

## Exodus 21

Verses 1-6

**“Now these are the ordinances which you are to set before them: <sup>2</sup>“If you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve for six years; but on the seventh he shall go out as a free man without payment. <sup>3</sup> If he comes alone, he shall go out alone; if he is the husband of a wife, then his wife shall go out with him. <sup>4</sup> If his master gives him a wife, and she bears him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall belong to her master, and he shall go out alone. <sup>5</sup> But if the slave plainly says, ‘I love my master, my wife and my children; I will not go out as a free man,’ <sup>6</sup> then his master shall bring him to God, then he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost. And his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him permanently.**

**Now these are the ordinances which you are to set before them**

It would seem that the laws concerning slavery were written for future generations because Israel would spend the next 40 years in the wilderness and their needs were being supplied by God

In addition, during the 7 years it took to conquer Canaan all of Israel accumulated great wealth and no one would have become a slave for many years

**<sup>2</sup>“If you buy a Hebrew slave**

How would an Israelite become a slave?

1. Foreign nations could enslave some Hebrews after a battle or war and sell them on the open slave market to anyone who could afford to buy them

2. He could sell himself to get out of debt

See 2 Kings 4:1

3. He could be sold by his parents in need of money

See Nehemiah 5:2

Again this would not have taken place until after the time of Joshua (1375 BC) which would be at least 75 to 100 years in the future.

**He shall serve for six years; but on the seventh he shall go out as a free man without payment.**

While God did not order the abolition slavery, He did make rules that greatly abated the continuation of slavery.

1. A Hebrew slave could not be bound for more than six years without his consent.
2. He had full rights of rest on the Sabbath

See Exodus 20:10

3. He could claim compensation for bodily injury

See Exodus 21:26-27

4. Slaves that left were to be given their 401K's ☺

See Deuteronomy 15:13 - 15

**But if the slave plainly says, 'I love my master, my wife and my children; I will not go out as a free mam**

No Hebrew slave could be compelled to serve more than six years unless he voluntarily accepted perpetual slavery.

That ceremony probably took place at the city gates or the tabernacle

The issue of foreign slaves will be dealt with later

See Leviticus 25:44-46

Verses 7-11

**<sup>7</sup>“If a man sells his daughter as a female slave, she is not to go free as the male slaves do. <sup>8</sup>If she is displeasing in the eyes of her master who designated her for himself, then he shall let her be redeemed. He does not have authority to sell her to a foreign people because of his unfairness to her. <sup>9</sup>If he designates her for his son, he shall deal with her according to the custom of daughters. <sup>10</sup>If he takes to himself another woman, he may not reduce her food, her clothing, or her conjugal rights. <sup>11</sup>If he will not do these three *things* for her, then she shall go out for nothing, without *payment of money*.**

**If a man sells his daughter as a female slave, she is not to go free as the male slaves do**

A woman who was bought to be a second-class wife or a concubine could not be set free if the Master decided he was not pleased with her

This gave women-slaves legal status as permanent members of the family

**If he designates her for his son, he shall deal with her according to the custom of daughters**

If they were given to a man's son, they were to be like a daughter

**If he takes to himself another woman, he may not reduce her food, her clothing, or her conjugal rights**

If the master took another wife he could not deny the other wife the three basic rights of food, clothing and cohabitation

If he would not do this the woman was free to return to her father's house without paying her master the purchase price he paid

Verses 12-14

**<sup>12</sup> “He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death. <sup>13</sup> But if he did not lie in wait *for him*, but God let *him* fall into his hand, then I will appoint you a place to which he may flee. <sup>14</sup> If, however, a man acts presumptuously toward his neighbor, so as to kill him craftily, you are to take him *even* from My altar, that he may die.**

**He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death**

The punishment for murder is the death penalty.

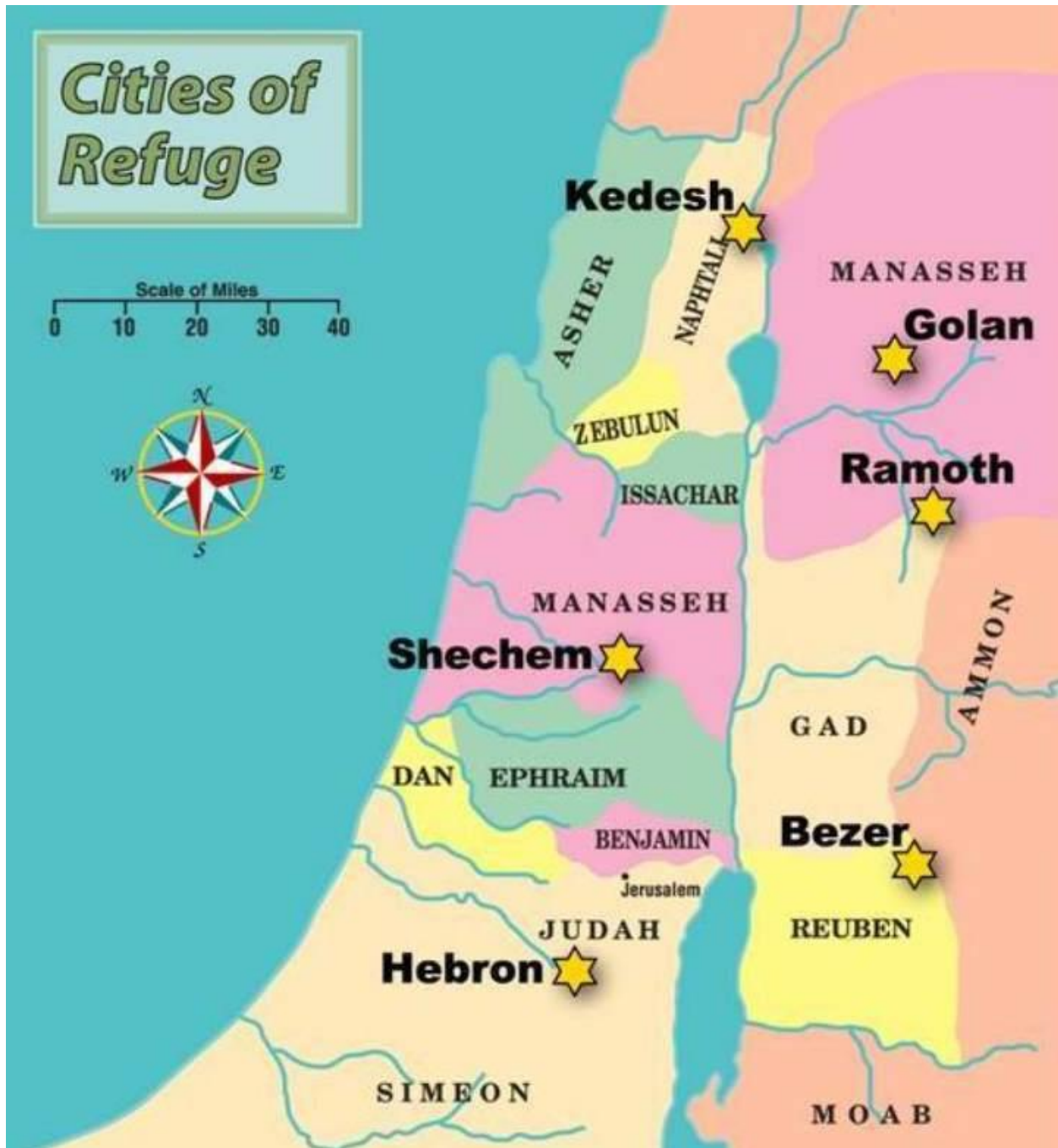
But one accused of murder is not always guilty because there are instances of accidental or unintentional homicide

To protect against unjust punishment, God appointed a place where the man could flee

I will appoint you a place to which he may flee

After Israel entered Canaan six cities of refuge were appointed

See Map 2105



See Joshua 20:1-9

**If, however, a man acts presumptuously toward his neighbor, so as to kill him craftily, you are to take him *even* from my altar, that he may die.**

Any person found guilty of this crime was denied sanctuary

Joab and Adonijah both fled to the altar, but Solomon ordered both of them slain

See 1 Kings 2:24-32

Verses 15-17

**<sup>15</sup> He who strikes his father or his mother shall surely be put to death**

**<sup>16</sup> He who kidnaps a man, whether he sells him or he is found in his possession, shall surely be put to death.**

**<sup>17</sup> “He who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death**

Four capital offenses are mentioned in this chapter

Murder

Striking your father or mother

Cursing your father or mother

Kidnapping

Verses 18-19

**<sup>18</sup> “If men have a quarrel and one strikes the other with a stone or with *his* fist, and he does not die but remains in bed, <sup>19</sup> if he gets up and walks around outside on his staff, then he who struck him shall go unpunished; he shall only pay for his loss of time, and shall take care of him until he is completely healed.**

**If men have a quarrel and one strikes the other with a stone or with *his* fist, and he does not die but remains in bed**

This is not about victims of crime

This is about people who get into physical altercations

**He shall only pay for his loss of time, and shall take care of him until he is completely healed.**

If one of them suffers injuries that keeps them from working, the other person shall reimburse them for medical bills and financial loss.

Verses 20-21

**<sup>20</sup> “If a man strikes his male or female slave with a rod and he dies at his hand, he shall be punished. <sup>21</sup> If, however, he survives a day or two, no vengeance shall be taken; for he is his property.**

If a slave died while being punished, the owner shall be punished

This brings up two questions

1. Who would punish the owner?
2. What would the punishment be?

If the slave survived a few days and then died, the master was not held responsible

This assumes a harsh punishment was warranted and the death was not intentional

This assumption is based on verses 26 and 27

If the loss of an eye or a tooth brings freedom for the slave then the masters could not use undue punishment when disciplining a slave

The slave's death was not intended but rather an accident

Verses 22-25

**<sup>22</sup> “If men struggle with each other and strike a woman with child so that she gives birth prematurely, yet there is no injury, he shall surely be fined as the woman's husband may demand of him, and he shall pay as the judges *decide*.**

**<sup>23</sup> But if there is *any further* injury, then you shall appoint *as a penalty* life for life, <sup>24</sup> eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, <sup>25</sup> burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.**

**If men struggle with each other and strike a woman with child so that she gives birth prematurely**

This would result in a fine to be determined by the judges

Apparently there was two or more judges making the decision

**But if there is *any further* injury then you shall appoint *as a penalty* life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,<sup>25</sup> burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.**

It's interesting that an eye for an eye has been said to be the law of retaliation

But here it was seen as a penalty for an injury to a pregnant woman

In any case, this had the effect of limiting revenge

A tooth for a tooth is better than a conflict spinning out of control

Verses 26-27

**<sup>26</sup> “If a man strikes the eye of his male or female slave, and destroys it, he shall let him go free on account of his eye. <sup>27</sup> And if he knocks out a tooth of his male or female slave, he shall let him go free on account of his tooth.**

This protected slaves from mistreatment by harsh masters

Verses 28-32

**<sup>28</sup> “If an ox gores a man or a woman to death, the ox shall surely be stoned and its flesh shall not be eaten; but the owner of the ox shall go unpunished. <sup>29</sup> If, however, an ox was previously in the habit of goring and its owner has been warned, yet he does not confine it and it kills a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned and its owner also shall be put to death. <sup>30</sup> If a ransom is demanded of him, then he shall give for the redemption of his life whatever is demanded of him. <sup>31</sup> Whether it gores a son or a daughter, it shall be done to him according to the same rule. <sup>32</sup> If the ox gores a male or female slave, the owner shall give his or *her* master thirty shekels of silver, and the ox shall be stoned.**

**If an ox gores a man or a woman to death, the ox shall surely be stoned**

Dangerous animals must be confined by their owners.

If not, and it kills someone, the animal must be stoned

**If, however, an ox was previously in the habit of goring and its owner has been warned, yet he does not confine it and it kills a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned and its owner also shall be put to death**

If an owner is a persistent and willful violator of this law, and it leads to someone's death, that man shall be put to death

**If a ransom is demanded of him, then he shall give for the redemption of his life whatever is demanded of him**

The amount was not determined by judges, but by the family of the deceased

This is the only case where compensation could spare someone from capital punishment

**If the ox gores a male or female slave, the owner shall give his *or her* master thirty shekels of silver, and the ox shall be stoned.**

This was probably the average price of a slave, so the price was limited to that amount

So why did God allow slavery?

God allowed slavery for the same reason he allowed divorce

See Matthew 19:3-9

**Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way.**

We know God hated divorce.

See Malachi 2:16

We do not find a verse like this concerning slavery, but Egypt was judged for their cruel treatment of the Hebrew slaves.



So people needed to ask themselves a very simple question

What would I do if the situation was reversed?

What if I were the slave and the other person was the master

This is the basis of the Golden Rule, is it not

Verses 33-34

**<sup>33</sup> “If a man opens a pit, or digs a pit and does not cover it over, and an ox or a donkey falls into it, <sup>34</sup> the owner of the pit shall make restitution; he shall give money to its owner, and the dead *animal* shall become his.**

Many of these laws deal with compensation for the loss of property

Verses 35-36

**<sup>35</sup> “If one man’s ox hurts another’s so that it dies, then they shall sell the live ox and divide its price equally; and also they shall divide the dead ox. <sup>36</sup> Or *if* it is known that the ox was previously in the habit of goring, yet its owner has not confined it, he shall surely pay ox for ox, and the dead *animal* shall become his.**

**If one man’s ox hurts another’s so that it dies**

The owner of a dangerous animal has a responsibility to control the animal

Again, prior history of the owner affects the cost to be paid