- a. The Feast of Unleavened Bread (14, 15)
- b. The Feast of Harvest (16a)
- c. The Feast of Ingathering (16b)
- d. All the men would gather these three times (17-19)

## COMMENTARY

### Responsibility & Carelessness

Continuing with the series of judgements in human relationships, this section (22:1-15) focuses on judgements concerning honesty and responsibility in the treatment of personal property. A thief when he is caught must make full restitution for the stolen goods. The fine is quite heavy. In the case of a person who entrusts his money or valuables to his neighbour, and the money or valuables are stolen, if the thief is caught, the thief must compensate double (22:7). But if the thief is not caught, then the two concerned parties will go before the judges, who will decide on the guilt of the trustee. The decision of the judges is final (22:7-9). However, if the thing entrusted is an animal, and should the animal "died, or be hurt, or driven away, no man seeing it" (22:10), the trustee and the owner will take an oath before God, the trustee declaring that he has not cheated his neighbour, he is free from liability (22:11). The taking of an oath before God is a serious matter. If one swears before God and lied, the wrath of God is upon the liar.

In the case of house burglary (22:2-3) if the burglar is harmed and died when he breaks into a house at night, the host of the house is not guilty of bloodshed. But if the burglar is harmed and died when he breaks in broad daylight, the host of the house is guilty of homicide. The reason for this rule is that since the thief breaks into the house in broad daylight, it is assumed that he has no intention to harm the host, other than to steal. The owner of the house has no right to kill the burglar. The burglary in the night is understandable, because in the dark, the host cannot be sure, whether the thief is carrying a deadly weapon. So he has the right to defend himself from possible death. It is interesting to note that theft is not punishable by imprisonment. Moreover, even the life of the thief is protected from unnecessary action.

Carelessness on the part of anyone that causes the loss or damage of another person's property may not be excused. If a person's animals stray to another man's field and eat of the grass of the field, the owner of the animal must compensate the other party. This also applies to a person who kindles a fire, and his neighbour's corn field catches fire through negligence on the part of him who kindles the fire, he must make restitution (22:5, 6).

If a man entrusts his animals for safe-keeping to his neighbour, and if the animal be stolen from him through his carelessness, then the trustee must

make full restitution (22:12). But if the animal is torn in pieces, the trustee must bring in witnesses and he is not liable to compensate (22:13).

In the case of a person who borrows an item from his neighbour, and the thing is damaged, hurt, or dies, the borrower must make good (22:14). But if the owner is present when the damage happens, the borrower is not liable (22:15).

### **Obligations to Man & God**

The next series of judgements (22:16-23:19) covers matters concerning seduction, capital offences, widows and the fatherless, obligations to God, treatment of others, and ceremonial laws of Sabbaths and sacred feasts.

**Seduction** of a young lady is a serious crime. If a man entices a maid, he must marry her. If her parents object and refuse the marriage, the man must pay a dowry (23:16-17).

**Three capital offences** are listed. The “witch” was not to be tolerated and allowed to exist. The word “witch” is better translated “sorcerer”. The word is used to describe one who claimed supernatural knowledge or power, which was used to influence the gods or to cast magic spells. The fact that it is designated to women is because they were more susceptible to this kind of practice.

Included in this category of capital offences is the act of having sex with an animal. This immoral act is unnatural and degrading and was

punishable by death. The people of Israel were prohibited from such immoral practice, which was common then among the Canaanites.

Making sacrifices to false gods was an offence of the gravest kind. It is an open rebellion against the LORD God and was punished by death. This intimates that any form of idolatry or worship of false gods is strictly forbidden and it carries the death penalty.

**The mistreatment of strangers, widows and the fatherless, and the poor** is strictly forbidden. A stranger or a foreigner should be treated with sympathy and kindness. Widows and the fatherless were defenceless and open to abuse and oppression. The penalty for afflicting widows and the fatherless was very severe. God’s wrath would be upon the offender and no mercy would be shown to him (22:24). The poor could easily be exploited by the rich. The laws were given to protect them from unscrupulous men. If the poor borrowed money from his neighbour, the moneylender must not charge any interest. If he took the borrower’s only piece of garment for security, he must return to the poor borrower at the end of the day.

The people must always remember to fulfil **their obligations to God**. First, the people of Israel should not revile God and the rulers of the people (22:28). The translation “gods” should be ruled out because one does not revile false gods and be punished.

The correct translation is “God”<sup>1</sup>. They should not adopt a low esteem, despise, or speak evil of God.

Secondly, the people must remember to consecrate what was due to God (22:29-30). The offering of firstfruits of the land was required of the people (Exodus 13:13)<sup>2</sup>. They were not only required to offer these to the LORD, they must not delay. Man often has this tendency to delay the tithes and offerings due to God. Every male firstborn of their livestock they were to sacrifice unto the LORD after seven days of its birth.

They should be ***holy unto God*** for He is holy (22:31). If they were to be holy, they must not eat the meat of an animal that had been torn by other beasts. Such meat was considered unclean because the injured animal had come in contact with an unclean carnivorous beast, and the blood had not been properly drained from it. Such meat was to be given to the dogs.

A list of laws concerning **the treatment of others** is given in 23:1-9. “Thou shalt not raise a false report” (v.1) is an expansion of the ninth

commandment which stipulates that one must not bear false witness. The law forbade slander and false witness. Such prohibition on the part of the people ensured the wellbeing of the community. This injunction leads on to the next (v.2) that one must not follow the majority of people to do evil. It is characteristic of people to desire to be accepted by the masses. The people must guard against such a tendency when it was evil and not good.

The subject of perversion of justice in that one should not “countenance a poor man in his cause” (v.3) is addressed. Justice should be applied to the poor as equally as it was applied to the rich. The kind attitude towards a person’s enemy foreshadows the teaching in the New Testament. This is no surprise because the teaching is from the same LORD God. The people of Israel were commanded to help their enemy if his ox or ass had gone astray to lead the same back to its owner. The people of Israel should render help to the enemy when his donkey could not bear the heavy burden it was bearing (vv.4-5).

The principle of equal justice to all irrespective of their economic and social standing is to be upheld. The poor should not be deprived of justice (v.6). The godly person must not indulge themselves in any kind of falsehood, and never to “slay the innocent and the righteous” obviously by giving false testimony. God would judge and punish the wicked (v.7). Moreover, the godly

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<sup>1</sup> In the light of Leviticus 24:15 And thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel, saying, Whosoever curseth his God shall bear his sin. 16 And he that blasphemeth the name of the LORD, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him: as well the stranger, as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name of the LORD, shall be put to death.

<sup>2</sup> Exodus 13:13 And every firstling of an ass thou shalt redeem with a lamb; and if thou wilt not redeem it, then thou shalt break his neck: and all the firstborn of man among thy children shalt thou redeem.

person must not take any bribe, for such bribe blinds the wise and pervert the words of the righteous (v.8). This section of miscellaneous judgements ends by repeating the warning not to afflict the stranger or foreigner. Justice too must be accorded to these people.

### **Sabbaths & Sacred Feasts**

The doctrine of *the sabbatical year* was applied to the land. The land was to be ploughed and sowed, and the produce harvested for six years. In the seventh year, the land was to be laid to rest. The purpose for this practice was to permit the poor to glean from these fields, and whatever remains could be eaten by the beasts (vv.10-11). The *keeping of the sabbath* on which there should be no work to include the beasts of burden, and the servants and the strangers on the seventh day was rehearsed. Its purpose was for them to refresh (v.12). This section ends with the exhortation to the people to be deliberate and attentive to these laws and judgements, and they must avoid all manner of idolatry, even to the extent of mentioning the names of these false gods (v.13).

The LORD commanded that they keep three major feasts in the year in which all the males would congregate before Him (vv.14-19). These three feasts were: the feast of unleavened bread; the feast of harvest; and the feast of ingathering. The feast of unleavened bread is linked to the Passover, and for seven days the people should only eat unleavened bread (12: 33-39). The

second was the feast of harvest, which is called in the New Testament period as the feast of Pentecost<sup>3</sup>. This was a joyous occasion because the people brought in the fruits of labour, which the LORD God would bless them. The third and final was the feast of in gathering which is also called “the feast of tabernacles”. It was held at the end of the year.<sup>4</sup>

Three times a year all the males of Israel would gather together before the “Lord GOD” (v.17)<sup>5</sup>. These three feasts were a time of great rejoicing and thanksgiving to God who would bless His people. They too provided the opportunity for the people to gather together to renew their fraternity and fellowship. They provided the means of spreading information and giving opportunities for families to be reunited. These feasts would result in fostering and forging national and spiritual unity.

### **SUMMARY**

These judgements and laws of God that touch pertinent aspects of communal life are precious and productive. They are pure and perfect. If diligently and properly adhered to, they promote the welfare and wealth of the people. As a people of God, we need to draw the principles underlying

<sup>3</sup> It also called the feast of weeks in Exodus 34:22 because it was to be kept seven weeks after the feast of unleavened bread (Leviticus 23:15-16; Deuteronomy 16:9).

<sup>4</sup> For further reference: Leviticus 23:33-36; Deuteronomy 16:13-15; 31:10).

<sup>5</sup> Hebrew, *adonai, yahweh*.

these judgements and laws both for our own individual and corporate benefits. If we want to live godly lives and if we want the church to be strong and be doing the will of God so as to please and glorify Him, we ought to live by these principles. The LORD be praised.



**DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION  
QUESTIONS**

**Daily Readings**

**MONDAY:** Exodus 22:1-6; 1 Samuel  
12:3-5; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10

**TUESDAY:** Exodus 22:7-15; Matthew  
25:14-27

**WEDNESDAY:** Exodus 22:16-24; Isaiah  
1:17; James 1:25-27

**THURSDAY:** Exodus 22:25-31; Malachi  
3:8-12; 2 Corinthians 9:6-8

**FRIDAY:** Exodus 23:1-19; Matthew  
5:38-48

**Discussion Questions**

1. Read Exodus 22:1-15. Which of the  
Ten Commandments form the basis  
for all the judgements?

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2. Why isn't blood-guilt by day the  
same as blood-guilt by night?

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3. If the host kills in self-defence in  
broad daylight, is he is guilty of  
homicide?

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4. Why is the trustee tried for the stolen  
money or goods, "if the thief be not  
found"?

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5. What is the meaning of taking an oath before God in a dispute in the presence of judges

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(3) verses 22-24:

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6. Which of the Ten Commandments form the foundation for the following judgements:

(1) verses 16, 17:

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7. Which commands in this chapter (Exodus 22) would you say are the most important for Christians today to remember?

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(2) verse 20:

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8. What aspect(s) of God's character stands out in the judgements concerning our social responsibilities (chapter 21)?

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9. Is it difficult to do good to our enemies? How can we overcome the difficulty?

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12. What effect would these three annual major gatherings before the LORD have on the people?

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10. What character of God do we learn by God's commandment to the people to let their land rest in the seventh year?

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11. What are the three major feasts?