

MISHPATIM

(Laws/Judgements)

Exodus 21:1-24:18

2 Kings 11:17-12:17



TORAH

BERESHIT

Bereshit
Noach
Lech Lecha
Vayeira
Chayei Sarah
Toldot
Vayeitzei
Vayishlach
Vayeishev
Mikeitz
Vayigash
Vayechi

SHEMOT

Shemot
Va'eira
Bo
Beshalach
Yitro
Mishpatim
Terumah
Tetzaveh
Ki Tisa
Vayakhel
Pekudei

VAYIKRA

Vayikra
Tzav
Shemini
Tazria
Metzora
Acharei
Kedoshim
Emor
Behar
Bechukotai

BAMIDBAR

Bamidbar
Naso
Behaalotecha
Shelach
Korach
Chukat
Balak
Pinchas
Matot
Massei

DEVARIM

Devarim
Va'etchanan
Eikev
Re'eh
Shoftim
Ki Teitzei
Ki Tavo
Nitzavim
Vayelech
Haazinu
V'Zot HaBerachah

THE STORY SO FAR



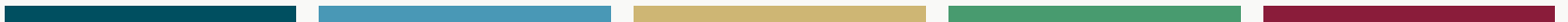
- God has rescued Israel from slavery in Egypt and has delivered them from the final pursuit of the Egyptians (across the Sea of Reeds).
- Moses comes to terms with having to lead a large nation.
- His father-in-law, Yitro, gives him some helpful suggestions, including appointing people under him to deal with the lesser matters and for Moses only to be involved with matters that couldn't be otherwise resolved.



THIS WEEK



- This week is an impressive collection of various laws that G-d gives the Israelites, mostly covering social and business matters.
- One of these matters involves slavery, namely, how to regulate it.

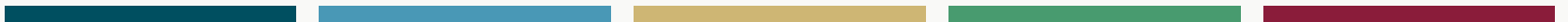


THIS WEEK



Exodus 21:1-6

“Now these are the rules that you shall set before them. When you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve six years, and in the seventh he shall go out free, for nothing. If he comes in single, he shall go out single; if he comes in married, then his wife shall go out with him. If his master gives him a wife and she bears him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out alone. But if the slave plainly says, ‘I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,’ then his master shall bring him to God, and he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost. And his master shall bore his ear through with an awl, and he shall be his slave forever.”



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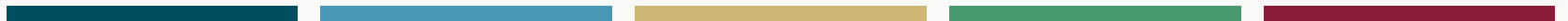


- We can see here, that G-d is attempting to regulate the laws regarding slavery, establishing maximum terms, rights to property etc.
- However the tempting question to ask is this: “Why not ban slavery entirely?”
- Today, it is widely held that slavery is an evil institution. While it is good that the Bible tries to reform it, why tolerate it at all?
- It is also ironic that G-d would tolerate slavery amongst the Israelites when He just freed the nation from slavery in Egypt.

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- This is a difficult question for us, but I'm going to start by giving my opinion about this, and attempting to explain it throughout the rest of the presentation.
- “Not everything that appears in the Bible is something that G-d necessarily approves of, even if it is not directly punished.”
- But first I'm going to show that the Bible actually also actually negative things to say about slavery as well.



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Firstly, the Sages ascribe a negative connotation to “the awl”. The slave who willingly stays a slave is brought to the doorpost, as it symbolises freedom (remember the blood on the doorposts during the last night in Egypt). The ear is pierced, because it is through them we hear the Word of G-d. Part of the Word says, “the Israelites belong to Me (G-d) as slaves. (Lev 25:55)” The Sages go on to say, that this slave has deliberately disobeyed G-d with his request to remain a slave and the piercing is designed as a permanent mark of shame in that regard.

Adapted from TRACTATE KIDDUSHIN 22b

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- Also in the New Testament there are negative remarks about slavery.
- Firstly in 1 Timothy, slave-owners are counted among the sinners:
 - “...understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine. (1 Tim 1:9-10)”
 - We also read in Revelation 18 about the condemnation of the luxury goods trade in the Roman Empire, with one item being slaves (see Rev 18:13).

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- But the question still remains, why tolerate this practice at all? After all, slave owners were not directly punished, in the same way as other sins were.
- I believe we can look towards the example of marriage and divorce as an analogy.



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- We have been taught to understand, that the ideal relationship is a single permanent union between man and wife.
- However we also read in Genesis how many of the patriarchs (who were praised as great men in many respects), had multiple wives.
- We also read in the Torah about how a man can divorce a woman if he finds something “indecent” with her (see Deut 24).
- None of these people are directly punished, so some conclude that, therefore, these practices are acceptable.



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- However, we also read in Genesis 2:24 “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”
- Jesus expounds on this teaching and gives us his interpretation in Mark 10. He teaches that, therefore, one man should have one wife, and any split is invalid (unless there has been infidelity).



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- Then Jesus' opponents ask why the provisions of divorce were included at all (i.e, why was divorce or polygamy not outright banned?).
- Jesus then says it was “because your hearts were hard.” He then goes on to quote Gen 2:24 to support his reasoning that divorce should only be reserved for the most extreme cases and that one man should have one wife.
- In fact even in the Old Testament, G-d says that he “hates divorce. (see Malachi 2:16)”



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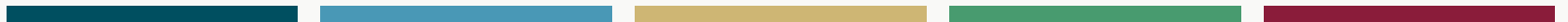


- Hence if we take the entirety of Biblical teaching about the marriage issue, we can come to quite a different conclusion about the nature of the institution.
- It is the same with slavery. If we take the entirety of Biblical teaching on the issue, we see that G-d does not support slavery amongst men, rather we are only meant to be slaves to Him. This is the reason why G-d freed the Israelites out of Egypt.
- Why did He not ban it outright? Perhaps, like with marriage, it was because our hearts were hard.





Blessed are you Lord our God, King of the universe,
Rock of all worlds, righteous through all generations,
faithful God,
who says and does,
who speaks and fulfils,
all whose words are truth and righteousness.





Faithful are you, Lord our God,
and faithful are your words,
and not one of your words shall return void,
for you are a faithful and merciful God and King.
Blessed are you Lord, God, faithful in all your words.

Amen

