

THE COVENANT CODE: THE ALTAR, SLAVERY EXODUS 20:22-21:11

Critical so-called scholars desperately try to discredit Moses as the author of the Pentateuch and one way they do that is to claim the Mosaic Law code could not have been written before the first millennium BC. Their reasoning is the people back then were not advanced enough or intelligent enough, meaning evolved enough as intelligent, thinking human beings, to be able to develop sophisticated law codes. They didn't even think people could write that long ago which is erroneous. The arrogant presupposition behind this thinking is that man has evolved into a more sophisticated, intelligent being in the progression of time, but that is exactly backwards. Earlier man was much more intelligent than we are. We have had thousands of years of genetic degradation which has affected our intelligence in a downward direction rather than thousands of years of genetic intellectual enhancement.

Biblical archaeology has completely destroyed this unbiblical scholarship. It began with the discovery of the law code of Hammurabi in Susa in 1901-1902 in the form of a black stele about seven feet tall. Hammurabi was the sixth king of the First Dynasty of Babylon. The stele shows the king receiving the law from the sun god Shamash. It "contains almost 300 paragraphs of legal provisions dealing with the social, commercial, domestic and moral life of the Babylonians" during that period of time. After it was captured and taken to Susa, someone erased some of it and it was broken into pieces and buried under the rub-

ble of the destroyed city to be discovered centuries later. "The code contains a preface or prologue in which the king claims to have been commissioned by the gods to rule over the kingdom and to establish proper law."¹ Hammurabi lived from 1728-1686 BC which predates Moses and the Mosaic Law by about three hundred years.

The earliest law code was discovered in Sumeria and attributed to UR Nammu which has been dated to ca. 2050 BC.

An even earlier law code out of Babylonia was the code of Lipit-Ishtar dated from about 1875 BC. It was written in Sumerian and was found in the city of Nippur.

Before that, King Bilalama of Eshnunna located near Baghdad (Babylon) had a law code that predated Hammurabi.

Assyrian law codes dated to the twelfth century during the time of Tiglath-Pileser in Assur were discovered. Hittite law codes were written about the time the Mosaic Law was written.

The point to all this history is the arrogant, condescending notion held by "scholars" that the Mosaic Law could not have been written by Moses at the time of the Exodus (1446-1440 BC) has been thoroughly discredited by archaeology.

Another argument presented as a means of denying the inspiration of the Scriptures involves the claim that Moses simply copied these pagan law codes

¹ Both quotes and the summary of the other law codes are from John J. Davis, *Moses and the Gods of Egypt: Studies in Exodus*, 2nd ed. (Winona Lake, IN: BMH, 1986), 223-224.

and presented them as the Mosaic Law; therefore, the Mosaic Law is derived from manmade, pagan law codes, particularly the Code of Hammurabi dressed up in Israelite, religious language. This is a serious exaggeration of the facts. As I mentioned in the "Introduction to the Law," it should not be surprising that universally held concepts of moral behavior would be common throughout the law codes of various societies in disparate places. The primary difference between the Mosaic Law and other pagan law codes is in the origin of the law codes. The Mosaic Law is totally divine in origin; pagan law codes derive their authority from the king and religion is at best a minor consideration in their formulation. Biblical scholars who are interested in the truth have studied this issue and find no basis whatsoever to claim the Mosaic Law was derived from the Code of Hammurabi.

The Mosaic Law was based on more than the commonly held desire to govern a civil, safe society. God was the basis for Israelite society and He had a purpose for them as a holy nation of priests to the world. God's holiness was the basis for the Law which was itself holy and intended to guide the nation into holiness as well.

Leviticus 20:7–8 ⁷You shall consecrate yourselves therefore and be holy, for I am the LORD your God. ⁸You shall keep My statutes and practice them; I am the LORD who sanctifies you.

At this point in the narrative, the Ten Words have been spoken in the hearing of all the people. The Israelites were frightened and asked Moses to speak to God for them and report back to them all Moses was told. That was an ac-

ceptable arrangement and Moses sent them back to their tents. Moses went back up the mountain and received what is commonly referred to as the Covenant Code or the Book of the Covenant which runs from Exodus 20:22 through 23:33. The text doesn't say how long Moses was on the mountain this time, but it wasn't too long because after he received the Book of the Covenant, he went back down and the people agreed to do "all the words which the Lord has spoken" (Ex. 24:3). After that, he went back up the mountain and received the instructions for the Tabernacle and the priesthood. When the Lord finished providing those instructions, Moses received the Ten Words written on the stone tablets (Ex.24:18-31:18).

This section begins with a repetition of the prohibition on idolatry and a command for the proper form of worship (Ex.20:22-26). Then a series of judgments are pronounced for various infractions and this covenant code section ends with a repetition of the prohibition on idolatry and a command for the proper form of worship (Ex. 23:13-19). The first part serves as an introduction and the last part a conclusion.

The first thing Moses heard from Yahweh was a reiteration of the commands to have no other gods besides Him and not to worship idols made by human hands.

Exodus 20:22–23 ²²Then the LORD said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'You yourselves have seen that I have spoken to you from heaven. ²³'You shall not make *other* gods besides Me; gods of silver or gods of gold, you shall not make for yourselves.

The Israelites had numerous personal encounters with Yahweh throughout the Exodus saga beginning with the miracles in Egypt and now they heard Him speaking directly to them when He proclaimed the Ten Words. They saw His miraculous works numerous times in Egypt and during the early stages of the Exodus. What more do people need in order to believe in the existence of the one true, living God? Despite all that, God knew they needed to be warned again about turning aside to false gods. As history will reveal to us, they didn't listen.

False gods are the product of the human mind in conjunction with demonic influence; therefore, in a sense they are made up, but they represent demonic forces which are very real.

1 Corinthians 10:20 ²⁰*No, but I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God; and I do not want you to become sharers in demons.*

The things apart from God that people worship have to be made by human hands. In other words, in and of themselves they are nothing. God refers to them as delusions; they are deadly delusions to be sure, but they are deceptive delusions designed to lead people away from God and to Satan, the father of lies and therefore the father of delusion. Don't think that simply because we don't present animal sacrifices to idols today that we don't have idols and that demonic forces aren't behind them as idols; we do have idols and they do represent demonic forces. In and of themselves they are worthless and impotent, but when people submit themselves to them, they are susceptible to demonic influence.

Isaiah 40:18–20 ¹⁸To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare with Him? ¹⁹As for the idol, a craftsman casts it, A goldsmith plates it with gold, And a silversmith *fashions* chains of silver. ²⁰He who is too impoverished for *such* an offering Selects a tree that does not rot; He seeks out for himself a skillful craftsman To prepare an idol that will not totter.

Jeremiah 10:3–5 ³For the customs of the peoples are delusion [הֶקְדָּל]; Because it is wood cut from the forest, The work of the hands of a craftsman with a cutting tool. ⁴“They decorate *it* with silver and with gold; They fasten it with nails and with hammers So that it will not totter. ⁵“Like a scarecrow in a cucumber field are they, And they cannot speak; They must be carried, Because they cannot walk! Do not fear them, For they can do no harm, Nor can they do any good.”

Delusion, הֶקְדָּל, may be translated as “idol,” but in this context, it means uselessness, meaninglessness, emptiness, and futility; it refers to what is of no use on the basis of being futile and lacking in content. This is the word translated “vanity in Ecclesiastes. In English, a delusion is an idiosyncratic belief or impression that is firmly maintained despite being contradicted by what is generally accepted as reality, typically a symptom of a mental disorder. Given the truths presented in Romans 1:18-23 that people know God, reject God, and replace God with created objects, isn't that a delusion and doesn't that really represent a satanically inspired mental disorder? The facts about God are present for all to not only see, but to intrinsically know; therefore, replacing what is known with what is knowingly false is a delusion. Rejecting the God of Light for the prince of darkness is seriously delusional and very dangerous, yet we are surrounded by this kind of thinking and activity today in Western civilization. Facts no longer matter. There is no better example of that today than gender or race; people today claim to be whatever gender or race they want to be whether they actually are that gen-

der or race or not. Another example is Islam, the religion of the sword, but aren't we continually told Islam is a religion of peace? That is delusional; it flies in the face of the facts. At the same time, the same people who claim Islam is a religion of peace claim Christianity is the religion of violence and evil and that too is delusional. But in the context of our Scripture, God is referring to the delusion of idolatry. This is not confined to only a few people; the majority of the world's citizens have been deceived, willingly deceived, and continue to be deceived. One day most of the entire world will be deceived by the deceiver of the world and he will lead billions of people into eternal death. That is ultimately where the delusions of idolatry must lead.

The prohibition on making idols also refers to making things that men think represent Yahweh and that may be the primary meaning in terms of the Ten Words. We worship God who is Spirit, however, God did assume human form and He did appear in time and space as a man for a brief moment in history, but He is not present in that way now and He wasn't present in that way during the Exodus. When He does return, it will be permanent and we will forever be with Him as the God-man, but in the meantime, we do not need physical representations of Him in order to properly worship Him. Jesus and Jesus alone is the image, the radiance of His glory, and the exact representation of the nature of God (Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3).

The worship section of the introduction concerned the construction of the altar.

Exodus 20:24–26 ²⁴You shall make an altar [מִזְבֵּחַ] of earth for Me, and you shall sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen; in every place where I cause My name to be remembered, I will come to you and bless you. ²⁵If you make an altar of stone for Me, you shall not build it of cut stones, for if you wield your tool on it, you will profane [תְּלִל] it. ²⁶And you shall not go up by steps to My altar, so that your nakedness will not be exposed on it.'

Altar, מִזְבֵּחַ, is from a word meaning to slaughter an animal usually for a sacrifice. It means an altar which may be of any construction of various designs for the placing of gifts and sacrifices in a ritual to a deity. This is a general word applicable to any type of worship, whether it is pagan or true worship, but Yahweh obviously designed worship around the altar the way He wanted the Israelites to do it and he made it distinct in His own way from the methods pagans used.

The only requirement for properly worshiping Yahweh at the time of this command was an altar upon which to offer sacrifices. This particular command seemed to address the issue of a people traveling about the country rather than being firmly established in a permanent place because the permanent, formal altars of the Tabernacle and the Temple were not of earth or stone. Waltke believed this type of altar was to be temporary until the "Tent-Sanctuary" was built.² At the time this command was given, there was no priesthood which suggests the average Israelite could build an altar for worship which was obviously what the Patriarchs and others did before that time. Only days earlier, Moses built an altar at the place where the Israelites defeated Amalek (Ex. 17:15). Only

² Bruce K. Waltke with Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: an exegetical, canonical, and thematic approach* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 434.

later, when the Tabernacle and Temple altars were built was tending the altar strictly a priestly duty.

Earth was apparently the preferred material for building the altar, but it could be made out of stacked stones. It didn't have to be a formal arrangement of the rocks; stacking a few uncut stones would suffice. These stones were not to be worked, that is shaped with tools, because that would profane the rocks. Profane, *תָּלַל*, means to defile or profane something; it renders something ceremonially or ritually common making it impure. Most theologians suggest this was probably because the Canaanites used dressed stones to build their altars although Canaanite altars of natural, undressed stones have been discovered so that theory may not be correct.

No steps leading up to the altar were allowed in order to avoid inadvertently exposing one's nakedness to the people present for worship. This may have been in response to pagan worship practices although it may have simply been an acknowledgment of the way they normally dressed in that time. Some pagan priests were known to officiate at their altars while naked and others wore small ephods or something similar. Some theologians believe the prohibition on steps was only until the priests were consecrated later in Exodus and received their priestly garments. Exposing themselves would not be an issue when they were dressed according to the instructions in the Mosaic Law and the Temple altar is widely thought to have steps leading up to it although the Tabernacle altar did not; it was accessible from ground level. The Temple altar may

not have had steps, however, because the Jews believe a ramp was built to get up to the Temple altar rather than stairs thereby avoiding any violation of the command not to have steps leading up to it.

At this point, Yahweh began instructing Moses to implement various commands and ordinances over a wide-ranging set of circumstances governing life for the Israelites from that point forward. These commands were particularly oriented towards life as it was to be lived in the land God promised them.

Exodus 21:1 ¹“Now these are the ordinances which you are to set before them:

From this very simple beginning, the whole of the Mosaic Law began to be revealed. The first set of commands dealt with slavery, specifically, other Hebrews who became slaves.

Exodus 21:2–6 ²“If you buy a Hebrew slave [עֶבֶד], he shall serve for six years; but on the seventh he shall go out as a free man without payment. ³“If he comes alone, he shall go out alone; if he is the husband of a wife, then his wife shall go out with him. ⁴“If his master gives him a wife, and she bears him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall belong to her master, and he shall go out alone. ⁵“But if the slave plainly says, ‘I love my master, my wife and my children; I will not go out as a free man,’ ⁶then his master shall bring him to God, then he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost. And his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him permanently.

Slave, עֶבֶד, means a slave or a bond servant; it refers to one who is owned by another for service until sold to another or who has worked his way out of slavery. It also simply means a servant, worker, or employee, that is, one who helps in the service of another but who is not necessarily the possession of another. In this context the meaning is clearly closer to the first definition, but in practice, slavery in Israel in many instances may have looked more like the se-

cond definition. Many theologians try to downplay the fact of slavery in Israel by maintaining it was more of an employer/employee contractual relationship and in some cases, that was true. For example, a poor Israelite could sell himself into indentured servitude for a price and he could be redeemed from that contract (Lev. 25:47-55). It was also true that God's commands made the relationships between owner and slave better between Israelites. None of that negates the fact slavery existed in Israel, but not every relationship was exactly slavery as we think of it today.

Slavery was widespread at that time and it generally wasn't quite what we think of when we consider the issue. Slavery was not always the oppressive, brutal ownership of one person by another. Often, in that time and place, it was more of a servant relationship. Most likely, both situations existed across the spectrum represented by these extremes. Certainly, slaves were put to work doing the most dangerous jobs such as mining, quarrying, construction, and agriculture, but they were also household servants and raised the family's children. The lives of the former were short and brutal, but the lives of the latter were better. In Rome, slaves could fulfill professional roles such as accountants and physicians. The institution of slavery is never a good thing, but it was the reality of the times. We have to remember that life was extremely difficult then and people would sometimes sell themselves into slavery in order to survive or to settle a debt. Slaves in the better jobs were often as well off as the common laborer in terms of effective income and standard of living, if not better, when all the ordi-

nary expenses of living are taken into account since slaves were fed and housed. In Canaan, Aram, Assyria, Babylonia, and Persia, paid labor to citizens was cheaper at times than owning and providing for slave labor. In Rome, freed slaves could become citizens but in Greece they could not.

The economies of Greece, Rome, and Egypt were centered on slave labor. In Greek society, it was considered undignified for a citizen to work so slaves were needed to perform the labor necessary to build and maintain the nation. That was probably true for Egypt and Rome as well, at least in the upper levels of society. The Greek Stoics maintained that slaves were humans and should therefore be humanely treated. This had some influence and when Christianity came along in the first century, this thinking grew. By that time, the Greco-Roman world had instituted some reforms in the way the slavery system operated.

Liberal theologians or unbelieving critics of Christianity criticize God for seemingly advocating slavery. That is not a correct characterization of what is going on here. As just noted, slavery, or indentured servitude, did allow many people to survive who otherwise would have died. The most important thing to note is it was Christianity that put a halt to the slave trade in Western civilization. I don't know about Oriental countries, but Islamic nations are still widely involved in slavery. Abolition simply wasn't possible then, the system was too entrenched and these nations too dependent on it for building and maintaining their socie-

ties, but Christ Jesus and the Apostles set forth principles in the Word of God that provided the basis for slavery to be abolished at least in the Christian world.

For example, the primary activist for the abolition of slavery in England and Europe was a Christian named William Wilberforce and he brought other Christian members of Parliament alongside for their much-needed assistance. In 1772, slave ownership in England was outlawed. In 1807, a law was passed that banned Englishmen from participating in the slave trade. In 1815 at the Congress of Vienna, the English delegate was successful in getting the slave trade outlawed in most European nations. Slavery was abolished in all the British possessions in 1833 just before Wilberforce died.³ Christian leadership was an important element of the abolitionist movement in the years leading up to the Civil War in this country.

Most theologians believe the Israelites treated their slaves better than most of the other nations in the area treated theirs. "Insofar as anything like slavery existed, it was a mild and merciful system, as compared to that of other nations. It cannot be said to be a Mosaic institution at all, but, being found by the Jewish lawgiver, it was regulated by statute with the purpose and tendency of mitigating its evils and of restricting its duration."⁴ That statement by Dr. Unger seems to be sugarcoating things more than just a little bit. I don't know that slavery is ever totally a "mild and merciful system." We are talking about forcing

³ Earle E. Cairns, *Christianity Through the Centuries: A History of the Christian Church* 3rd ed., rev. and exp. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 402.

⁴ Merrill F. Unger, s.v. "service," *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, rev., ed. R. K. Harrison (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988), 1162.

people to work for someone else under the threat of deadly force. However, there is evidence that slaves in that time, under some circumstances and depending on their position as slaves, were treated better than what we think of when we consider the issue of slavery because that was not the historical situation in the USA which is the system with which we are most familiar. Even people who voluntarily submit to indentured servitude do it because they have no other alternative available to solve the problem that is placing them in that position; they wouldn't sell themselves into involuntary servitude if they had some other less drastic choice. It is true God did not begin the institution of slavery with the Mosaic Law and through the Law He did intend to have the Israelites treat their slaves better. In terms of history, we know the truths presented in the Bible did lead to the abolition of slavery in the West over 3,000 years later.

In Israel, the Israelites were not to be enslaved as foreigners were enslaved, but they were to be treated as hired labor and they were not to be subjected to a lifetime of slavery.

Leviticus 25:39–43 ³⁹If a countryman of yours becomes so poor with regard to you that he sells himself to you, you shall not subject him to a slave's service. ⁴⁰He shall be with you as a hired man, as if he were a sojourner; he shall serve with you until the year of jubilee. ⁴¹He shall then go out from you, he and his sons with him, and shall go back to his family, that he may return to the property of his forefathers. ⁴²For they are My servants whom I brought out from the land of Egypt; they are not to be sold *in* a slave sale. ⁴³You shall not rule over him with severity, but are to revere your God.

Foreigners, however, could be permanently kept as slaves.

Leviticus 25:44–46 ⁴⁴As for your male and female slaves whom you may have—you may acquire male and female slaves from the pagan nations that are

around you. ⁴⁵Then, too, *it is* out of the sons of the sojourners who live as aliens among you that you may gain acquisition, and out of their families who are with you, whom they will have produced in your land; they also may become your possession. ⁴⁶You may even bequeath them to your sons after you, to receive as a possession; you can use them as permanent slaves. But in respect to your countrymen, the sons of Israel, you shall not rule with severity over one another.

It was not permissible to kidnap a fellow Israelite and sell him into slavery under penalty of death.

Deuteronomy 24:7⁷"If a man is caught kidnapping any of his countrymen of the sons of Israel, and he deals with him violently or sells him, then that thief shall die; so you shall purge the evil from among you.

We most likely think of kidnapping in terms of some sort of sexual crime, child custody issue, or ransom, but in that culture people were most likely kidnapped in order to be sold into slavery. In some ways, this was akin to killing that person; their life as they had known it was over, hence the death penalty. In terms of an Israelite, it also deprived them of the benefits of being associated with the covenant community.

People could sell their children to their creditors in lieu of repaying the debt, but the examples the Bible provides in this regard suggest this practice was more akin to a taking of the child rather than a voluntary surrender of the child on the part of the parents. They did give up their children in accordance with the prevailing customs of the day, but it seems they had no choice and it was done under duress rather than voluntarily. Whether or not the children were pledged as collateral prior to entering into the debtor relationship, which is what most theologians seem to assume, or whether it was simply the culturally ac-

cepted consequence of being unable to pay a debt is not stated. It sounds more like the latter.

2 Kings 4:1 ¹Now a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets cried out to Elisha, "Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that your servant feared the LORD; and the creditor has come to take my two children to be his slaves."

Nehemiah 5:5 ⁵"Now our flesh is like the flesh of our brothers, our children like their children. Yet behold, we are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters are forced into bondage *already*, and we are helpless because our fields and vineyards belong to others."

The price for slaves throughout the history of the Bible was variable. Exodus 21:32 set the price for a slave gored by an ox at thirty shekels. Joseph was sold into slavery for twenty shekels (Gen. 37:28). 2 Maccabees 8:11 refers to selling 90 Jews for a talent which apparently works out to about 40 shekels apiece.⁵

Provision was made in the Law for restitution in cases of theft. If the thief could not repay the debt owed for his crime, he was to be sold into slavery presumably until the debt was repaid or possibly for the six-year term specified in Exodus 21:2.

Exodus 22:3 ³"... He shall surely make restitution; if he owns nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft."

Slaves were allowed to participate in the religious life of the Israelites. They were to honor the Sabbath day (Ex. 20:10) and they could share in the feasts (Dt. 12:11-12, Dt. 16:11, 14). Slaves had to be circumcised (Ex. 12:44) and that al-

⁵ A. Rupprecht, s.v. "slave, slavery," *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 5 vols., gen. ed. Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1975, 1976), 5:454.

lowed them to participate in the rites of Judaism, which is in contrast to the sojourner or hired servant who could not participate unless voluntarily circumcised.

In terms of understanding the commands God gave Moses concerning Israelite slaves, we need to remember that foreign slaves are not the subject in Exodus 21:2-11. There was a difference in the owner/slave relationship between owning Israelites and owning foreigners, or at least there was supposed to be a difference. Whether or not that actually worked out in practice throughout Israel's history is another issue; the Bible indicates they did not follow Yahweh's guidelines.

Jeremiah 34:12-16¹²Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, ¹³“Thus says the LORD God of Israel, ‘I made a covenant with your forefathers in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, saying, ¹⁴“At the end of seven years each of you shall set free his Hebrew brother who has been sold to you and has served you six years, you shall send him out free from you; but your forefathers did not obey Me or incline their ear to Me. ¹⁵“Although recently you *had* turned and done what is right in My sight, each man proclaiming release to his neighbor, and you had made a covenant before Me in the house which is called by My name. ¹⁶“Yet you turned and profaned My name, and each man took back his male servant and each man his female servant whom you had set free according to their desire, and you brought them into subjection to be your male servants and female servants.”

The command was Hebrew slaves were to be freed after six years of service (Ex. 21:2). Some may have followed that command, but apparently some, perhaps most, did not. If the slave came in single or already married, his wife was free to leave with him. However, if he married another slave, she and her children remained the property of the owner. It was probably possible for him to

purchase their freedom, if he had the resources to so, but since he was a slave himself, that is doubtful. He had the option of leaving without his family. His third option was remaining with the owner in order to remain with his family. If he exercised that option, his ear was pierced with an awl. Presumably, any man could choose to exercise this option and stay with his owner, if that was acceptable to the owner. This procedure was apparently done at the Tabernacle or Temple in the presence of God which gave it the appearances of a solemn oath before God which should have served to discourage either party from abrogating the agreement, although some think it could have been done elsewhere. It was a visible affirmation of the agreement between the two parties.

The next set of commands Moses received from Yahweh involved female servants or slaves.

Exodus 21:7–11 ⁷“If a man sells his daughter as a female slave, she is not to go free as the male slaves do. ⁸“If she is displeasing in the eyes of her master who designated her for himself, then he shall let her be redeemed. He does not have authority to sell her to a foreign people because of his unfairness to her. ⁹“If he designates her for his son, he shall deal with her according to the custom of daughters. ¹⁰“If he takes to himself another woman, he may not reduce her food, her clothing, or her conjugal rights. ¹¹“If he will not do these three *things* for her, then she shall go out for nothing, without *payment of money*.

The implication in this command is the woman is being sold by a father with some financial needs with the expectation of marriage either to the person who purchased her or to his son. If the purchaser subsequently rejected the marriage arrangement, he could search for someone to redeem her. However, she could not be redeemed by a foreigner. If she married a son, she was to be wel-

came into the family as a daughter. If he had another wife, the servant/wife was not to be denied any of the marital rights that properly belong to her as a wife. If she was denied these things, she could leave and return to her father without recompense.

Female servants who were not sold into service with the intention of becoming wives or concubines were also to be freed after six years, and they could serve for life if they chose to do so.

Deuteronomy 15:12 ¹²"If your kinsman, a Hebrew man or woman, is sold to you, then he shall serve you six years, but in the seventh year you shall set him free.

Deuteronomy 15:17 ¹⁷then you shall take an awl and pierce it through his ear into the door, and he shall be your servant forever. Also you shall do likewise to your maidservant.

Once an Israelite slave was freed, he was not to be sent out empty handed; he was to be given provisions for starting his life as a free person.

Deuteronomy 15:13–14 ¹³"When you set him free, you shall not send him away empty-handed. ¹⁴"You shall furnish him liberally from your flock and from your threshing floor and from your wine vat; you shall give to him as the LORD your God has blessed you.

The owner was not to feel that supplying the freed slave was a burden because he got twice the work than he would have received from a hired servant, or, alternatively, it cost him half what he would have paid the hired hand for the same work. Either way, he should be happy to send the slave away with some provisions.

All of this was connected to the fact God had delivered the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt.

Deuteronomy 15:15 ¹⁵“You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God redeemed you; therefore I command you this today.

Israelites were not to be kept in perpetual bondage; they were free people and they were not to mistreat one another by enslaving others in the covenant community.