

February 28

Exodus 21 & 22, Numbers 35

Hey, everybody - it's February 28th and we're going to be doing an accelerator today that will finish the month of February. I know that it's a leap year and we're going to skip tomorrow and then the day after that, we'll go directly to March 1st.

But today, I'm going to address two subjects out of Exodus 21 and 22, Numbers 35 and some various passages throughout Deuteronomy. The two passages that I would want to suggest today are related to a theocracy and the principle of eye for eye and tooth for tooth.

Now there are many different kinds of governmental models in the world and one of those models is a theocracy. Of course, a monarchy is when there's a king who's in charge, a democracy would be when people vote their elected officials to be in charge and then a theocracy is where God is in charge of everything...theocracy. I actually tried to tell the governing board that our system at the church is a theocracy and my name is Theo, but they didn't go for it so we have the system that we have right now. Anyway, so the nation of Israel has no government per se during this era. As a matter of fact, throughout the entire era of Moses, then Joshua, then all the way through the Judges until 1st Samuel, there's no government in place - it's just a theocracy. So God is in charge, God determines all of the laws and everybody is accountable to God because he's not only their God, he's also the king.

Now this is a very helpful concept to understand as we try to apply the moral law from the Old Testament or the whole law of the Old Testament to our lives because we have to figure out as followers of Jesus today, which of the laws that we find in the Old Testament, still apply today and which ones don't. Because the moral rules from the Old Testament, well those still apply today. Any rule that you see that's in the Pentateuch, the first five books of Moses, that's later on repeated in the New Testament, well that's a moral law and it still applies in our lives today. But the ceremonial laws, for example, don't - ceremonial laws - a good example of that - is the sacrifices that were made on a daily basis. Obviously, we still don't do sacrifices to this day and the reason is that Jesus was our once and for all sacrifice and so those ceremonies no longer need to take place for people who follow Jesus today.

But the third category is civil law - so moral law, ceremonial law and then civil law. Civil laws are the laws that make sense when a culture is a theocracy. And we'll notice that they have many different laws - judgments - that they have capital punishment that is given way more than we would in our culture. Part of the reason for that is that they didn't have a prison system so it was either fines or restitution or the death penalty - so we see the death penalty much more often. In this culture where God is in charge and everybody knows it and everybody worships him - those kinds of penalties make sense. But if we try and translate many of those laws into our current context, it doesn't make sense because we

don't live in a theocracy. We have to trust the governmental systems that we have. Hopefully then, people who wind up going through the criminal justice government system, get exactly what they deserve, which is a lot like many NFL football teams. Recently we saw the Pittsburgh Steelers get smeared in the playoffs – they got exactly what they deserved in the playoffs.

(Voice in the background) *"Wait a minute, dude, I'm a Steelers fan - what do you mean the Steelers got exactly what they deserved?"*

Pastor Mark – "Dude – it's just like for a video accelerator."

(Voice) "I don't appreciate that. I'm going to get you for that"

Pastor Mark – "Ow, my tooth!"

(Voice) "I'm going to get you!"

Pastor Mark – "I'm going to get your tooth for hitting my tooth"!

Uhhh – what does that remind you of? Oh yes, our next principle for the day, which is the eye for eye, tooth for tooth rule. Now often times, we think when we read this in the Old Testament – that that sounds pretty harsh. I mean somebody hurts you and you hurt them back exactly the same way! That sounds like awful difficult punishment, but interestingly in the Old Testament – it wasn't thought of this way at all. As a matter of fact, in the Old Testament people would often times take the law into their own hands and gain retribution from the other person in escalating amounts.

For example, somebody comes into your house and he steals something – you go to his house and you steal something bigger and feel justified. He comes to your house and beats you up a little bit – you go to his house and beat him up a lot. He comes to your house and he beats you up and rips your hair out and leaves you bleeding on the ground – you go back to his house and you kill him. Then his relatives come and kill a bunch of your relatives and pretty soon it escalates into an all out war. Well this is often time what would happen if people took that retribution into their own hands. It's important to remember that in these passages, the law of eye for eye and tooth for tooth was in the judicial context, meaning that a judge could rule that somebody could have eye for eye or tooth for tooth, but a person couldn't take that law into their own hands. The other thing is that a judge could not rule for more punishment than the person gave originally. So if somebody committed a crime – it kept them being punished, but not overly punished in a way that would continue the retribution gaining higher and higher and higher ground until clans and tribes and nations were at war with each other. So the law of eye for eye and tooth for tooth was designed to be able to make that a reality.

Well, I hope you've had a little interesting time today looking at theocracy and the law of eye for eye and tooth for tooth and I pray that God's blessings will be on you this today – and that you'll be glad that we don't get eye for eye and tooth for tooth from God. We get the grace of Jesus that gives us that which we do not deserve. May God's blessings rest on you this day.