

The Mosaic Law

This lesson provides a high-level overview of the justice system that is found in the Mosaic Law. The Mosaic Law touches on many different topics, but few people study it today. This is unfortunate, because the Law played a huge role in the lives of the Israelites; it is much easier to understand the Old Testament if you have a good working knowledge of the Law. If we are ignorant of the culture of those times then we will find it difficult to understand what is really going on.

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 the Law can still reveal 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. While that may sound reasonable, it is actually wrong. An action is right or wrong solely because *God says it is right or wrong*. Only God has the authority to make that determination, and only God has the authority to dictate what should happen when His laws are broken.

God is quite clear all throughout the Bible that when someone sins, *His* laws are being broken and *He* is the one who is being sinned against. God takes every act of disobedience personally, and He sees *Himself* as the victim.

The Mosaic Law is not a random collection of laws that were assembled from various sources; they are God's laws. The reason Israel was commanded to keep them is because the Lord was God:

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 repeatedly said that Israel was to obey *His* judgments because *He was God*. It is not any more complicated than that. As tempting as it might be to simply live according to our own

feelings, the truth is that what we think or feel is irrelevant. All that matters is *what God has said*. When we neglect God's Word and go with our own feelings we will fall into all sorts of error.

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. 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, and that one tree was forbidden on pain of death. Why was it wrong to eat from that tree? *Because God said so*. Disobeying God's commands is a sin, pure and simple.

It is very important to realize that *only* God can define what is right and what is wrong. What really counts is not our feelings or sensibilities but what God has commanded. There are times when it may be difficult to figure out how to apply a commandment to a situation, but we must never forget that what really matters is what God has said.

Why was the punishment for eating of the tree *death*? There are a number of reasons why this punishment makes sense, but what I want to emphasize is that just as God had the right to determine what is right and what is wrong, God also had the right to determine the penalty for breaking His laws. He had every right to decree that eating from the tree of the knowledge was wrong, and He had every right to decree that the punishment for breaking that law was death. I am not saying that His laws are random or that His punishments are arbitrary; that is not the case. What I am saying is that just as it has never been up to us to determine what is right and what is wrong, it is also not up to us to determine what should be done when the law is broken. That is God's decision. We are not free to make up new sins and we are not free to say that certain sinful behaviors are now “just fine”. Mankind does not have the power to change God's commands.

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."

However, 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."

God would no longer personally confront murderers and issue sentences. Instead, mankind was now 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 viewed murder as an assault on Himself. Men were made in God's image, and therefore an attack on man was an attack on God.

This is where things stood for a number of centuries. It was not until the time of Moses that God gave mankind a complete system of justice. That is the system that we will be studying.

The Mosaic Law and Justice System

There are a tremendous number of regulations in the Mosaic Law. Some people have counted more than 600 separate laws! Since it is not possible to cover every single law, I am going to narrow the focus of this lesson. There are many restrictions that deal with food, and while those regulations are important I am not going to cover them. I'm also not going to cover the regulations regarding sacrifices, or the handling of the dead, or how to deal with mold, or what to do when someone gets sick with leprosy, or the regulations regarding slavery. There is simply not enough time or space to deal with those enormous subjects. Instead I am going to focus on the basic "crime and punishment" laws.

The Ten Commandments are very famous and 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 God audibly gave Israel those commands, the Israelites actually **lost their nerve** 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; they could not handle it. Instead they asked Moses to go to God on their behalf, find out what the Law was, and then report back to them. They simply could not handle interacting directly with God.

My point is that the law contains a great deal more than just ten commands. However, the Ten Commandments are a good place to start. Those 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: Worship God; do not worship anyone else.

#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 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.

Since these commands are very famous I will not elaborate on them. Instead let's take a look at some of the other aspects of the Mosaic Law.

The Trial

How were trials conducted in the Old Testament? Well, the Lord instituted a series of **judges** that were 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 you can see, the judges were commanded to be just. They were not allowed to accept bribes or favor one person's cause over another. **They had to be impartial.** They were not allowed to favor 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 applied equally to everyone, even to foreigners:

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."

The Mosaic Law made it clear 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 away 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 when an exceptionally hard case came along, the matter would be brought to **the priests** and they would reveal what the Lord commanded. This is not the same thing as inquiring of the Lord with the Urim and Thummim, although that was done from time to time. Instead, God set aside certain priests who could be called upon to answer exceptionally hard questions. That 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 they 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."

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 much more important than it seems. In some countries people are presumed guilty until they can prove that they are innocent. These countries believe that it is better to punish ten innocent people than to let one guilty person go free, and so they routinely punish innocent people. This is an abomination to God. The Lord *strictly prohibits* the prosecution of the innocent. If a society is going to punish someone it had better be *very* sure that the person is guilty. Punishing the innocent invites God's wrath.

Another interesting issue is the matter of unsolved crimes. Today an unsolved murder simply becomes a cold case that is eventually forgotten about. In the Mosaic Law, 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 about 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 a person was 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 nearest city 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 not to charge them with the blood of the murdered man, and the Lord would forgive them.

Finally, what about **juvenile offenders**? In today's society crimes that are 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. 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 study the case law of the Old Testament and see how cases involving minors were actually handled. It turns out that in each case, children were treated exactly like adults. Their age did not affect their sentences in any way. 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; no one was allowed to take any plunder from it. Achan, however, stole a few things from the city – an act that led to God withdrawing His blessing from Israel. As a result the Israelites were defeated when they attacked Ai, and a number of them were killed. Achan was sentenced to death for his crime, but he was not the only one who was executed:

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 had died in the wilderness. The only people from the previous generation who were still alive were Joshua and Caleb. Everyone else was born during the 40 years the Israelites spent wandering around the desert. Achan, therefore, could not have been older than 40, and he may have been a lot younger than that. It's very possible that his children were younger than 20. It is also important to remember that the Mosaic Law *strictly prohibited* people from executing children for the sins of their fathers. People could only be punished for their *own* sins. If Achan's children were punished then they must have been guilty as well.

A even more striking example happened in the time of **Elisha**. This time there can be no doubt that the children were young. In this case the prophet Elisha was traveling when he encountered a group of little children:

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) is mocking Elisha, the prophet of the Lord. Specifically, they were telling him to

“go up”. This is a reference to Elijah's ascension into Heaven, which had just happened. The children in this story were telling Elisha that he, too, should vanish off the face of the Earth. They wanted the anointed prophet of the Lord to die. By despising him they were despising his God, and the Lord was not happy about it. In response the Lord sent bears to **tear them limb from limb**.

What we can see from this is that **a sin is a sin**, regardless of the person's age. The Lord has killed both grown men and little children. In the Mosaic Law capital crimes were not less serious simply because they were committed by someone under the age of 18.

Methods of Execution

There were several different methods of execution. One of the most common 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. Today when the state executes a criminal they do everything they can to make the process as painless as possible. On top of that, in the case of a firing squad they load some of the guns with blanks so that the executioner doesn't know if he actually shot him or not. The whole idea is to make sure that the criminal does not suffer and that the person doing the executing does not know that he contributed to the criminal's death. Finally, executions are not public spectacles. If anyone watches it is usually only those who were directly connected with the crime.

The system described in the Mosaic Law 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 – which would have been a very painful way to die. As you can see, no one was concerned about whether the criminal would suffer during the execution. In fact, **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. Finally, the execution was held **in public** where everyone could see it.

This would have had quite an impact on any onlookers. The execution would serve as a graphic, impossible-to-miss illustration of the punishment for that particular crime, and the Israelites would not have been able to miss the agony of death. They would have even *participated* in the punishment. If anyone was ever tempted to commit that particular crime they would have a clear memory of the punishment. One would imagine that this would serve as an effective deterrent.

Stoning was not the only method of execution, though. Sometimes criminals were executed by **hanging**. When the criminal was hung there was a special provision made for the disposal of their body. Their body could not be left to rot. Instead, they had to be buried that day:

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. It is true that in the matter of Achan people were burned, but that was only after they were stoned to death.

Criminals died in other ways as well. It often varied, because some crimes were punished by the **avenger**. For example, let's say that someone murdered your wife. In that case you would be *required by law* to hunt down the murderer and kill him. The way that you executed him would be up to you. You might strangle him, or stab him, or beat him to death; it was up to you. But it was your job to find him and kill him.

But what if it was just an accident? What if he didn't mean to kill her? In that case his only hope of survival was to flee to one of the cities of refuge – and that is what we will discuss next.

Cities of Refuge

In the Old Testament the penalty for murder was death. However, if you accidentally killed someone then the situation was different. In that case you had to flee to one of the six **cities of refuge**, where you had to live until the death of the High Priest. The entire system is explained in Numbers 35:

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.”

As you can see, the cities were specifically set aside for people who were guilty of **accidentally killing someone**. They were *not* designed to protect murderers. These cities were placed at convenient places throughout the land of Israel so that they were within reach of the entire population. Anyone who lived in one of the cities of refuge was protected from the **avenger**:

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 modern bounty hunter. If a man was guilty of murder then the avenger (who was the **nearest relative** of the person who had been murdered) was responsible for hunting the murderer down and executing him.

Israel had six cities of refuge – three east of the Jordan and three west of it:

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.”

Once a person fled to one of the cities of refuge he was put on trial and the facts of the case were determined. If he was actually a murderer then he would be put to death:

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.”

One of the interesting things about this particular case is that the definition of murder was a lot stricter in the Mosaic Law than it was today. In this example, the person **assaulted a victim and the victim died**. Whether the person *intended* for the victim to die 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, if you deliberately hit someone and they died as a result of that injury then you couldn't claim that you didn't mean to kill him. That did not work. The Mosaic Law did not have different classifications of manslaughter and homicide. If you killed someone you either did it accidentally or you did it on purpose. If you did it on purpose then you were executed.

As was said earlier, the avenger is the person who was responsible for hunting down and executing the murderer:

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

Once the criminal had been tried and sentenced there was no further legal action. The criminal was executed by the avenger:

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. If it was accidental, though, then his life would be spared:

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:”

The difference between murder and an accident was the person's intent. If the person acted with the **intent** of inflicting harm then the crime was murder. However, if the person didn't mean to inflict any harm then it was not murder – but that did *not* mean that he was allowed to go free. Since he had killed someone he had to **remain in the city of refuge until the High Priest died:**

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.”

The death of the High Priest would atone for the blood that had been shed, and the person could then leave the city and go on with his life. However, *only* the death of the High Priest could wash away the stain of the innocent blood. God went 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 left the city before the High Priest died, the avenger of blood had every right to **hunt him down and kill him**. The slayer was required to stay within the city limits until the death of the High Priest; otherwise he risked being killed at the hand of the avenger.

God ended 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 took great pains to command that murderers were to be executed **without exception**. There is no talk of rehabilitation or releasing the murderer back into society; in fact, that was strictly prohibited. Verse 31 is quite explicit: the *only* sentence you could issue for murder was death. The blood of murdered individuals defiled the land, and the only way the land could be cleansed was by executing the criminal who was responsible.

Capital Crimes

There are quite a few capital crimes in the Old Testament. First, **murder** (a violation of the sixth commandment) was 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 accidentally then the situation was different. In that case the slayer would flee to one of the cities of refuge, where he had to live until the High Priest died.

As a side-note, the Mosaic Law allowed people to kill burglars who were caught breaking into their home. However, there was an exception to this:

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

3 If the sun be risen upon him, there shall be blood shed for him; for he should make full restitution; if he have nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft.”

What the Law is communicating here is that although it's not murder to defend yourself, it *is* murder to kill people who are stealing your property. Thieves were required to make restitution; they were not supposed to be executed and you were not allowed to kill them. However, if you caught someone breaking into your house at night then you could assume that your life was in danger and act accordingly. The point here is *not* “It's ok to kill burglars at night but not during the daytime”; the point is that thieves should not be killed at all, except when you have good reason to believe that your life is in danger.

This brings up another point. There were a number of situations in the Mosaic Law where you could kill someone without being guilty of murder. For example, if you were the avenger of blood and you killed the murderer that you were chasing then you were not guilty of murder. If someone attacked you and you defended yourself then you were not guilty of murder. If you were a soldier and killed someone in battle then you were not guilty of murder. If a thief broke into your home and threatened your life and you killed him then you were not guilty of murder either. In all of those cases you were not guilty of murder or accidental death, so you did not have to move to the city of refuge. You were placed in a different category altogether.

Criminal negligence was also a crime. If you made a decision that you **knew** was likely to

result in someone's death, 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."

In this case the owner of the ox knew that he had a dangerous animal that had tried to kill people in the past, but he did nothing about it. Since he knew about it and did nothing, he was held responsible when the ox killed someone. He should have taken steps to resolve the problem.

A modern example of this would be drunk driving. Society takes great pains to ensure that all drivers know that drinking while intoxicated leads to accidents – including fatal accidents. If drunk driving had been an issue back in the days of the Mosaic Law, a drunk driver who ran into someone and killed him would have been executed for murder. It would not have been considered an accident because the driver knew that drinking while intoxicated was dangerous, and he deliberately chose to do it anyway. Since the driver chose to engage in reckless behavior, and since that behavior killed someone, he would have been executed. (However, he would not have been executed until he actually killed someone.)

Another capital crime was **hitting your mother and father** (a violation of the fifth commandment):

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 the fifth commandment):

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

And **being a chronically rebellious child**:

Deuteronomy 21:18: "If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son, which will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother, and that, when they have chastened him, will not hearken unto them:

19 Then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him, and bring him out unto the elders of his city, and unto the gate of his place;

20 And they shall say unto the elders of his city, This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton, and a drunkard.

21 And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die: so shalt thou put evil away from among you; and all Israel shall hear, and fear."

It seems unbelievable that God commanded the *death penalty* in these cases, but God takes honoring parents very seriously. Just because we don't think it's a big deal doesn't mean that God agrees with us. When He commanded that we should honor our father and mother He really meant it.

Another capital crime was **kidnapping** (a violation of the eighth commandment):

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.”

Witchcraft was also on the list (and a violation of the first commandment). This crime 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 clear that witchcraft was a very grave sin:

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.”

This passage is not talking about Harry Potter-type magic, where someone waves a magic wand and something arbitrary happens. Real wizards and witches are people who 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 the first commandment) 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.”

Ancient Israel was not supposed to be a pluralistic society. People were not allowed to join other religious, hold other beliefs, or worship other gods. God commanded the Israelites to execute *anyone* who tried to get them to worship pagan gods. It didn't matter if the guilty party was their wife, daughter, son, or friend; 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 God, the Lord commanded that the city be utterly destroyed. Everyone in it was to be killed, right down to the animals. The city was to be burned with fire and left as a trash heap, never to be rebuilt. 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.

Another capital crime was **breaking the Sabbath** (a violation of the fourth commandment):

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."

Blasphemy was also a capital crime (and a violation of the third commandment):

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 the seventh commandment), nearly all of which were punishable by death. Most of these fell into several categories: adultery, sex with family members (incest), sex with neighbors, sex with animals, and homosexuality. The punishment in each of these cases was death for both parties. To quote just one part of this large section:

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 the seventh commandment) was also punishable by death:

Deuteronomy 22:25: “But if a man find a bethrothed 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

There were many crimes in the Mosaic Law 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, as well as the loss of time due to his 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.”

If the victim was completely healed then the matter was considered to be settled. However, if the victim was permanently injured then the **criminal was to be injured in the same way that he had 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 own 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; in fact, jail is not mentioned anywhere in the Mosaic Law.

Let's pause for a moment and bring up another point. Some people have claimed that Christ disagreed with this provision of the Law during His 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.”

Although this passage is very famous, I'm afraid that people have completely misunderstood it. Notice that verse 40 contains the all-important phrase “at the law”. What Jesus was actually telling people was that *they were required to comply with judgments that were handed down by the courts*. If you were sued and the court took away your cloak, you were required to comply with that. If the Romans passed a law requiring you to carry their soldier's pack, then you were to comply. In fact, Jesus said that instead of seeking your revenge, God wanted you to go above and beyond what the law stated.

As you can see, this is a completely different issue and has nothing to do with what the Mosaic Law was talking about. All Jesus was really saying was that Christians are **not allowed to take revenge**. People were taking the “eye for eye, tooth for tooth” rule to mean that they could go beyond the law and exact their own revenge. 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. The same Mosaic Law that contained the “eye for an eye” rule *also told people to love their neighbors*. There is a tremendous difference between a court handing down a legal sentence and a person going around the law to get their own revenge. Those two situations should not be confused.

The Mosaic Law also had protections for innocent bystanders. For example, in the event that two people got in a fight and one of them accidentally injured a woman in such a way that the woman **gave birth prematurely** (but the woman and her baby were unharmed) then the attacker had to **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.

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.””

In this particular case, although the criminal meant to attack the man, he did not mean to attack the woman; the attack on her was truly an accident. If the woman and her child were uninjured (in other words, no “mischief” followed) then the attacker was required to pay however much the judges determined. However, if mischief *did* follow then Exodus 21:23 kicked in: he had to pay an eye for an

eye, a tooth for a tooth, and a life for a life. If the baby died then the man was executed, because his intentional attack resulted in the death of an innocent bystander.

The principal here is one of **restitution**. Just because it was an accident does not mean that the attacker was not responsible for damages. He still had to make it right.

Theft was 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 that 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 he 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 who was 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 that was punished by **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

The Mosaic Law contains a number of other practices that were forbidden, but for which there was no specific punishment. For example, people were forbidden from **charging 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.”

People were allowed to charge interest to other people, but not to the poor. The poor were exempt.

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 the king!” would have been a gross violation of this commandment. It's one thing to rebuke a ruler for sinning; God often used His prophets to rebuke kings. However, cursing them was another matter entirely. You were not allowed to curse your parents or your rulers.

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 and equal:

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 an entire gallon of milk. Merchants had to be just and fair.

Also, if you saw someone in distress you were required to **lend them 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 just walk away and do nothing about it. You had to stop and help. You were not allowed to

say “Oh well,” and go on with your life. You were your brother's keeper.

You also 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.”

Since the roof of a house was considered part of its living space, you had to build a battlement in order to keep people from falling off the roof. This was simply another example of “love your neighbor as yourself”.

Finally, if you made 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 was that if you made your money through a means that God had condemned as sinful then you couldn't take the reward of that activity and offer it to God. The Lord wanted no part of it; it was an abomination to Him.

Waging War

The Mosaic Law had quite a bit to say about how wars should be waged. In fact, there were two separate sets of commands. The Lord said 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.”

In verse 18 the Lord explained the reason behind this policy: He did not want the Israelites to **copy the lifestyles** of the natives. As it turned out, though, the Israelites did *not* wipe out the native Canaanites and they *did* copy their practices. This eventually caused God's judgment to fall upon Israel, and they were evicted from the land and carried away to Babylon.

When it came to waging war against people who lived in other countries, though, 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 said that He was the one who would give them strength to win the battle. What mattered was not the size of their army but **the size of their God**. No army could stand against the might of the Living God. Throughout the Scriptures the Lord said that He was the one who gave military victory:

Psalm 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 who 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 Mosaic Law also said that there were certain people who were not allowed to join 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 who had just **planted a vineyard**, and a man who was **engaged but not yet married**. In each case the Lord said that the person should go back home, lest he die and not be able to partake of the fruit of his labors. It was important to God that people be allowed to reap what they sowed – not just in a bad way, but in a good way as well.

There was another type of person who 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 required to go home. This was to keep the fearful person from infecting the rest of the army. The end result was that the army was made up entirely of people who were not afraid. They were to be **fearless warriors** whose heart was completely focused on the Lord. David's battle with Goliath is a great example of this; he was not afraid to fight because he trusted God.

The Mosaic Law makes a brief mention of military ranks:

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 who were in charge. They were responsible for leading the army into battle.

As far as the actual fighting was concerned, the first thing the Israelites were required 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, whenever 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. The United States then sets up a government composed of local citizens and leaves, allowing that country to continue on as a sovereign nation.

It's easy to think that countries have always done this, but that is not the case. 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 or allowing things to go back to normal. Instead, the enemy city was

completely destroyed and its land became part of Israel's territory.

Another regulation regarding warfare 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."

The Lord said that the Israelites 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.

Regulations for Kings

Throughout the Scriptures there are a number of regulations that are specific to kings. The Lord spent quite a bit of time explaining how a wise and righteous king should behave. Although there are a number of passages throughout the Bible that we could look at, I want to focus on a passage in the Mosaic Law that contains some specific instructions for kings.

Before we get started, though, I'd like to point out how odd it is that the Lord would take the time to do this. After all, God told Israel that they were to be a theocracy, with the Lord Himself reigning as their king. However, God also knew that Israel did not want Him to be their king and that they would one day ask for a human king. 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**. Sure enough, that is exactly what happened in the days of 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.”

The Lord told Israel that by requesting a king they were **rejecting God**. The Israelites 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 and 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.

Since God knew that Israel was going to rebel against him, He laid down some regulations regarding kings:

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, Israel had to let **God pick their king**. They were not allowed to pick just 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 earlier, the Lord wanted the Israelites to trust in Him for victory. The king's heart was to be fixed on God. He was not allowed to amass a huge army or put his trust in his own strength. God wanted the king to depend on Him.

God also placed restrictions on the king's ability to amass wealth and wives:

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 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, those wives turned his heart away from God. The Lord did not want the king to have anything in his life that would lead them away from Him.

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 went to his head and made him forget God. In fact, he started seeing himself as a god and wanted the people around him to worship him. The Lord did not want this to happen to the kings of Israel, so He forbade them from amassing extravagant wealth.

Finally, the king was required to personally **write out a copy of the entire Mosaic 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 fear God and walk in His commandments.