

Moses – part 26

He must pay for stealing
by Victor Torres

Has anything been stolen from you? Have you ever stolen anything? Have you taken advantage of anyone?

Most of us will probably say “yes” to the first question. But most of us will probably answer “no” to the last two questions.

We have seen the laws given to Moses dealing with those who kill others and those who hurt others. Today, we will look at laws or rules dealing with those who steal from others. We will also examine the laws dealing with those who take advantage of others.

[Exo 22:1 \(ERV\) "How should you punish a man who steals a bull or a sheep? If the man kills the animal or sells it, then he cannot give it back. So he must pay five bulls for the one he stole. Or he must pay four sheep for the one he stole. He must pay for stealing.](#)

“He must pay for stealing”. Fair enough. Everyone agrees with that part.

But hold on a second! He must pay five bulls for the **one** he stole? And he must pay four sheep for the **one** he stole? “That's a bit harsh”, some of you may think. He only stole one bull, why should he pay five?

What's fair then? Should he pay one bull for the one he stole? If that's the case, more people will steal. The worst thing that could happen to them is to give up one of their bulls if they get caught. However, if they get away with the crime, then they get a bull.

As we mentioned in our previous studies, a bull is a big deal back then. It is the most expensive livestock that you could own. It has more meat than a goat or a sheep, so it's obviously more valuable than a goat or a sheep. But it is also a very useful animal for many tasks.

Here's an excerpt from Wikipedia that shows us the usefulness of bulls or oxen:

Oxen are used for plowing, for transport (pulling carts, hauling wagons and even riding), for threshing grain by trampling, and for powering machines that grind grain or supply irrigation among other purposes. Oxen may be also used to skid logs in forests, particularly in low-impact, select-cut logging.

Knowing this, we now realize why someone who steals a bull is given a heavier

penalty than someone stealing a sheep. Stealing a bull is a more serious crime than stealing a sheep. However, stealing is a serious crime, period. It is so serious to the Lord, He has also given this law:

Exo 22:2 (MKJV) If a thief is found breaking in, and is struck so that he dies, no blood shall be shed for him.

Remember, under the law of Moses, if you kill someone, you will also be put to death. But not in this case! If you caught someone stealing your bull or your sheep, and you hit him and he dies, you're not guilty of murder. That's what it means when it says "no blood shall be shed for him [for the thief]".

Imagine someone thinking of stealing a bull, but then he remembers this law. Wouldn't you suppose he might have second thoughts about his plans?

"Man, if I get caught, I could be beaten to death by the owner and he won't even get punished." "Maybe I should just ask him for help instead of stealing his bull."

But then we have this law:

Exo 22:3 (MKJV) If the sun is risen upon him, blood is due for him. He should repay in full. If he has nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft.

This law is related to the previous one, so let's look at them side by side.

Exo 22:2 (MKJV) If a thief is found breaking in, and is struck so that he dies, no blood shall be shed for him.

Exo 22:3 If the sun is risen upon him, blood is due for him. He should repay in full. If he has nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft.

We have two situations here:

- 1) Nighttime, a thief is caught in the act. The owner strikes him with a shepherds stick. The thief falls, hits his head on the rock and dies. The owner **is not** guilty.
- 2) Daytime, a thief is caught in the act. The owner strikes him with a shepherds stick. The thief falls, hits his head on the rock and dies. The owner **is** guilty.

What's the biggest difference? The time of day. One occurred during nighttime, one during daytime.

Why does it matter? Because during nighttime, it's dark and the owner couldn't recognize the thief. The owner probably didn't hit him to kill him. He hit him to catch him and put him to justice. So the first law is there to protect an owner who is just trying to catch a thief.

What about the second law?

Exo 22:3 (MKJV) If the sun is risen upon him, blood is due for him. He should repay in full. If he has nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft.

Who is it protecting? That's right! It's protecting the thief from getting killed by the angry owner. "If the sun is risen upon him" there's daylight, and you can easily tell who the thief is. No need to catch him. "He should repay in full".

If you hit him with your stick and he falls on a rock and dies, you'll be guilty of murder. "Blood is due for him".

See how merciful our Lord is? He even gave them a law to protect the thief! The Lord knows there is evil lurking in everyone's heart, including the heart of an angry owner catching a thief. The Lord knows there will be people who will beat a thief to death if He didn't give them this law.

Did you notice the last part of verse 3?

"If he [the thief] has nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft."

What is that telling us? Poverty is not an excuse for stealing. If you are so poor you have nothing to eat, ask your neighbors for help. Don't steal his bull or his sheep.

If a poor man steals a bull or a sheep but has nothing to pay for it, he will be sold as a slave. Yikes! Did I mention stealing is a serious crime to the Lord?

Let's look at the next rule:

Exo 22:4 (ESV) If the stolen beast is found alive in his possession, whether it is an ox or a donkey or a sheep, he shall pay double.

"He shall pay double." Wait a minute. I thought you pay five bulls if you stole a bull and four sheep if you stole a sheep? Why does it say he shall pay double here? I know it can get confusing, so let's look back at the first rule we saw today:

Exo 22:1 (ERV) "How should you punish a man who steals a bull or a sheep? **If the man kills the animal or sells it, then he cannot give it back.** So he must pay five bulls for the one he stole. Or he must pay four sheep for the one he stole. He must pay for stealing.

See the big difference? In the first situation, the thief already killed or sold the animal, which means he has no intention of giving it back to the owner. That's

why he is punished more severely.

In the second situation, maybe the thief is having second thoughts on what he did. Maybe he's thinking of returning the animal. In any case, he will be punished more lightly if the animal he stole was found alive. He would just pay double of what he stole.

It's about the intent of our hearts. God can see what's in our hearts. He knows what we are thinking. God knows if you are sorry for what you did or if you are sorry only when you are caught.

This next rule is about people taking advantage of others:

[Exo 22:5 \(KJV\) If a man shall cause a field or vineyard to be eaten, and shall put in his beast, and shall feed in another man's field; of the best of his own field, and of the best of his own vineyard, shall he make restitution.](#)

If you let your animals feed in another man's field, you have to give the best produce of your own field or vineyard to make up for it. Think about it. Here's this shepherd who wants to take advantage of his neighbor. He lets his sheep feed on his neighbor's field. Even if those sheep fed only on grass, he must pay with his best harvest of wheat, barley or whatever crops he has. That should make him think twice before he takes advantage of anyone.

Taking advantage of others is also a big deal to the Lord. Let's keep that in mind.

Sometimes we were not really taking advantage of someone, but because of our careless actions, we hurt others:

[Exo 22:6 \(ERV\) "A man might start a fire to burn thornbushes on his field. But if the fire grows and burns his neighbor's crops or the grain growing on the neighbor's field, the man who started the fire must pay for what he burned.](#)

You can see that we also pay for our careless actions which hurt others.

As you might have guessed already, there's a deeper meaning that is hidden behind these laws given to Moses and Israel.

And just like the last time, we should see that our Lord is the victim of the crime and see ourselves as the thief.

How do we steal from God?

Let's look at these verses:

Rom 12:1 (ESV) I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, **to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God**, which is your spiritual worship.

1Co 6:19 Or do you not know that **your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you**, whom you have from God? **You are not your own**,

1Co 6:20 **for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.**

Get it? "Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God."

"You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body."

Here's a more direct instruction:

1Co 10:31 (MKJV) Therefore whether you eat or drink, **or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.**

If our body is not our own and we should offer it as a living sacrifice, if we are told that "whatever you do, do all to the glory of God", then everything that we do which is not for His glory is stealing from Him!

We must serve God with all our soul, so anything that we do for selfish gain is stealing from God.

We must serve God with all our minds and with all our hearts, so when we say or think of things that does not glorify Him, we have taken advantage of Him.

I will leave you with the questions we asked in the beginning:

Has anything been stolen from you? Have you ever stolen anything? Have you taken advantage of anyone?