

Week 17) Exodus 19-20; 24; 31-34

1). Ex 19:15—Spousal Abstinence for three days of ritual purification at Sinai ~1400-1200 BC

Once the children of Israel arrived at Sinai, God hoped the Israelites could become “unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation” (Ex 19:6). The Lord commanded a purification ritual that included washing their clothes and sanctification (Ex 19:10). The Hebrew term “sanctify/qadash” can also be translated as “to purify, consecrate, holy, or to make clean.” As they prepared to enter into the presence of the Lord for three days, Moses added a ritual addendum: “come not at your wives” (Ex 19:15). An ancient general sentiment assumed ceremonial uncleanness even for chaste marital sexual relations.

The ritual purification was to prepare them for “the third day [when] the LORD will come down in the sight of all the people upon mount Sinai” (Ex 19:11). Restored scripture repeats that “Moses . . . sought diligently to sanctify his people that they might behold the face of God” (D&C 84:23) but does not mention the restriction to avoid marital intimacy.

2). Ex 20:10—Women, Daughters, Maidservants Included in the Command to Keep the Sabbath ~1400-1200 BC

The Lord included three groups of females in his command to “remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy . . . thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates” (Ex 20:8, 10). It did not matter if the maidservant was an Israelite or not; all needed to honor the Lord’s Sabbath. In addition to not working for one’s sustenance on the seventh day, covenant Israel would figuratively enter the Lord’s presence to worship Him on that day.

Later in Exodus, God clarified, “my sabbaths . . . [are] a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the LORD that doth sanctify you” (Ex 31:13). In restored scripture, the Lord adds that those who keep the Sabbath day holy will “more fully keep [themselves] unspotted from the world” (D&C 59:9).

3). Ex 20:12—Honor Mothers ~1400-1200 BC

As part of the Decalogue, the Lord commanded Israel, “Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land.” The word honour can also mean glorify, which fits into the eternal perspective of God’s work (Mose 1:39). The importance of this commandment was expanded in other scripture: “that it may go well with thee, in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee” (Deu 5:16; Eph 6:2-3 is similar). This was such an important commandment to the Israelites that it was a capital crime to strike or curse (including treating trivially or belittling) one’s mother or father (Ex 21:15, 17).

In the NT Jesus warns that we should love God more than parents and that parents--or anyone (Mt 10:37). Also parents or anyone who lead children astray will be punished (Lk 17:2). In the Restored Church, we believe beyond mortal parents, that every child born on earth has a literal Mother and Father in Heaven whom we should honor. Our Heavenly Parents’ gift of life and plan of happiness were made

possible through the Savior's atonement. As we honour them, Elohim will sanctify and exalt mortals with the "continuation of . . . lives . . . in the eternal worlds" (D&C 132:22, 55).

4). Ex 20:14—**Women Included in Avoiding All Forms of Fornication or Adultery**
~1400-1200 BC

"Thou shalt not commit adultery."

5). Ex 20:17—**Not Coveting Another's Wife nor Maidservant** ~1400-1200 BC

In the last of the Decalogue, the Lord commands, "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant." Coveting is intensely wanting something that belongs to another person, and if left unchecked, can eventually lead to a cankered heart, literal or figurative theft, and a life focused on misdirected goals. In the case of a neighbour's wife or maidservant, it may also lead to breaking God's law of chastity.

6). Ex 21:3-5—**Wife and Daughter of a Hebrew Slave** ~1400-1200 BC

The Law of Moses provided several laws on servitude or slavery, including how family relations functioned in servitude. If one married a slave, different rules were applied to the relationship than if one's spouse were sold into slavery. In the case when a husband brought his wife and daughter into indentured servitude to another Hebrew, they could all be released together after seven years of work.

However, if a master gave his male servant a wife while he was working for him, when his seven-year release date came, the man could go free, but not his wife and children (Ex 21:2-4). In that case, the Law of Moses provided another option for the soon-to-be-released male servant: "if the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free" (Ex 21:5). The servant could permanently remain with his master and his family if his master agreed. The man would have his ear pierced at the doorpost, wear a gold hoop in the ear, and serve his master for life (Ex 21:5-6).

7) Ex 21:7-11, 20, 26-27; Lev 19:20; 25:6, 44; Deu 5:14; 15:12-18; 1 Sam 8:16; Jer 34:8-16—**Female Hebrew Servants/Slaves** ~1400 BC-AD 100

The Law of Moses provided a way for poor Israelites—male or female at any age—to sell themselves or family members into a form of indentured servitude. If an Israelite father or widowed mother needed food and shelter, or if creditors demanded payment, the Law allowed a man to sell himself, his wife, or their children into servitude to pay the debt (Ex 21:2-11; 2 Kgs 4:1; Neh 5:5; Isa 50:1).

In the case of female servitude in the Mosaic Law, when someone sold a girl into servitude as a maidservant, she "shall not go out as the menservants do" (Ex 21:7). This is because when a master purchased a female, he betrothed her. This meant that as his property, she took on the role of a concubine and could become a sexual partner to her master. In return, the master had the responsibility to provide her with food, clothing, and "marital rights" so that she could have a baby (Ex 21:10; also Lev 25:39-44).

The Law required a master to treat his maidservant with the same respect required in Leviticus 19:29, “You must not defile your daughter by making her a prostitute” (BSB). The Law also protected women from some forms of physical abuse (Ex 21:26-27).

Other laws protected a female Hebrew servant/slave. Her master could free her if he did not want to marry her or if he wanted to divorce her (Ex 21:8). Further, an Israelite master was not to sell her to a foreigner (Ex 21:8). Her master could also arrange her marriage with his son. In that case, her betrothal raised her social status from slave to daughter.

Deuteronomy recorded a more equal ruling for those female servants not taken as concubines. They could also go free with the male servants after six full years of service (Deu 15:12). We do not know how often this addendum was carried out. Across the OT we find Hebrew female and male servants working for fellow Israelites or the King (1 Sam 8:16; Ecc 2:7).

Biblical Categories of Servitude or Slavery

Typically, female servants fell into one of these three categories:

- 1) **Debt Slave:** Courts or creditors could order someone into slavery for theft or insolvency (e.g. Ex 22:1-4), or a father could sell his dependent daughter (under 12), to pay debts (e.g. Ex 21:7-11). She then worked in the new household, learned its management, and with time, the buyer or his son was expected to marry her as a concubine or secondary wife. Unlike the male slaves, these young females, sold as future concubines, did not gain freedom every seven years because of their marital relationship with their owners and the children they had together.
- 2) **Indentured Servant:** Israelites were not to enslave their fellow Israelites but could employ indentured servants for a specified period under seven years (Deu 15:12-14; Ex 21:2-11; 2 Kgs 4:1; Neh 5:5; Isa 50:1). Masters released male slaves every seven years, or in the Jubilee year. When all debts were cancelled, people also released indentured servants.
- 3) **War Captive:** When entering the promised land, the Israelites were commanded to “save alive nothing that breatheth” (Deu 20:16). For cities outside their inheritance, they were to kill all the men and take the women, children, and possessions (Deu 20:10-15). In this case, captive women could become legitimate wives, mourn the loss of their parents, and assimilate into Israelite society (Deu 21:10-13). Later, when Solomon’s kingdom was divided, women and children from Judah became captives of the northern Israelite tribes and Syria (2 Chr 28:5-8).

OT Word Usage for Female Servants or Slaves

In both Hebrew and Greek, servant and slave were used interchangeably. The Hebrew Bible uses two words, *amah* and *shiphchah*, that the KJV translates as maidservant(s), handmaid(s), maid, bondmaid(s), and bondwoman(en). *Amah* and *shiphchah* are generally synonyms. *Shiphchah*, denotes slightly more menial labor. Both words are also used figuratively (*amah* 18 times, or 32% of its usage; and *shiphchah* 13 times or 21%). For example, *amah* expresses service and devotion to God in Hannah’s prayer, “O LORD of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid/*amah*” (1 Sam 1:11). Most figurative occurrences are in the books of Samuel and Kings.

OT Protection for Female Servants

The Law of Moses included provisions to protect female servants physically, emotionally, and spiritually. For example:

Handmaidens, Harems, & Heroines: Find their Messiah in the OT—Lynne Hilton Wilson, PhD

- Ex 20:10; Deu 12:18, 16:11-16: Israelite and non-Israelite servants received a day of rest on the Sabbath, all Jewish holidays, and sacrificial meals.
- Ex 21:7-11: If someone sold a dependent daughter into slavery or servitude (see Debt Slave above) and the master assigned her to marry his son, he should treat her “after the manner of daughters” (Ex 21.9). If the new husband took a new wife or concubine, he had to continue providing her food, clothing, or marital rights, otherwise else the Law set her free with no reimbursement.
- Ex 21:12, 20: If a master struck a servant and he or she died, he was charged with a capital crime.
- Ex 21:26-27: The Law set a servant free if their owner struck and caused an eye to “perish,” or knocked out her tooth.
- Ex 21:32: If a bull gored a servant, the people must stone the bull and the bull’s owner must pay the servant’s master thirty shekels of silver.
- Ex 20:14; Deu 21:10-14: The Law commanded that no one rape a female war captive; a procedure was given if someone wanted to make her a legitimate wife.
- Lev 25:43: Masters were not to rule Israelite servants with “rigour,” meaning harshness.
- Deu 15:12-15: When Israelite indentured servants completed their agreed-upon service, the Law instructed owners to furnish released servants liberally with resources to start their new lives from their owner’s livestock, grain stores, and wine.

NT Female Slaves/Servants/Handmaidens

During the late Second Temple era, or time of the NT, servitude saturated a third of the Roman Empire and Judaic world. One half of the population in large cities—including Jerusalem—were slaves or servants. Often their situation was more like a short-term indentured servant. The average middle class family had eight servants. Even servants owned slaves (Rodriguez, *Encyclopedia World Slavery*, 548). Female Hebrew servants and/or slaves still had to endure a lifelong sexual partnership with their master as a secondary wife. From this time, in Jerusalem, the great Rabbi Hillel observed, “Whoever multiples female slaves multiplies promiscuity” (Bromiley, *Bible Encyclopedia*, Q-Z, 545).

We see the very young teenager Mary of Nazareth understood this cultural responsibility as a female servant when she told angel Gabriel: “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word” (Luke 1:38). “Handmaiden” comes from the Greek, *doule*, a female servant or slave. In her culture, Mary agreed to serve God in all things: “I will do everything within my power to fulfill your plan, and I am willing to carry your child and raise Him for you.”

During Jesus’ ministry, he denounced using female servants as illicit sexual partners. He taught the higher law—which even discourages immoral thoughts (Mt 5:28). Jesus also took on female servant roles when he healed the sick, provided food, and washed feet. By doing those things, Jesus also honored women.

The Lord did not condemn servitude; he praised it. Culturally it was not surprising that Jesus’s parables and the apostle’s epistles are filled with examples of servitude. In a strongly counter-cultural condemnation, Jesus attacked the social role of masters’ superiority. He denounced the traditional “master-servant” relationships by teaching equality and fairness to all who serve Him (Mt 10:24; 12:18; 20:27; 23:11; Mk 10:44; etc.). Shortly before His death he attacked self-aggrandizement even more: “Whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted” (Mt 23:12; also Col 4:1).

The Lord overturned the social ladder when he said, “whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mk 10:44-45). Then at the end of His life, he became the suffering servant from Isaiah, “My righteous servant justifies many; for he shall bear their iniquities” (Isa 53:11).

8) Ex 21:15, 17; Lev 20:9—**Child Who Strikes or Curses Their Mother**

~1400-1200 BC “And he that smiteth his father, or his mother, shall be surely put to death . . . And he that curseth his father, or his mother, shall surely be put to death.”

9) Ex 21:22—**Woman Caused to Miscarry** ~1400-1200 BC

If a pregnant woman is injured by men fighting, and she loses her fetus, the husband can demand financial restitution. But if the pregnant woman dies as a result of being injured from the fight, then the Law required, “you are to take life for life” (Ex 21:23, NIV).

10) Ex 22:16-17—**Laws Regarding Seduction of Virgins as a Form of Marriage** ~1400-1200 BC

God forbids premarital sex, seduction, and rape. If a male seduces a young girl, and they are not engaged or betrothed, the Law stipulates that he must pay her dowry or “bride-price” and make her his wife (Ex 22:16, NIV). The term bride-price is also described as bride-wealth. At this time, Hebrew fathers did not sell their daughters to future husbands; rather the “bride’s price” was her financial security in case of widowhood or divorce without a religious cause. The father was to give his daughter the dowry if she became single. We do not know how much money the fathers actually shared, nor how often it happened.

However, if the victim’s father refuses to let the seducer marry his daughter, the seducer still has the responsibility to pay the dowry or “bride price of a virgin” (Ex 22:17, NLT). Deuteronomy 22:28-29 specifies the price of a virgin was 50 shekels of silver (which was about 1 1/4 pounds, or about 575 grams). As a word of caution, the Book of Deuteronomy appears to use vocabulary, ideas, and style from the 7th century BC, not from the time of Moses (Barker, *Temple Theology*, 14-15, 25, 51; Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible*, 130-35; Nelson, *Deuteronomy*, 4-8).

11) Ex 22:18; Deu 18:10-12; Isa 57:3—**Female Witch or Sorcerer** ~1400-1200 BC

God commanded, “Do not allow a sorceress to live” (Ex 22:18, NIV). He felt so strongly about the corrupting influence of sorcery that He made it a capital crime. He wants His children to turn to Him for assistance and never to sorcerers, evil spirits, or witches (Jms 4:7; D&C 63:17). Sorcery was common in the nations surrounding ancient Israel.

God forbade all forms of sorcery including magic, fortune telling, divination, omen interpretation, spells, soothsaying, necromancy, witchcraft, wizardry, consulting mediums or charmers, etc. (Lev 19:26, 20:6). Throughout biblical history we read how Israel broke its covenant with Yahweh and turned to sorcerers, idols, and other gods. (*See *Deu 18:10-12*)

12) Ex 22:22-24—**Widows and Fatherless Children** ~1400-1200 BC

The Law of Moses made provisions for widows and the fatherless. In ancient Israel, women and children relied on adult male relatives for protection and provision. When husbands and fathers died, the widows and fatherless children were too often exploited, despite Jehovah's commandment through Moses: "You shall not oppress any widow or orphan" (Ex 22:22, NASB). The Hebrew for "*anah*/ afflict," also means to oppress, humble, or make bow down.

Typically, the fatherless and widows had few opportunities to support themselves and were reduced to poverty. The Law of Moses hoped to alleviate that problem. However, the prophets Isaiah, Job, and the psalmist complained that the rulers chased self-serving rewards without defending the fatherless and the widows (Isa 1:23). Job noted that despite the orphaned children's need for their donkey and a widow's ox to help them work, men literally took the animals away as payment for a debt or as a "pledge" for a loan (Job 24:3). Worse still, the psalmist recorded that people slew the widows and murdered the fatherless (Ps 94:6).

To those who exploit widows and orphans, Jehovah warned "If you do mistreat them, and they cry out to Me in distress, I will surely hear their cry. My anger will be kindled, and I will kill you with the sword; then your wives will become widows and your children will be fatherless" (Ex 22:23-24, BSB). The Lord fulfilled His threat, in part, when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem and captured the Israelites (Jer 22:3-5, 25).

13) Ex 23:26; Job 24:21; Ps 113:9; Isa 54:1—**Barren Women** ~1200-1400 BC

God promised the children of Israel protection and specific blessings if they obeyed their covenant with Him, including that women seeking motherhood would not "miscarry or be barren" (Ex 23:25-26, NIV). In ancient times, a woman's status and power were based on having children. People saw barrenness as a reproach from God (Gen 30:1, 23; Deu 28:18). Large families were helpful in Israel's agrarian economy.

However, Israel did not obey all that God commanded, so they did not receive those contingent blessings. Yet the promise will eventually be fulfilled and God will "maketh the barren women . . . to be a joyful mother of children" (Ps 113:9). The barren women in Isaiah 54:1-3 symbolize Israelites who have not yet "borne the promised fruit of [their] covenant with God" (Parry, *Understanding Isaiah*, 479-80). In the last days, Israel will "break forth into singing" and metaphorically Zion will "enlarge" her tent for more offspring (Isa 54:1-2; 3 Ne 22:1-2).

14). Ex 32:2-3—**Women and Daughters Give Earrings for the Golden Calf** ~1200-1400 BC

Aaron asked the Israelites to collect all their golden earrings—including from their wives and daughters—to create a golden calf. Shortly before this, the children of Israel had traveled from Egypt to

the foot of Mt. Sinai and learned that the Lord wanted them to “obey” Him and be His treasured people, even “a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation” (Ex 19:5-6). Even though they promised to do “all that the LORD hath spoken” (Ex 19:8), their spiritual enthusiasm did not last.

The text of the Ten Commandments precedes this event, where God repeated his emphasis, “Do not make any gods to be alongside me; do not make for yourselves . . . gods of gold (Ex 20:23 NIV; see 20:1-17). The Israelites did not have enough faith to obey, nor to “behold the face of God” (D&C 84:20-23) and speak directly with Him (Ex 20:19). Instead their fears from the “thunders and lightnings” and Moses’s 40-day absence distracted them (Ex 19:16).

Instead of remembering how the Lord miraculously enabled them to escape from slavery, they “hardened their hearts” (D&C 84:24) and asked Aaron to make them “gods, which shall go before us,” and he “fashioned . . . a molten calf” (Ex 32:1-4). This was in opposition to the first two of God’s Ten Commandments.

The text may have generalized “all” the people—male and female, old and young—who turned their hearts away from Jehovah to the golden calf, but only “about three thousand” men refused to return to “the LORD’S side” under Moses’ leadership (Ex 32:26, 28).

15). Ex 34:15-16—**Marriage with Daughters of Gentiles Led to Idolatry** ~1200-1400 BC

To make a holy nation last for generations, God knew it required choosing marriage partners who also covenanted to follow Him. He warned that “when you choose some of their daughters as wives for your sons and those daughters prostitute themselves to their gods, they will lead your sons to do the same” (Ex 34:16, NIV), and eventually His covenant will be broken.

This command was repeated by Joshua, “do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses . . . come not among these nations, these that remain among you . . . neither serve . . . nor bow yourselves unto [their gods]” but instead “cleave unto the LORD your God” (Jos 23:6-8). Specifically, he pointed to the importance of marriages within the covenant: if ye “cleave unto the remnant of these [neighboring] nations . . . and . . . make marriages with them, and go in unto them, and they to you: Know for a certainty that the LORD your God will no more drive out any of these nations from before you; but they shall be snares and traps unto you” (Jos 23:12-13). Within a short time after Joshua’s death, his warning was fulfilled as many of the Israelites chose Canaanite spouses, and their children, “served their [Canaanite] gods . . . did evil . . . [and] forgot the LORD their God” (Jdg 3:6-7, NIV). (See *Gen 24:3; *Gen 27:46; *Gen 28:1, 8-9; *Deu 7:3; *Jos 23:12-13; *Jdg 3:5-6)