

Plan and Purpose Bible Lesson #III-17—Statutes and Judgments

We looked at the difference between combining church and state man's way (for example the Roman Catholic Church) and God's way in our last lesson. Since God's way was what might be called a Theocratic Republic, let's look a little closer at how it was set up and the statutes that God gave Israel that governed it. We want to first look at the statutes governing the relationship of the priests to the government.

According to Ex. 40:12-15, Moses was instructed to bring Aaron and his sons before the tabernacle and wash them with water; clothe them with the holy garments; and anoint them to minister to God in the priest's office. This anointing was to be an everlasting priesthood throughout their generations. The word "everlasting" is from the Hebrew *olam*, which actually means "age, or age lasting," rather than "everlasting" as we use the term today. I point this out because in Heb. 7:12, after discussing the change of the priesthood from the Aaronic priesthood to the Melchisedec priesthood, we are told **"for the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law."** Had *olam* meant everlasting as we think of the word today, this law could not have been changed since God says He changes not.

The priests were to be compensated in a number of ways. The breast and right shoulders of all peace offerings were to go to the priests. (Ex. 29:27-28; Lev. 7:28-36; Deut. 18:3-5) The breast was to be a heave offering. Basically, all wave and heave offerings went to the priests. Another wave offering was the sheaf of first fruits at Passover and the loaves of first fruit grain at the Feast of Weeks. (Lev. 23:10-21) The remnant of the meat offerings that was left from the burnt offerings also went to the priests. (Lev. 2:4-11) The shewbread that was to be prepared every Sabbath went to the priests. (Lev. 24:5-9) The tithe of the children of Israel was to go to the tribe of Levi, but they were in turn to tithe of the tithe to the priests. (Num. 18:20-32) We will also see in our study of the Ordinances that under some trespass sins the priests could also receive some money that resulted from fines levied against the guilty.

When the tabernacle was built and divided into two rooms, only the high priest could enter behind the veil into the holy of holies and then he had to follow certain rules very closely or he would die. While this was very much a concern to him personally, it was also a concern of the people in that he was their high priest, their contact with God. Anyone else going into the holy of holies would die. Ex. 30:17-21 tells us that they were to make a laver (bath) of brass that was to sit in between the tabernacle and the altar for burnt offerings and be filled with water. Aaron and his sons were to wash their hands and feet at it before approaching the altar or going into the tabernacle. Failure to do so would bring death to the priest. It was a statute that they wash. This tells us a little as to their position. My wife was once asked by an attorney, as she was being questioned to determine her suitability for a jury, if she felt a policeman was obligated to set an exemplary model for behavior to the rest of the people. Her answer was "yes" and this cost her a seat on the jury. Yet, she was right. By virtue of his position, he was obligated to set an exemplary model for the people. This was somewhat the position of the priests. They were obligated to the people to abide by these rules because of their priestly office. It was certainly to their advantage personally to do so, but in effect, they were the property of the people and as such did not have the right to not follow these rules.

Not only was Israel to destroy all signs of idol-worship in the land, (Lev. 26:1) but the Second Commandment commands them not to make any idols or graven images of their own. It would have had to be the priest's word as to what constituted an idol or image.

Deut. 12:1-19 briefly outlines all of these duties and adds that the people were to take their tithes, their sacrifices and offerings to the place the place that God would choose once they were in the land. They could kill and eat flesh so long as they did not eat the blood but all offerings and sacrifices were to go to the place that God would choose.

The priests were to burn the red heifer whose ashes were to be used in cleansing the unclean as the water of separation. These ashes for the water of separation were to be available to the people by statute for ever. (Num. 19:10) Again, the word "ever" is from the Hebrew *olam*.

Deut. 17:8-13 tells us the priests were to be a part of the judicial process. I think we can safely assume that their job was to hand down the appropriate judgment, based on God's law of judgment, once guilt had been determined by the judge.

I might point out that this Scripture also contains the "contempt of court" law. A matter that was hard to determine was to be taken to the priest and the judge. Once judgment was rendered, the parties involved were to do exactly as the judge had said in accordance with the judgment handed down by the priests. Failure to do so meant death.

A priest was to be with Israel's armies as they went to battle. His job was to encourage the soldiers and counsel them in God's ways. (Deut. 20:1-20)

When a body was found in the field and no one knew who was guilty of slaying him, the elders and judges of the nearest city were to go through a ceremony to receive forgiveness for themselves, and their people of the blood, for the victim. Priests were to be there to witness the occasion. (Deut. 21:1-9)

There are a number of things for which God says the guilty are to be **"cut off from their people or congregation."** We have already mentioned that we believe the "congregation" to be those in good standing, qualified to vote at their particular level of government. Assuming we are correct in this, "cut off from their people or congregation" would mean losing this status of good standing. I think it important that we understand that if they were cut off, they were not eligible to inherit the promises of God. Thus they could not be among those who will rule and reign with Christ. In principle, I think this still applies. It could be permanent or temporary. Permanent removal would be for such things as capital crimes. Temporary removal could be for such things as uncleanness brought about by different situations, in which case it is assumed that correction of the situation would mean reinstatement. Responsibility for the "cutting off" and any reinstatement would have to be a function of civil government. Let's look at a partial list of these sins.

Lev. 3:17 tells us it is a perpetual statute that no one eat fat or blood. Lev. 7:22-27 tells us that anyone who does, shall be cut off from his people. Lev. 17:10-14 confirms this for those eating blood.

Lev. 20:2-6 tells us anyone giving their seed to Molech, or turning after familiar spirits or wizards, God will cut them off from their people.

Ex. 31:14 tells us anyone defiling the Sabbath will be cut off from among his people.

Lev. 7:20 adds to the list anyone eating of the flesh of the peace offering having his uncleanness upon him, apparently referring to having a running issue, or sore, could be cut off. However, verse 21 adds anyone who has touched any unclean thing, including uncleanness of man, unclean beast, or any abominable unclean thing, will be cut off.

Lev. 18:29 says, **“For whosoever shall commit any of these abominations, even the souls that commit them shall be cut off from among their people.”** These abominations, reading chapter 18, include incest, sexual relations with a woman during her menstrual period, adultery, homosexuality and sodomy.

Lev. 19:8 includes cutting off anyone eating of the flesh of a peace offering after the third day.

Lev. 23:27-32 tells us that one who is not afflicted on the Day of Atonement while Num. 9:1-4 includes one who refuses to keep the Passover, they too shall be cut off.

Num. 15:30-31 adds anyone who sins presumptuously, or as the margin of my Bible puts it, which a high hand, is included in the cut off group.

Num. 19:13 adds anyone touching a dead body and not purifying himself.

This gives us an idea of what would constitute a sin that would result in being cut off. Of course, cutting off is a judgment, but it will be a governmental responsibility to enforce or uphold it, whether it be the death penalty or a temporary banishment. Num. 5:1-3 commands that every leper, everyone that hath in issue, and whosoever is defiled by the dead shall be put out without the camp.

Deut. 23:1 tells us that he that is wounded in the stones, or hath his privy member cut off, shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD. Deut. 23:2 says a bastard shall not enter into the congregation, even to his tenth generation shall he not enter. This refers to a mixed breed rather than one born out of wedlock.

We have seen that the Sabbath law is a commandment, an ordinance, and now a statute. The same applied to the feast days and holy days. Ex. 34:18; Lev. 23:10-14; Num. 9:1-14; and Deut. 16:1-8 all deal with the Passover. Ex. 34:22-26; Lev. 23:15-21 and Deut. 16:9-12 deal with the Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost. Lev. 34-43 and Deut. 16:13-15 deal with the Feast of Tabernacles. Lev. 23:24-25 tells us of the Feast of Trumpets while Lev. 16:29-34 and Lev. 23:27-32 deal with the Day of Atonement. I think we can appreciate that with any national holiday, or special day, government has to accommodate it, if not actively enforcing it.

There were also the Sabbath years that involved the year of release, which were sure to provide some problems for government at some level. (Lev. 25:2-7) The same applied to the Jubilee, especially since all real property reverted back to the original owners and many servants were to be released from their servitude. (Lev. 25:8-22)

In fact, the Jubilee had a great deal to do with property laws. Property laws, while not affecting the state directly, certainly require government cognizance and sometimes enforcement of them. Lev. 25:23-24 tells us the land was not to be sold for ever because the land belonged to God. (The word “ever” here is from the Heb. *tsemithuth* which means “extinction.”) The law of redemption was to apply to any land in possession. If anybody had to sell their land, in effect, they only sold the use of it. Thus, if any of his next of kin wanted to redeem it, or if the man was able to redeem it himself, the price of redemption, as was the price of the sale to start with, was to be based on the length of time until the Jubilee. If he wasn’t able to redeem it, or his next of kin couldn’t or wouldn’t redeem it, it would go out in the Jubilee to the original owner, or his family if he was deceased. (Lev. 25:25-28)

The men of the family were the possessors of the land and the inheritance was reckoned to the men only. However, as the Israelites were getting ready to move into the land of Canaan, the five daughters of a man named Zelophehad came to Moses and Eleazar the Priest (Aaron’s son) with a problem. Their father had died in the wilderness having had only daughters, no sons. They felt they

were entitled to his inheritance and stated this to Moses and Eleazar. Moses took the matter before the LORD and two principles of law were given concerning this situation. First, if a man dies having only daughters, then the inheritance is to go to the daughters; if no sons or daughters, it is to go to his brethren; if he had no brethren, it is to go to his father's brethren; if his father had no brethren, then it goes to his kinsman that is next to him or his family. (Num. 27:7-11)

The second principle was that if the inheritance went to his daughter, she was not to marry outside her tribe so that the possession would always stay in the same tribe. (Num. 36:5-9)

The property in a city was under a slightly different law. If a man sold a dwelling in a walled city; he had one year to redeem it. If it wasn't redeemed in that year, it became the permanent possession of the new owner and did not go out in the Jubilee. In un-walled villages, all property was like the fields, it reverted back to the original owner in the Jubilee and could be redeemed anytime. (Lev. 25:29-31)

The tribe of Levi was not to receive an inheritance in the land of Canaan. (Deut. 18:1-2) However, each tribe had to give to the Levites four cities, and their suburbs, for them to live in. Of these cities, six were to be designated as cities of refuge, where the man slayer could flee to escape the avenger of blood. (We'll discuss these cities more in our study of the Judgments.) (Num. 35:2-15; Deut. 19:2-3; 19:7-10)

The property laws of the cities belonging to the Levites were the same as the un-walled villages. Sold property could be redeemed anytime and went back to the original owner in the Jubilee. (Lev. 25:32-34)

Fair and proper treatment of bondservants was another property responsibility that was of great concern to the governmental leaders. If a man waxed poor and had to sell himself into servitude into the hand of a stranger in the land, the law specified he or his family would always have the right of redemption. The price of redemption was to be based on the time left until the Jubilee. But if not redeemed he and his children with him were to go out free in the year of the Jubilee. (Lev. 25:47-55)

We find that the same basic law applies to an Israelite being sold to an Israelite, however, God commands that he not be dealt with as a bond servant, but rather he was to be dealt with as a hired servant. True bond servants were to be of other nations and of the strangers of the land and were permanent possessions, even to be part of one's inheritance that went to their heirs. (Lev. 25:39-46)

An Israelite being a servant to an Israelite was to work 6 years and be released in the 7th year according to Deut. 15:12-18. They were not to be released empty handed however. If he or she wanted to stay, they could do so and would become servants for ever (*olam*).

The economic system, while not a direct responsibility of government, contrary to what our leaders assume today, did have some specific rules that require governmental enforcement. The primary one was the forbiddance of taking usury from each other. The Israelites were commanded to help each other when the other was in need, but they could not exact usury. (Lev. 25:35-38)

They were not to oppress one another in their dealings. The Jubilee was always to be reckoned with in pricing the use of the land. (Lev. 25:14-17)

The poor were to be provided for through each man leaving enough crops in his field that the poor could glean their needs from them. (Lev. 23:22)

Taxes, if you wanted to call them that, consisted of the tithe (Deut. 14:22-29) which was to go to the Levite. (Num. 18:24) Also, the people were to provide pure olive oil for the lamps on the candle stick in the tabernacle. It was a statute that the people furnish the oil and the high priest was to order

the lamps. No detail is given as to how it was to be determined how much oil each was to provide. (Lev. 24:2-4) Anything else required from the people was to be through free will offerings, or the offerings for the sin and trespass sacrifices.

Lev. 24:22 says, **“Ye shall have one manner of law, as well for the stranger, as for one of your own country: for I am the LORD your God.”** I can’t help but feel this was directed primarily to the judges and elders.

Another law, though certainly a commandment to the individual, would have to be enforced by the judges, **“Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in meteyard, in weight, or in measure. Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin, shall ye have.”** (Lev. 19:35-36)

Num. 30:2-16 teaches us a statute that would be frowned upon very strongly today. This is that the husband, or father has the authority over a wife or daughter and had the right to prevent or undo a vow that they might make. The man was to be recognized as the authority.

If a man and his wife had a stubborn and rebellious son who would not obey them, even when chastened, they were to take him to the elders of the city that were then to have the men of the city stone him that he die. (Deut. 21:18-21)

Anyone hung on a tree because of his crime was not to be left overnight but was to be buried the same day he died for anyone hung on a tree was accursed of God (Deut. 21:22-23) This law played a large part in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

God recognized that Israel would not always have the theocratic republic which He had organized them under, but that they would eventually give way to a monarchy. However, this would not change their position before the law, nor the rulers responsibility. Therefore, He commanded that when this happened, the king was to write the law in a book out of that which the priests would have and he was to keep all the words of this law and these statutes and do them. (Deut. 17:14-20)

It was God’s intent that Israel be self-governed. The greatest liberty can be enjoyed when this is the case. Therefore, we have seen very little law directed to a specific government. Rather the law we have seen has been primarily that which can be used to guide individual response to the commandments. As we study the Judgments, keep in mind that, with the notable exception of the judgment for murder, most of the judgments were to be carried out either by the individuals involved such as in theft, in which case the government had the responsibility to see that it was done, or by the men of the city or nation as a whole such as in the case of murder, i.e. it was a corporate responsibility rather than an individual one.

But, while God dealt primarily with the nation (i.e. His covenant was with the nation rather than the individuals of the nation) it was His intent that the government of that nation be primarily self-government.

JUDGMENTS

To more fully understand and appreciate the judgments of God, we need to understand “justice.” Webster, in his 1828 Dictionary defines justice as, “the virtue which consists in giving to every one what is his due.” In his book, Digest of Divine Law, Mr. Howard B. Rand tells us on page 36 that the fundamental principle of Divine justice primarily “rests in the protection of the rights of the individual and in the assurance of a happy and peaceful continuity of family life. This principle of placing the rights of the individual and family above all else is never lost sight of, even in matters pertaining to

administration and the laws governing national existence.” In placing the rights of the individual and family above all else, the judgments are restorative in principle, giving to the one damaged, by a breach of the law, or by accident, that which was damaged, plus compensation for anguish and pain where applicable. When restitution is not possible, at least not within the power of man to bring it about, the judgment is designed to give mental satisfaction to those damaged, plus, in effect, the guilty, through the death penalty, are put on hold awaiting the judgment of the true Judge of all who has the power to declare true restitution for crimes that are to us un-restorable.

Man’s judgment, as we know it, is virtually never consistent, nor seldom does it render to anyone “what is his due” and I am speaking primarily of the victim. Because of this, it is sometimes difficult to understand the judgments of God. But, with this principle of restitution with the intent of “protection of the rights of the individual” in mind, let us look at God’s judgments.

Most “crime” or sin involves thievery, so let’s begin here. In Ex. 22:1 we’re told that if a man steals an ox or a sheep, and kills it or sells it, he is to restore five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep. Two things are considered in this judgment, I believe. First is the fact that the thief killed or sold the ox or sheep. The second is that the ox plays a larger part in man’s ability to make a living. Not only was the ox eaten, it was a beast of burden or for work. Thus the restitution was higher for it than for the sheep which was only to be sheared and eaten.

Verses 2-4 deals with catching the thief in the process of the theft. First, if the theft occurs at night and the thief be smitten that he dies, there is no penalty against the one who smote him. If it happens in the daylight when the thief can be identified and one kills him, then the one killing him is subject to judgment. But if the thief is caught and since the stolen property is found in his hand, he has to only restore double. Verse 7-13 tells us that if one leaves something with another, and it be stolen out of the man’s house and the thief be caught, he is to pay double. However, if no thief is found, the owner of the house, where the goods were left, is to be brought before the judges for them to determine if he himself might have taken it. If the judges determine that he did indeed take it, he is to restore double. However, if it is determined that it was stolen by someone else, the one who was keeping the property is to make restitution to the owner. But if it is an animal for example, and it dies or is hurt, and the one keeping the animal is innocent of any wrong doing, no restitution is to be made. (Ex. 22:7-13) However, Lev. 6:2-7 tells us that if a man commits a trespass and lies to his neighbor about that which was delivered for him to keep, or in a thing taken away by violence, or hath deceived his neighbor, or found that which has been lost and lies about it, and swears falsely, he is to restore the property in principle and shall add to it 20%. He is then to offer a trespass offering to the priest. It appears to me the difference between Ex. 22:7-13 and Lev. 6:2-7 is that in the former, the property is gone for whatever reason, so a double restoration is required, while in the latter, the original property is restored plus 20% of the value.

Lev. 22:14-16 says that if a man eats of the holy thing unwittingly, he is to restore the holy thing and add 20% of the value to it. I do not know the circumstance that would lead to this, but it is treated as a theft, though done unknowingly.

Num. 5:6-10 deals with a similar circumstance. Here it is called a trespass which could mean a sin that causes damage rather than an actual theft. At any rate, restoration of the principle plus 20% and offering a trespass offering is the judgment. Lev. 5:15-19 deals with the same situation. This is one situation where a fine is to be paid to the priest in addition to the trespass offering.

The most serious theft is that of stealing another person. Ex. 21:16 says, **“And he that stealeth a man, and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death.”** Deut. 24:7 tells us the same thing.

Though adultery has a specific commandment against it, it is also a form of theft, but as with kidnapping, it too is non-restorable and judgment demands the death penalty for both the man and the woman. (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22) Even if the woman is only betrothed, not yet married, the penalty is the same if it happens where she could call for help and be heard, but doesn't. (Deut. 22:23-24) If the same thing happens where the woman cannot call for help and be heard, only the man is to be executed. (Deut. 22:25-27)

There are a number of situations listed in Scripture that would be both adultery and incest. For each of these, because of the adultery, the judgment is death for both the man and the woman. Lev. 20:11-12 lists a man and his father's wife, and a man and his daughter-in-law. Lev. 20:14 lists a man who takes both a wife and her mother. They were to be burned (cremated). Lev. 20:20 lists a man and his uncle's wife and vs. 21 lists a man and his brother's wife.

While we are on the subject of incest, Lev. 20:17 tells us that if a man lie with his sister, or half-sister, they both shall be cut off in the sight of their people, and he shall bear his iniquity. Lev. 20:19 says if a man lies with his mother's sister or his father's sister, they shall bear their iniquity. Since adultery isn't involved here, death is not the judgment, but in the one case, being cut off from their people, and both cases bearing their iniquity, is probably pretty serious judgment. As we discussed before, this is a form of fornication. In the New Testament, fornication is a sin that invalidates a marriage in God's eyes, thus a divorce is not necessary to annul it. Being cut off from their people permanently could have serious ramifications as well. As we'll see a little later, the women are technically married to the men so they cannot remarry.

If the relationship is continued, we know that children born of this type of union will have major problems. So when it says they shall bear their iniquity, I suspect this is a pretty serious judgment.

There are exceptions to the adultery law, but the circumstance certainly has to be considered. Lev. 19:20-22 gives an example. In this case the man lies with his bondmaid, though she is betrothed to a husband, because she was not free, she is not to die for the sin. The man is to bring a trespass offering to the priest and he will be forgiven. In this case, the owner's property rights supersede that of the betrothed husband. It is still a sin, but is not considered adultery.

We'll deal with the killing of a person by another person in our next lesson. JRL