

Justice

This paper was written to provide a brief and high-level overview of the justice system that is found in the Old Testament. The first five books of the Bible have a great deal to say on many topics, but all too often they are ignored – either because they are difficult to understand or because they are seen as irrelevant. However, just as a proper understanding of the sacrificial system can bring new meaning to Christ's sacrifice on the cross, a better understanding of the justice system in the Old Testament can shed new light on God's thoughts and character. It is true that the Mosaic Law has passed away and does not apply to the Church, but studying it can still give insights on how God thinks. The Bible tells us that His thoughts are higher than our thoughts, and the Law is an excellent example of that.

The entire concept of justice is often misunderstood. I have heard people say that an action is wrong because it hurts people, or because it's bad for society, or because it just “doesn't feel right”. They define *right* and *wrong* as what helps or hurts them personally, or what helps or hurts society as a whole. That is completely incorrect. An action is either right or wrong solely because *God says it is right or wrong*. No one other than God has the authority to make that determination, and at the same time no one else has the authority to dictate what should happen when His laws are broken. (God is quite clear all throughout the Bible that it is *His* laws that are being broken, and that *He* is the one being sinned against. God takes every act of disobedience personally as He sees *Himself* as the victim.)

This can be seen in many passages throughout the Bible. To quote just two of them:

Exodus 20:2: “I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.”

Leviticus 18:2: “Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, I am the Lord your God.

3 After the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein ye dwelt, shall ye not do: and after the doings of the land of Canaan, whither I bring you, shall ye not do: neither shall ye walk in their ordinances.

4 Ye shall do my judgments, and keep mine ordinances, to walk therein: I am the Lord your God.

5 Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them: I am the Lord.”

Leviticus 19:37: “Therefore shall ye observe all my statutes, and all my judgments, and do them: I am the Lord.”

Notice how God clearly says that we are to obey *His* judgments because *He is God*. It is not any more complicated than that.

As tempting as it is to go by our own feelings or thoughts, in reality what we think or feel is irrelevant. All that really matters is *what God has said*. As it turns out, God has said quite a bit about justice. Studying God's commands – and His instructions on what constitutes justice – is very important. If we neglect to find out how God defines justice, how could we ever hope to be just? If we ignore the only right answer then what are we left with? Our own ideas about what is just are not

important; what matters is what God has to say about the topic. That is precisely what this paper is intended to explore.

In The Beginning

This may come as a surprise, but the very first commandment that was ever given to mankind had nothing to do with the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. It was actually this:

Genesis 1:28: “And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.”

Mankind was instructed to populate the Earth, and they did so. This may seem to be trivial but in God's eyes it was quite important. In fact, the people who built the city of Babel found out just how seriously God takes this particular command: the whole reason that their languages were confused was because they were not willing to repopulate the planet! They wanted to stick together and make a name for themselves (so they would not have to follow God). The Lord put a quick end to that.

The commandment that Adam and Eve broke was actually given a bit later:

Genesis 2:16: “And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat:
17 But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.”

God told Adam that mankind could eat from any tree in the garden except for one tree. That one tree was forbidden on pain of death. Why was it wrong to eat from that tree? *Because God said so.* It is not any more complicated than that. If God issues a command and we disobey it then we've sinned, pure and simple. God has the power to lay down the law and He does exactly that.

This is a key point to realize: God, and *only* God, defines what is right and what is wrong. What really counts is not our feelings, or sensibilities, or how it might impact society. All that matters is one thing: what has God commanded? Now, at times it may be difficult to figure out how to apply a commandment to a situation, but it must never be forgotten that what really matters are God's commandments.

Why was the punishment death? Because God so decreed that that was the punishment. God has the authority to lay down the law and God has the authority to determine what happens when we break His law, according to His holy and perfect sense of justice. He had every right to decree that eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was wrong and He had every right to decree that the punishment for breaking that law was death. This is because *God decides the laws* and *God decides the punishments*. This is extremely important to remember. It has *never* been up to us to decide what the laws are or what should be done when the law is broken. That is solely God's decision.

In the beginning God handled law enforcement **personally**. When Adam and Eve broke His

commandment and ate from the tree, God Himself convicted them and issued the sentence:

Genesis 3:9: “And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?

10 And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.

11 And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldst not eat?

...

17 And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life;

18 Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field;

19 In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.”

The same thing happened when Cain killed Abel. Cain was not handed over to the authorities because there were no authorities. Instead God handled it personally:

Genesis 4:9: “And the Lord said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: am I my brother's keeper?

10 And he said, What hast thou done? The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground.

11 And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand;

12 When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth.”

The situation changed after the Flood. In the covenant that the Lord made with Noah He established the **institution of government**:

Genesis 9:5: “And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man.

6 Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.”

Here we can see that God changed the situation. God would no longer confront murderers personally and issue sentences. Instead, mankind would be responsible for hunting down criminals and punishing them. The Lord made it clear that the penalty for murder was *death* and that mankind should hunt down murderers and execute them. Why? Because God views murder as an assault on Himself. Men were made in God's image, and an attack on man is therefore an attack on God.

Here things stood for a number of centuries. It was not until the time of Moses that we have record of God laying down a complete system of justice. It is that system of justice that will be the theme of the rest of this paper.

The Mosaic Law and Justice System

There are a tremendous amount of regulations that are specified in the Mosaic law. Some people have counted more than 600 separate laws! It is not possible to cover every single one in this study so I'm going to narrow the focus of this paper.

First, there are many restrictions in regard to diet, and I am not going to cover these. I'm also going to set aside the regulations regarding sacrifices, the handling of the dead, and what to do when someone gets sick with leprosy. While these subjects are interesting and there is much that can be learned about them, I am going to leave them alone for the time being. These regulations have more to do with holiness and separation than general crime and punishment.

The Ten Commandments are very famous, and they can be found listed in Exodus 20. However, what some people forget is that the Law of Moses consists of a great deal more than just those ten commands. After those commands were issued the Israelites actually **lost their nerve** to hear any further instructions, and asked Moses to get God to stop talking to them:

Exodus 20:18: “And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off.

19 And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die.”

It is important to remember that when God gave the Israelites the Ten Commandments He was not speaking through someone else. God was actually speaking to the Israelites *personally*, in an audible voice! This completely unnerved the Israelites and they asked Moses to go to God, find out what the law was, and then report back to them. They simply could not handle directly interacting with God.

So there is a great deal more to the Law than just the Ten Commandments. However, let's take a brief look at them. These laws establish a number of themes that can be found throughout the rest of God's decrees. In fact, one could say that the rest of God's laws are simply further exposition on these ten commands:

#1: Do not worship anyone else except for God.

#2: Idol making and idol worship is strictly forbidden. You are not even allowed to use an idol to worship the true God.

#3: Do not take the Lord's name lightly – either by swearing or in any other way. His name and everything about Him is to be treated as holy.

#4: You are strictly forbidden from working on the Sabbath, the seventh day of the week (our Saturday).

#5: Honor your father and mother and treat them with respect.

#6: You must not murder people.

#7: You must not commit adultery.

#8: You must not steal.

#9: You must not “bear false witness against your neighbor”. This can be likened to telling a lie

that is calculated to cause your neighbor harm – such as trying to frame someone for murder. (The Bible does prohibit other types of lies as well.)

#10: You must not covet (desire) things that belong to someone else.

These commands are very well known, so I will not elaborate on them here. Instead, let's take a look at some of the lesser-known crimes – and punishments. It will not be difficult to tie these commandments back to the ten that we have just listed. (In the list below I will refer to these ten commands by their number, for brevity's sake.)

The Trial

How were trials conducted in the Old Testament? Well, the Lord instituted a series of **judges** that would be responsible for trying cases:

Deuteronomy 16:18: “judges and officers shalt thou make thee in all thy gates, which the Lord thy God giveth thee, throughout thy tribes: and they shall judge the people with just judgment.”

19 Thou shalt not wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift: for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous.

20 That which is altogether just shalt thou follow, that thou mayest live, and inherit the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.”

As can be seen, the judges were commanded to be just. They were not allowed to accept bribes or to favor one person's cause over another's. **They had to be impartial.** They were also not allowed to favor either the rich or the poor:

Leviticus 19:15: “Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbor.”

Laws also had to apply to everyone equally, even if the person was a foreigner:

Leviticus 24:22: “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.”

It is clear from the Old Testament that **no one was above the law.** The law applied to kings just as much as it applied to peasants. King David was not able to get by with murder just because he was king; God punished him for it. *No one was greater than the law.*

It is interesting to note that in the case of exceptionally hard cases the **priests** would get involved and reveal what the Lord commands. This is not the same thing as inquiring of the Lord directly, although that was done from time to time. Instead, God chose certain priests that could be called upon to answer especially hard questions, probably because the Lord had given them special

wisdom. This is discussed here:

Deuteronomy 17:8: “If there arise a matter too hard for thee in judgment, between blood and blood, between plea and plea, and between stroke and stroke, being matters of controversy within thy gates: then shalt thou arise, and get thee up into the place which the Lord thy God shall choose;

9 And thou shalt come unto the priests and the Levites, and unto the judge that shall be in those days, and inquire; and they shall show thee the sentence of judgment:

10 And thou shalt do according to the sentence, which they of that place which the Lord shall choose shall show thee; and thou shalt observe to do according to all that they inform thee;

11 According to the sentence of the law which they shall teach thee, and according to the judgment which they shall tell thee, thou shalt do: thou shalt not decline from the sentence which they shall show thee, to the right hand, nor to the left.

12 And the man that will do presumptuously, and will not hearken unto the priest that standeth to minister there before the Lord thy God, or unto the judge, even that man shall die: and thou shalt put away the evil from Israel.

13 And all the people shall hear, and fear, and do no more presumptuously.”

It is important to note that in order for someone to be put to death there had to be **at least two witnesses**, and the witnesses had to be the first ones involved in the criminal's execution:

Deuteronomy 17:6: “At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death be put to death; but at the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death.

7 The hands of the witnesses shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterward the hands of all the people. So thou shalt put the evil away from among you.”

The punishment for **false witnesses** was very severe. They were to receive whatever punishment their false testimony would have inflicted upon the innocent man:

Deuteronomy 19:16: “If a false witness rise up against any man to testify against him that which is wrong;

17 Then both the men, between whom the controversy is, shall stand before the Lord, before the priests and the judges, which shall be in those days:

18 And the judges shall make diligent inquisition: and, behold, if the witness be a false witness, and hath testified falsely against his brother;

19 Then shall ye do unto him, as he had thought to have done unto his brother: so shalt thou put the evil away from among you.

20 And those which remain shall hear, and fear, and shall henceforth commit no more any such evil among you.

21 And thine eye shall not pity; but life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.”

Also, this may seem obvious but you were also **not allowed to prosecute and punish the innocent**:

Exodus 23:7: “Keep thee far from a false matter; and the innocent and righteous slay thou not: for I will not justify the wicked.”

This is more important than it seems. In some countries people are presumed guilty until proven innocent. The thought is that it is better to punish 10 innocent people than to let 1 guilty person go free, and so the innocent are routinely punished. This is an abomination to God. He *strictly prohibits* the prosecution of the innocent. If a society is going to be punishing someone it had better be *really* sure that person is guilty. Punishing the innocent invites God's wrath.

Another interesting issue is the realm of unsolved crimes. Today an unsolved murder simply becomes a cold case that is eventually forgotten about. In the Old Testament, however, the situation was quite different. Even **unsolved murders** had to be dealt with. It was not simply enough to say “we tried” and then move on to the next case. God had very specific instructions as to what needed to take place:

Deuteronomy 21:1: “If one be found slain in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee to possess it, lying in the field, and it be not known who hath slain him:

2 Then thy elders and thy judges shall come forth, and they shall measure unto the cities which are round about him that is slain:

3 And it shall be, that the city which is next unto the slain man, even the elders of that city shall take a heifer, which hath not been wrought with, and which hath not drawn in the yoke;

4 And the elders of that city shall bring down the heifer unto a rough valley, which is neither eared nor sown, and shall strike off the heifer's neck there in the valley:

5 And the priests the sons of Levi shall come near; for them the Lord thy God hath chosen to minister unto him, and to bless in the name of the Lord; and by their word shall every controversy and every stroke be tried:

6 And all the elders of that city, that are next unto the slain man, shall wash their hands over the heifer that is beheaded in the valley:

7 And they shall answer and say, Our hands have not shed this blood, neither have our eyes seen it.

8 Be merciful, O Lord, unto thy people Israel, whom thou hast redeemed, and lay not innocent blood unto thy people of Israel's charge. And the blood shall be forgiven them.

9 So shalt thou put away the guilt of innocent blood from among you, when thou shalt do that which is right in the sight of the Lord.”

In summary, if someone was found murdered and no one could tell who was responsible, the priests had to **sacrifice a heifer** that had never been used to till the ground. The elders of the city nearest to the murdered man had to pledge that they were not responsible for the murder and did not know who was guilty. The priests would then beg the Lord to not charge them with the blood of the murdered man, and the Lord would then forgive them.

Finally, what about **juvenile offenders**? In today's society crimes committed by people under the age of 18 are treated very differently from crimes committed by adults. In the Mosaic Law,

however, there are no specific references to ages when it comes to crime and punishment. The Lord does not stipulate that a given punishment only applies to adults; He simply gives the crime and the punishment, and leaves it at that.

While that alone is not conclusive, one can look at specific cases in the Old Testament to see that when it came to crimes, children seemed to be treated as if they were adults. One example of this can be seen in the matter of **Achan**. When the Israelites invaded Canaan they were told that the city of Jericho was to be completely destroyed. They were not allowed to take any plunder at all from the city. Achan, however, stole a few things from the city – an act that led to God withdrawing His blessing from them. As a result the Israelites were defeated when they attacked Ai. As punishment for this crime Achan was sentenced to death, but he was not the only one that died:

Exodus 7:15: “And it shall be, that he that is taken with the accursed thing shall be burnt with fire, he and all that he hath: because he hath transgressed the covenant of the Lord, and because he hath wrought folly in Israel. ...

24 And Joshua, and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, and the silver, and the garment, and the wedge of gold, and his sons, and his daughters, and his oxen, and his asses, and his sheep, and his tent, and all that he had: and they brought them unto the valley of Achor.

25 And Joshua said, Why hast thou troubled us? The Lord shall trouble thee this day. And all Israel stoned him with stones, and burned them with fire, after they had stoned them with stones.

26 And they raised over him a great heap of stones unto this day. So the Lord turned from the fierceness of his anger. Wherefore the name of that place was called, The valley of Achor, unto this day.”

It is true that the Bible does not tell us how old Achan's children were when this happened. However, remember that the entire older generation of Israelites died in the wilderness. Only Joshua and Caleb made it into Canaan from that generation. Everyone else was born at some point during the 40 years the Israelites spent wandering around the desert. Achan, therefore, could not have been older than 40, and he might have been a lot younger than that. It is very possible that his children were younger than 20. Also, keep in mind that the Mosaic Law *strictly prohibited* executing children for the sins of their fathers. God commanded that people were only to be punished for their *own* sins. If Achan's children were punished then they must have been guilty as well.

A more striking example happened in the time of **Elisha**. This time there can be no doubt that the children were young – probably teenagers (if not younger than that). In this case the prophet Elisha is traveling when he encounters a group of hooligans:

2 Kings 2:23: “And he went up from thence unto Bethel: and as he was going up by the way, there came forth little children out of the city, and mocked him and said unto him, Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head.

24 And he turned back, and looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the Lord. And there came forth two she bears out of the wood, and tore forty and two children of them.

25 And he went from thence to mount Carmel, and from thence he returned to Samaria.”

What is going on here? We see that a group of children (and the Bible specifically says that they

were *little* children) mocking Elisha, the prophet of the Lord. Specifically, they were telling him to “go up”. This is a reference to Elijah's translation, which had just happened previously. The children in this story were telling Elisha that he, too, should vanish off the face of the Earth. They wanted him, the anointed prophet of the Lord, to die. By despising him they were despising his God, and the Lord took it personally. In response the Lord sent bears to **tear them limb from limb**, and 42 children died.

So it can be seen that to the Lord **a sin is a sin**, no matter what the age of the person. The Lord has not hesitated to strike both grown men and children dead. In the Mosaic Law capital crimes do not become less serious just because they were committed by someone under the age of 18.

Methods of Execution

There were several different methods of execution. One common one used was **stoning**. An example of this can be seen in the case of a man who gathered sticks on the Sabbath:

Numbers 15:32: “And while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man that gathered sticks upon the sabbath day.

33 And they that found him gathering sticks brought him unto Moses and Aaron, and unto all the congregation.

34 And they put him in ward, because it was not declared what should be done to him.

35 And the Lord said unto Moses, The man shall be surely put to death: all the congregation shall stone him with stones without the camp.

36 And all the congregation brought him without the camp, and stoned him with stones, and he died; as the Lord commanded Moses.”

It is interesting to see how different this is from modern executions. When a criminal is executed today society does all it can to make the execution as painless as possible. In the case of a firing squad some of the guns used contain blanks so that the executioner doesn't know if his gun contained live ammunition or not. The whole idea is to make sure that (a) the criminal does not suffer during the execution, and (b) when possible, that the person doing the executing does not know that he was responsible for the criminal's death. Finally, executions are not public spectacles. If anyone at all watches it is usually only those directly connected with the crime.

The system described in the Old Testament was completely different. First of all, the guilty person was executed by **stoning**. This meant that people threw rocks at him until he died of his injuries. It would have been a very painful way to die. No one was concerned about whether or not the criminal would suffer during the execution. **Suffering was guaranteed.**

Second, the execution was not performed by a select group of executioners. The **entire congregation** joined in throwing rocks at the criminal until he died. Everyone played a role in his death, and everyone knew they were playing a role in it. Plus, of course, the execution was held **out in public** where everyone could see it and be aware of what was going on.

This would have had quite an impact on any onlookers. They would have a graphic, impossible-to-miss illustration of the punishment for that particular crime, and they would see with their own eyes the agony involved in dying that way. They would even have *participated* in the punishment. If anyone

was ever tempted to commit that particular crime, the person being tempted would have a vivid memory of the consequences to think about.

There were other methods of execution. Sometimes criminals were executed by **hanging**. In the event that the criminal was hung there was a special provision made for the disposal of their body:

Deuteronomy 21:22: “And if a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be to be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree:

23 His body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day; (for he that is hanged is accursed of God;) that thy land be not defiled, which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance.”

I have not found any mentions in the Mosaic Law of anyone being burned at the stake, or of any crime for which that was the stated punishment. It is true that in the matter of Achan people were burned, but that was only after they were stoned. It's possible that only their corpses were burned.

Cities of Refuge

In the Old Testament the penalty for murder was death. However, if you killed someone accidentally then the situation was different. In that case you had to flee to one of the **cities of refuge**, where you had to live until the death of the High Priest. The entire system is explained here. (I will divide the passage into sections, as it is fairly long.)

Numbers 35:9: “And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying,

10 Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come over Jordan into the land of Canaan;

11 Then ye shall appoint you cities to be cities of refuge for you; that the slayer may flee thither, which killeth any person at unawares.”

The cities were specifically for people guilty of **killing someone in an accident**. They were not designed to protect murderers. These cities would be scattered at convenient places throughout the land of Israel so that they would not be too far from anyone.

Numbers 35:12: “And they shall be unto you cities for refuge from the avenger; that the manslayer die not, until he stand before the congregation in judgment.”

The **avenger** can be thought of as something like a bounty hunter today. If a man was guilty of murder then it was the responsibility of the avenger (who was the **nearest relative** of the person that was murdered) to hunt him down and kill him. The cities of refuge were safe havens where the avenger was not permitted to enter.

Numbers 35:13: “And of these cities which ye shall give six cities shall ye have for refuge.

14 Ye shall give three cities on this side Jordan, and three cities shall ye give in the land of

Canaan, which shall be cities of refuge.”

The Lord specified that **six cities** were to be set aside in Israel for cities of refuge. (The exact cities were decided after the Israelites had conquered Canaan. At the point this command was given the Israelites were still wandering around in the desert.) This would put every Israelite within a reasonable distance of a city of refuge.

Numbers 35:15: “These six cities shall be a refuge, both for the children of Israel, and for the stranger, and for the sojourner among them; that every one that killeth any person unawares may flee thither.

16 And if he smite him with an instrument of iron, so that he die, he is a murderer: the murderer shall surely be put to death.

17 And if he smite him with throwing a stone, wherewith he may die, and he die, he is a murderer: the murderer shall surely be put to death.

18 Or if he smite him with an hand weapon of wood, wherewith he may die, and he die, he is a murderer: and the murderer shall surely be put to death.”

Here the Lord is making it quite clear that the cities of refuge were *only* for people who were guilty of accidental manslaughter. If a person was guilty of murder then they were to be executed. In the examples given a person **assaulted a victim and the victim died**. Whether the person *intended* for the victim to die or not was irrelevant; if the result of the assault was death then the crime was murder and the murderer was to be executed. (In other words, you couldn't beat someone to death and then claim that you didn't mean for it to go that far. That didn't work.)

Numbers 35:19: “The revenger of blood himself shall slay the murderer: when he meeteth him, he shall slay him.”

As we have already established the avenger of blood (here called the “revenger” of blood) was the one responsible for hunting down the criminal and executing him. After the trial and the sentence there was no further legal action: once the criminal was found he was executed on the spot.

Numbers 35:20: “But if he thrust him of hatred, or hurl at him by laying of wait, that he die;

21 Or in enmity smite him with his hand, that he die: he that smote him shall surely be put to death; for he is a murderer: the revenger of blood shall slay the murderer, when he meeteth him.”

Once again God makes it clear that if the killing was **intentional** (as opposed to accidental) then the crime was murder and the avenger was commanded to slay the murderer.

Numbers 35:22: “But if he thrust him suddenly without enmity, or have cast upon him any thing without laying of wait,

23 Or with any stone, wherewith a man may die, seeing him not, and cast it upon him, that he die, and was not his enemy, neither sought his harm:”

Here we see that the difference between murder and an accident is the intent of the person. If the person acted with the **intent** of inflicting harm then the crime is murder. However, if the person didn't mean to inflict any harm or just didn't know that the person was standing there then there was no crime.

Numbers 35:24: “Then the congregation shall judge between the slayer and the revenger of blood according to these judgments:

25 And the congregation shall deliver the slayer out of the hand of the revenger of blood, and the congregation shall restore him to the city of his refuge, whither he was fled: and he shall abide in it unto the death of the high priest, which was anointed with holy oil.”

In the case of accidental manslaughter the person was required to **live in the city of refuge until the death of the High Priest**. The death of the High Priest would absolve the blood of the man that had been killed and the person could then go on about his life normally. However, *only* the death of the high priest could wash away the stain of the innocent blood and free the man to go back to his life.

God does go on to explain what would happen if the man chose to leave the city of refuge before the High Priest died:

Numbers 35:26: “But if the slayer shall at any time come without the border of the city of his refuge, whither he was fled;

27 And the revenger of blood find him without the borders of the city of his refuge, and the revenger of blood kill the slayer; he shall not be guilty of blood:

28 Because he should have remained in the city of his refuge until the death of the high priest: but after the death of the high priest the slayer shall return into the land of his possession.”

In other words, if the slayer leaves the city before the High Priest dies the avenger of blood has every right to **hunt him down and kill him**. He *must* stay within the city until the death of the High Priest or else risk execution at the hand of the nearest relative of the person he killed.

God ends this section with a final warning:

Numbers 35:29: “So these things shall be for a statute of judgment unto you throughout your generations in all your dwellings.

30 Whoso killeth any person, the murderer shall be put to death by the mouth of witnesses: but one witness shall not testify against any person to cause him to die.

31 Moreover ye shall take no satisfaction for the life of a murderer, which is guilty of death: but he shall be surely put to death.

32 And ye shall take no satisfaction for him that is fled to the city of his refuge, that he should come again to dwell in the land, until the death of the priest.

33 So shall ye not pollute the land wherein ye are: for blood it defileth the land: and the land cannot be cleansed of the blood that is shed therein, but by the blood of him that shed it.

34 Defile not therefore the land which ye shall inhabit, wherein I dwell: for I the Lord dwell among the children of Israel.”

Notice how God takes great pains to be clear that murderers were to be executed **without exception**. There is no talk about rehabilitation and then releasing the murderer back into society; in fact, that is strictly prohibited. Verse 31 is quite explicit: the *only* sentence you could issue for murder was death; “he shall be surely put to death”. God is *very* clear here. The blood of murdered individuals stained the land, and the only way the land could be cleansed was by executing the criminal responsible. **The forgiveness of sin requires the shedding of blood** – this is a theme seen all throughout the Scriptures.

Capital Crimes

There are quite a few capital crimes in the Old Testament. First, **murder** (a violation of #6) is punishable by death:

Exodus 21:12: “He that smiteth a man, so that he die, shall be surely put to death.”

However, as we've explained, if a person killed someone else in a tragic accident then the situation was different. In that case the person was to flee to one of the cities of refuge, where he had to live until the high priest died:

Exodus 21:13: “And if a man lie not in wait, but God deliver him into his hand; then I will appoint thee a place whither he shall flee.”

(This was covered in more detail in the section regarding cities of refuge.) Incidentally, the Mosaic Law allowed people to kill burglars that were breaking into your home:

Exodus 22:2: “If a thief be found breaking up, and be smitten that he die, there shall no blood be shed for him.”

It should be noted that murder is defined *not* as killing someone but as **intending to kill someone** – and not just anyone, but intending to kill **someone who was innocent**. Executing criminals was not a crime, nor was killing a burglar who had broken into your house, nor was killing enemy soldiers (or animals, for that matter).

However, there was one additional angle. If you were engaging in behavior that you **knew** was likely to result in someone's death and you did nothing about it, and someone died as a result, then you were guilty of murder:

Exodus 21:28: “If an ox gore a man or a woman, that they die: then the ox shall be surely stoned, and his flesh shall not be eaten; but the owner of the ox shall be quit.

29 But if the ox were wont to push with his horn in time past, and it hath been testified to his owner, and he hath not kept him in, but that he hath killed a man or a woman; the ox shall be stoned, and his owner also shall be put to death.”

An example from today's world would be drunk driving. Drunk drivers routinely kill innocent people. Had drunk driving been an issue back in the days of Moses a drunk driver who ran into someone and killed them would have been executed for murder, because he engaged in an activity that was known to kill innocent people.

Another capital crime was **hitting your mother and father** (a violation of #5):

Exodus 21:15: "And he that smiteth his father, or his mother, shall be surely put to death."

And **cursing your parents** (also a violation of #5):

Exodus 21:17: "And he that curseth his father, or his mother, shall surely be put to death."

It seems unbelievable today that God commanded *death* to anyone to hit their parents or cursed them, but God takes honoring parents very seriously. Just because we take the matter very lightly does not mean He does. When He commanded that we should honor our father and mother He really meant it.

Another capital crime is **kidnapping** (a violation of #8):

Exodus 21:16: "And he that stealeth a man, and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death."

And **witchcraft** (which could be seen as a violation of #1, as you are going to evil spirits for help instead of God). This may seem quaint to us today, but even in modern times there are people all over the world who deal with evil spirits. The Lord made it quite clear what the penalty for that sin was:

Exodus 22:18: "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live."

Leviticus 20:6: "And the soul that turneth after such as have familiar spirits, and after wizards, to go a whoring after them, I will even set my face against that soul, and will cut him off from among his people."

Deuteronomy 18:10: "There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch.

11 Or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer.

12 For all that do these things are an abomination unto the Lord: and because of these abominations the Lord thy God doth drive them out from before thee."

We are not talking about Harry Potter-type magic here, where someone waves a magic wand and says a spell and something arbitrary happens. Real wizards and witches are people that seek out demons and form a relationship with them in order to get the demons to do their bidding. This is a *very great sin*. No Christian should be forging a relationship with demons and going to them for help.

Worshipping someone other than God (a violation of #1) was also punishable by death:

Exodus 22:20: "He that sacrificeth unto any god, save unto the Lord only, he shall be utterly destroyed."

Deuteronomy 13:6: "If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou, nor thy fathers;

7 Namely, of the gods of the people which are round about you, nigh unto thee, or far off from thee, from the one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth;

8 Thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him; neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him:

9 But thou shalt surely kill him; thine hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people.

10 And thou shalt stone him with stones, that he die; because he hath sought to thrust thee away from the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.

11 And all Israel shall hear, and fear, and shall do no more any such wickedness as this is among you."

God was quite clear that the Israelites were to execute *anyone* that tried to get them to worship pagan gods. It didn't matter if they were wives, daughters, sons, or friends; they were to be executed for trying to turn Israel away from God. The Lord even specified the method of execution: they were to be stoned to death by the *entire congregation*. Everyone was to take part in putting them to death.

God went even further and explained that this provision applied to **cities** as well:

Deuteronomy 13:12: "If thou shalt hear say in one of thy cities, which the Lord thy God hath given thee to dwell there, saying,

13 Certain men, the children of Belial, are gone out from among you, and have withdrawn the inhabitants of their city, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which ye have not known;

14 Then shalt thou inquire, and make search, and ask diligently, and, behold, if it be truth, and the thing is certain, that such abomination is wrought among you;

15 Thou shalt surely smite the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, destroying it utterly, and all that is therein, and the cattle thereof, with the edge of the sword.

16 And thou shalt gather all the spoil of it into the midst of the street thereof, and shalt burn with fire the city, and all the spoil thereof every whit, for the Lord thy God: and it shall be an heap forever; it shall not be built again.

17 And there shall cleave naught of the cursed thing to thine hand: that the Lord may turn from the fierceness of his anger, and show thee mercy, and have compassion upon thee, and multiply thee, as he hath sworn unto thy fathers;

18 When thou shalt hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God, to keep all his commandments which I commanded thee this day, to do that which is right in the eyes of the Lord thy God."

If an entire city was found to have departed from serving God, the Lord commanded that the city was to be utterly destroyed. Everyone in it was to be killed, right down to the animals. The city was then to be burnt with fire and left as a trash heap, never to be rebuilt again. No one was allowed to take any spoil from the city; the entire area was cursed. The Lord was quite serious that He alone was to be worshiped. (Remember Sodom and Gomorrah?)

Another capital crime was **breaking the Sabbath** (a violation of #4):

Exodus 31:14: “Ye shall keep the sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people.

15 Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the sabbath of rest, holy to the Lord: whosoever doeth any work in the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death.”

And **blasphemy** (a violation of #3):

Leviticus 24:16: “And he that blasphemeth the name of the Lord, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him: as well the stranger, as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name of the Lord, shall be put to death.”

Leviticus 18 and 20 has a long list of forbidden sexual practices (violations of #7), nearly all of which were punishable by death. Most of these fall into several categories: sex with family members (other than your husband/wife), sex with neighbors, sex with animals, and sex with people of the same sex (as in homosexuality). The punishment was death for both parties. To quote just one part of this section (it does go on to specifically mention many other crimes):

Leviticus 20:10: “And the man that committeth adultery with another man's wife, even he that committeth adultery with his neighbor's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.”

Rape (another violation of #7) was also punishable by death:

Deuteronomy 22:25: “But if a man find a betrothed damsel in the field, and the man force her, and lie with her: then the man only that lay with her shall die:”

Non-Capital Crimes

Of course, there were many crimes listed that were not punishable by death. For example, if a man caused another man to be injured, the person responsible for the assault had to **reimburse the victim for all medical expenses and loss of time due to injuries**:

Exodus 21:18: “And if men strive together, and one smite another with a stone, or with his fist, and he die not, but keepeth his bed:

19 If he rise again, and walk abroad upon his staff, then shall he that smote him be quit: only he shall pay for the loss of his time, and shall cause him to be thoroughly healed.”

In addition to this, if a person attacked someone else the **criminal was to be injured** in the same way that he injured the victim:

Exodus 21:23: “And if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life,

24 Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,

25 Burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.”

So then, if a criminal took another person's life then his life was to be taken. If he cut off someone's hand then his own hand was to be cut off. **Justice demanded that whatever he did to his victim be done to him.** (Jail time was not an option, and in fact I have seen no mention of jail anywhere in the Mosaic Law.)

Let's pause for a moment and bring up another point. Some would object that Christ disagreed with this provision when He made this statement in the Sermon on the Mount:

Matthew 5:38: “Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth:

39 But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.

40 And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also.

41 And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.”

What this passage is teaching is *not* that society is prohibited from prosecuting criminals. Notice he says that if someone sues you “at the law” (verse 40) then you have to comply with the judgment handed down by the court. That is *very different* from saying “there is no law”. It is actually teaching that Christians are **not allowed to take revenge**. People were taking the “eye for eye, tooth for tooth” rule to mean that they could exact their own revenge outside the law. Revenge, however, has always been forbidden – even in the Mosaic Law itself:

Leviticus 19:18: “Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself: I am the Lord.”

Notice that the idea of **loving your neighbor as yourself** actually comes from *Leviticus*. That

concept was not something new that had never been taught before. Just in case we missed the point, Paul emphasizes that the **government does indeed have the power to prosecute criminals** and execute them:

Romans 13:1: "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.

2 Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.

3 For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same:

4 For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil."

Notice that the rulers are said to be a terror to evil, and do not bear the sword in vain.

The Mosaic Law also has protections for innocent bystanders. For example, in the event that two people got in a fight and one of them accidentally injures a woman in such a way that the woman **gives birth prematurely** (but the woman *and the baby* is unharmed) then the attacker must **pay a fine**:

Exodus 21:22: "If men strive, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart from her, and yet no mischief follow: he shall surely be punished, according as the woman's husband will lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges determine."

In this case, while his attack on the man was malicious, the injury *to the woman* was an accident. The attacker did not mean to injure the woman or her unborn child, and *if* there was no injury to either party (no "mischief" followed) then he was required to pay however much the judges determined. However, if mischief *did* follow then Exodus 21:23 (which is the very next verse!) kicked in: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a life for a life. If the baby was born prematurely and died then the man was executed, because his intentional attack on someone else resulted in the death of an innocent bystander.

The principal here is one of **restitution** – just because it was an accident does not mean you're not responsible for damages. You still have to make it right, as much as is possible.

Theft is also discussed. If a thief stole something, he was required to **restore what he stole and then pay more on top of that**. The penalty amount he had to pay varied depending on what was stolen, but it was always several times more than the value of the stolen property. Generally, the more valuable the stolen item the greater the multiplier:

Exodus 22:1: "If a man shall steal an ox, or a sheep, and kill it, or sell it; he shall restore five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep."

Stealing an oxen would have been far worse than stealing a sheep. People depended upon oxen to survive; they needed them for plowing and for other farm work. Sheep were important too, but the loss of a single sheep was not likely to put the survival of an entire family in jeopardy. The loss of an ox, however, could do just that.

The general theme for thefts was that the thief had to **make restitution**. For example, if a person deliberately caused harm to his neighbor then he had to repay whatever harm was caused:

Exodus 22:5: “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.”

Any criminal guilty of arson also had to repay whatever was burned in the fire:

Exodus 22:6: “If fire break out, and catch in thorns, so that the stacks of corn, or the standing corn, or the field, be consumed therewith; he that kindled the fire shall surely make restitution.”

Jail time was not an option, nor was the person executed (unless the action they took resulted in someone's death). They had to repay what they had stole – even if that meant selling themselves into slavery to pay the debt.

Finally, I have only found one crime in the Mosaic Law for which the punishment was **having one's hand cut off**. That crime is not theft, but is something else altogether. I think this speaks for itself:

Deuteronomy 25:11: “When men strive together one with another, and the wife of the one draweth near for to deliver her husband out of the hand of him that smiteth him, and putteth forth her hand, and taketh him by the secrets:

12 Then thou shalt cut off her hand, thine eye shall not pity her.”

Other Crimes

There were also commands given for which there was no specific punishment. For example, people were forbidden from oppressing others by charging **outrageous amounts of interest** on loans to the poor:

Exodus 22:25: “If thou lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as a usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury.”

If credit card companies existed back in the days of Moses they would definitely have been in violation of this commandment. You were not allowed to strangle the poor with interest payments.

You were also forbidden from **cursing rulers and judges**:

Exodus 22:28: “Thou shalt not revile the gods, nor curse the ruler of thy people.”

(In this context, 'gods' means 'judges'.) I think it is pretty clear that going around chanting “Death to [ruler]” would have been a gross violation of this commandment. It was one thing to say that a ruler was doing something wrong; God often used His prophets to rebuke kings (such as when He sent Nathan to rebuke David, for example). It was something else entirely to curse them. Like cursing

parents, cursing rulers was strictly prohibited.

Another class of crimes was **fraud** (which is really just another form of stealing) and **withholding a man's wages**:

Leviticus 19:13: “Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbor, neither rob him: the wages of him that is hired shall not abide with thee all night until the morning.”

In the above example, a day laborer needed his wages so that he could feed himself and his family. Powerful people might withhold a man's wages just because they could, but this was strictly prohibited. You were not allowed to make other people suffer just so you could improve your own life.

Along that same line you were not allowed to purposefully **make life difficult for the disabled**:

Leviticus 19:14: “Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumblingblock before the blind, but shalt fear thy God: I am the Lord.”

Weights and measurements also had to be just:

Leviticus 19:35: “Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in meteyard, in weight, or in measure.

36 Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin, shall ye have: I am the Lord your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt.”

A modern example of this commandment would be that a gallon jug of milk had to actually contain a gallon of milk, and if a gas station claimed to have sold you 12 gallons of gasoline then they weren't allowed to short you and only give you 9 gallons instead. Merchants had to be just and fair.

Also, if you saw someone in distress you were required to **lend a hand**:

Deuteronomy 22:4: “Thou shalt not see thy brother's ass or his ox fall down by the way, and hide thyself from them: thou shalt surely help him to lift them up again.”

A family's livelihood could depend on the life of their ox. If you saw that their ox was in trouble you couldn't walk away and do nothing about it. You had to stop and help. You were not allowed to say “Oh well,” and go about your life. You were your brother's keeper.

When doing construction, you had to take **reasonable precautions to safeguard the lives of others**:

Deuteronomy 22:8: “When thou buildest a new house, then thou shalt make a battlement for thy roof, that thou bring not blood upon thine house, if any man fall from thence.”

In other words, if you were aware of a situation that had a high likelihood of taking someone else's life, and you had the ability to do something about it, then you were required to take action. Once again, you could not just say “Oh well – it's their own fault” and go on about your business. This is simply another example of “Love your neighbor as yourself”.

Finally, if you make your money through prostitution you were **not allowed to take that money and offer it to God**:

Deuteronomy 23:18: “Thou shalt not bring the hire of a whore, or the price of a dog, into the house of the Lord thy God for any vow: for even both these are abomination unto the Lord thy God.”

This may seem strange, but the basic idea is that if you make money through a means that God has condemned as sinful and evil then you cannot take the reward of that evil activity and offer it to God. The Lord will have no part of it; it is an abomination to Him.

Appendix A: Waging War

The Mosaic Law has quite a bit to say about the way that war should be waged. There were two sets of commands. The Lord made it quite clear that when it came to waging war against the **people who lived in Canaan** the Israelites were to practice nothing less than total annihilation:

Deuteronomy 20:16: “But of the cities of these people, which the Lord thy God doth give thee for an inheritance, thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth:

17 But thou shalt utterly destroy them; namely, the Hittites, and the Amorites, the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; as the Lord thy God hath commanded thee:

18 That they teach you not to do after all their abominations, which they have done unto their gods; so should ye sin against the Lord your God.”

We can see here that the Lord even explains the reason behind this policy: He did not want them to **copy the lifestyles** of the natives. As it turned out, the Israelites did *not* wipe out the native Canaanites, and as God predicted they were corrupted by them. This led to Israel's eviction from the land.

However, when it came to waging war against people who lived in other countries, a different set of regulations applied. First, the Lord said that the people of Israel were to trust God for victory and not place their hope in the size of their army:

Deuteronomy 20:1: “When thou goest out to battle against thine enemies, and seest horses, and chariots, and a people more than thou, be not afraid of them: for the Lord thy God is with thee, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.

2 And it shall be, when ye are come nigh unto the battle, that the priest shall approach and speak unto the people,

3 And shall say unto them, Hear, O Israel, ye approach this day unto battle against your enemies: let not your hearts faint, fear not, and do not tremble, neither be ye terrified because of them;

4 For the Lord your God is he that goeth with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you.”

The Lord made it very clear that He was the one that would give them strength to win the battle. It was not the size of their army that counted, but the **size of their God**. No army can stand against the might of the Living God. Throughout the Scriptures the Lord emphasized that He was the one that counts when it comes to victory:

Psalms 33:16: “There is no king saved by the multitude of a host: a mighty man is not delivered by much strength.

17 A horse is a vain thing for safety: neither shall he deliver any by his great strength.

18 Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy;

19 To deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine.

20 Our soul waiteth for the Lord: he is our help and our shield."

God wanted people to realize that **He was the one that governed** over their lives and their situations. Victory – or defeat – was in His hands. He did not want the Israelites to start focusing on their own strength or trusting in themselves for victory. He wanted all of their hope and trust to be focused on Him.

The Lord went on to say that there were some people who did not belong in the army:

Deuteronomy 20:5: "And the officers shall speak unto the people, saying, What man is there that hath built a new house, and hath not dedicated it? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle, and another man dedicate it.

6 And what man is he that hath planted a vineyard, and hath not yet eaten of it? Let him also go and return unto his house, lest he die in the battle, and another man eat of it.

7 And what man is there that hath betrothed a wife, and hath not taken her? Let him go and return unto his house, lest he die in the battle, and another man take her."

Here we have three different cases: a man who had just **built a house**, a man that had just **planted a vineyard**, and a man that was **engaged but not yet married**. In each case the Lord said that this person should go back home, lest he die and not be able to partake of the fruit of his labors. It is important to God that we should reap what we sow – not just in a bad way, but in a good way as well.

There is another type of person that was not permitted to be in the army:

Deuteronomy 20:8: "And the officers shall speak further unto the people, and they shall say, What man is there that is fearful and fainthearted? Let him go and return unto his house, lest his brethren's heart faint as well as his heart."

Anyone who was afraid was not permitted to be in the army. The concern was that the person's fear would spread to other people as well. The army was to be made up entirely of people who were not afraid to be there. These were to be **fearless warriors** whose heart was completely focused on the Lord for victory. (David's battle with Goliath is a great example of this; he was not afraid to fight because his entire trust was focused on God.)

There is a brief mention of organization:

Deuteronomy 20:9: "And it shall be, when the officers have made an end of speaking unto the people, that they shall make captains of the armies to lead the people."

The army was to have captains that were in charge. These would be responsible for leading the army into battle.

As far as the actual fighting was concerned, the first thing the Israelites had to do when attacking a city was offer it **terms of surrender**:

Deuteronomy 20:10: "When thou comest nigh unto a city to fight against it, then proclaim peace unto it.

11 And it shall be, if it make thee answer of peace, and open unto thee, then it shall be, that

all the people that is found therein shall be tributaries unto thee, and they shall serve thee.”

If the city accepted the terms then they would become servants of the Israelites. However, if the city rejected these terms then the Israelites were allowed to **attack**:

Deuteronomy 20:12: “And if it will make no peace with thee, but will make war against thee, then thou shalt besiege it:

13 And when the Lord thy God hath delivered it into thine hands, thou shalt smite every male thereof with the edge of the sword:

14 But the women, and the little ones, and the cattle, and all that is in the city, even all the spoil thereof, shalt thou take unto thyself; and thou shalt eat the spoil of thine enemies, which the Lord thy God hath given thee.”

In modern times when the United States conquers another country the first thing it does is take billions of dollars from American taxpayers and use that money to repair the country that they just defeated in battle. They then set up a government that is composed of local citizens and leave, allowing that country to continue on as a sovereign nation.

It's easy to think that this is what countries have always done, but that is not the case. As we can see, the Mosaic Law had very different regulations when it came to engaging in war. The Lord said that when the Israelites conquered a city they were to **slaughter all of the males**, take the women and children captive as **slaves**, and then **loot the city** and take the plunder for themselves. There is no mention of nation building. When it was all said and done life did not just “go on”; instead, the enemy city was completely destroyed and became part of the territory of the Israelites.

There was one final regulation regarding warfare, and it dealt with the practice of the **siege**:

Deuteronomy 20:19: “When thou shalt besiege a city a long time, in making war against it to take it, thou shalt not destroy the trees thereof by forcing an axe against them: for thou mayest eat of them, and thou shalt not cut them down (for the tree of the field is man's life) to employ them in the siege:

20 Only the trees which thou knowest that they be not trees for meat, thou shalt destroy and cut them down; and thou shalt build bulwarks against the city that maketh war against thee, until it be subdued.”

Here the Lord commanded the Israelites that they were not allowed to practice scorched earth warfare. They were to take care to not cut down any trees that were used for food. God did not want the Israelites to destroy the countryside and make it uninhabitable.

Appendix B: Regulations for Kings

This is something I will only touch on briefly. All throughout the Scriptures there are many regulations that are specific to kings. The Lord spends quite a bit of time explaining how a wise and righteous king should behave. What I want to focus on specifically, however, is a passage in the Mosaic Law that has some specific instructions for kings.

First, it is interesting that the Lord would take the time to do this. After all, He made it very clear that the nation of Israel was to be a theocracy, with the Lord Himself reigning as their king. However, He also knew that the Israelites did not want to have Him as their king and would one day ask for a human king to be appointed over them. With this in mind God set down a few rules for this future king:

Deuteronomy 17:14: “When thou art come unto the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein, and shalt say, I will set a king over me, like as all the nations that are about me;”

When the Israelites were still wandering around in the desert, decades before they ever crossed over the Jordan to begin conquering the land of Canaan, the Lord already knew that they would **reject Him as king**. The actual event that the Lord is predicting is recorded in I Samuel:

1 Samuel 8:4: “Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah,
5 And said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations.
6 But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the Lord.
7 And the Lord said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.
8 According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken me, and served other gods, so do they also unto thee.
9 Now therefore hearken unto their voice: howbeit yet protest solemnly unto them, and show them the manner of the king that shall reign over them.”

Here the Lord makes it clear that by requesting a king the Israelites were **rejecting God**. They did not want God to reign over them. Since that time thousands of years ago nothing has changed. To this day the Israelites still reject God. They still do not want the Lord to reign over them. Jesus Himself commented on this very fact as He was going to Jerusalem to be crucified:

Matthew 23:37: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!
38 Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.

39 For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."

One day the situation will change and the Israelites will accept Jesus as their King. But that day has not yet come to pass.

The Lord goes on to lay down some regulations regarding the kings that the Israelites were to have:

Deuteronomy 17:15: "Thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee, whom the Lord thy God shall choose: one from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee: thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which is not thy brother."

First, they were to let **God pick their king**. They were not allowed to just pick anyone, and they were not allowed to set a **foreigner** over them. Their king had to be an Israelite.

Second, the king to **trust in God for aid**, not in a large army of horses or in the power of a foreign ally:

Deuteronomy 17:16: "But he shall not multiply horses to himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt, to the end that he should multiply horses: forasmuch as the Lord hath said unto you, Ye shall henceforth return no more that way."

As was discussed in Appendix A, the Lord wanted the Israelites to trust in Him for victory, not in a large army. The king's heart was to be fixed on God for strength and victory. He was not allowed to amass a huge army and put his trust in his own strength. God wanted the king to depend on Him.

Deuteronomy 17:17: "Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away: neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold."

The king was also forbidden from putting together **a harem**, for fear that having many wives would turn the king's heart away from God. Solomon rejected this command and amassed hundreds of wives – and sure enough, they turned his heart away from God, which brought God's judgment down upon Solomon. The Lord did not want the king to have anything in his life that would **turn his heart away from God**.

Also, the king was forbidden from amassing enormous amounts of wealth. He was not forbidden from *being* wealthy; it was not a sin to multiply silver and gold. The problem was with *greatly* multiplying silver and gold. Once again, the danger was that enormous wealth would cause the king to become proud and forget God. King Nebuchadnezzar is a great example of this:

Daniel 4:28: "All this came upon the king Nebuchadnezzar.

29 At the end of twelve months he walked in the palace of the kingdom of Babylon.

30 The king spake, and said, Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty?"

Nebuchadnezzar's power and wealth had gone to his head and made him forget God – in fact, he saw himself as a god. The Lord did not want this to happen to the kings of Israel and so He forbade them from amassing extravagant wealth.

Finally, the king was required to personally **write out a copy of the entire law**:

Deuteronomy 17:18: “And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites:

19 And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them:

20 That his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment, to the right hand, or to the left: to the end that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he, and his children, in the midst of Israel.”

Not only was the king commanded to **personally transcribe** the entire law (thus ensuring that he had read it and was familiar with it!), but he was also required to **read it** “all the days of his life”. The purpose of this was so that the king would learn to fear God and would walk in the Lord's commandments. God wanted the king to fear God, obey God, and be humble.