

What are the types of laws in the Old Testament?

1. **Casuistic Law:** case law that uses an “if...then” condition-response structure and is written in the third-person
2. **Apodictic Law:** absolute law written in unconditional, categorical directives such as commands and prohibitions

Foundational Principles

1. Relationships always precede rules.
2. Context is as important as content.
3. Holiness remains the destination and obedience the duty.

Five Lenses for Interpreting the Law

1. **Class:** Is this casuistic or apodictic law?
2. **Context:** What is the narrative setting in which the law is given?
3. **Culture:** What are the cultural elements within the law and behind the law? How does law compare with other cultures of the Ancient Near East (ANE)?
4. **Covenant:** What role does this law play in the development of the old covenant? How is this law renewed, realized, or repurposed in the new covenant?
5. **Christ:** How does the keeping of this law conform us to the image of Christ?

Covenant Code Example: Exodus 21:7-11

When a man sells his daughter as a slave, she shall not go out as the male slaves do. If she does not please her master, who has designated her for himself, then he shall let her be redeemed. He shall have no right to sell her to a foreign people, since he has broken faith with her. If he designates her for his son, he shall deal with her as with a daughter. If he takes another wife to himself, he shall not diminish her food, her clothing, or her marital rights. And if he does not do these three things for her, she shall go out for nothing, without payment of money.

1. Class

Casuistic (If/Then)

2. Context

These laws are a part of the application of the covenant God established with Israel. Recall with broad strokes the story of Israel:

- **Genesis 15:13-15** God gave Abraham a word of promise: he would take his offspring down to sojourn in a foreign land and they would be afflicted for four hundred years, but then he would judge their oppressors and bring them out with great possessions.
- **Genesis 46:2-4** The journey of Abraham’s offspring came during the time of Jacob (Israel) when God told him not to be afraid to go down to Egypt because it would be there that God would make him a great nation. God promised to go with him and his people and to bring them up again.
- **Exodus 1:8-14** Where Israel had prospered in the time of Joseph and for some time after, there came a time when a new king who did not know Joseph feared that there too many Israelites and that they were too powerful. His solution was to make them into slaves. However, the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied. So the Egyptians, still fearing the Israelites, made their work even more bitter and ruthless. And eventually they attempted to control the growth of the population by ordering the killing of their infant boys. However, their courageous midwives saved the boys of Israel and the people multiplied and grew very strong. It was then that Pharaoh commanded every son of Israel to be thrown into the Nile. Amram and Jochebed gave birth to Aaron and Moses and Miriam. Moses was set in the Nile in a basket of bulrushes and God used the daughter of Pharaoh to save him.
- **Exodus 14:30-31** After a series of plagues, God brought Israel up out of the land of Egypt under the leadership of Moses. He gave them divine passage on the dry bed of the Red Sea and then caused the armies of Pharaoh to drown as they pursued them across the land. Thus God saved Israel and went with them out of the land of bondage. They feared and believed in the Lord.

- **Exodus 19:4-6** Having demonstrated his faithfulness by bearing his people upon eagles' wings and bringing them to himself, God issues a casuistic law covenant: if they would obey his voice and keep his covenant, then they would be his treasured possession among all peoples, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation unto the Lord.
- **Exodus 20:2-17** God spoke the ten words (commandments) that would form the core of instructions of the first covenant he made with Israel. The covenant code that follows in Exodus 20-23 then is the application of these ten words in practical terms.
- **Exodus 21:1-32** God provided application of the ten commandments in terms of the institution of slavery among the people of Israel. God's people had experienced 400 years of increasingly oppressive chattel slavery in which they were harshly and inhumanely treated specifically because of their identity as Israelites.

3. Culture

The English word *slave* is used to translate several Hebrew words that carry a range of meaning: maid, servant, worker, employee, or slave. Similarly the term usually translated *master* can mean employer, master, boss, or owner. An examination of the Hebrew language and the context helps determine the particular meaning intended for the setting.

Exodus 21:1-6 is a discussion about the purchase/acquiring of Hebrew slaves/servants/workers, so these are Israelites taking on other Israelites in their charge. Across the ANE, all industry was household (cottage) industry. To be an employee was to work for the master of a house. Because company owners (masters) invested in employees by providing them a livelihood, employees owed the company owner certain binding terms of service. [One might think of a military contract or the Hollywood studio system.] The issues raised in the passage provide for the honor of the employer and the provision of the employee: if a man goes to work for another man single, after the terms of his contract [six years] he was permitted to go out single; if he had come in married, he could go out married; but if he married while under contract to another contracted worker, he had two options, possibly a third (1 - leave alone, 2 - change the terms of his contract to work for the employer for the remainder of his life, 3 - take an outside job where he might save enough money to pay off the contract of his wife/children).

In 21:7 the word is אַמָּה (awmaw'). Its gloss is a maid, a handmaid, a female servant, a female slave.

There is no doubt that male headship was abused. (Genesis 3:16 **To the woman he said, "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you."**) Yet that abuse was not a part of God's good design. God's design in male headship (*patriarchy*) was to provide protection and provision for women. In a world where the independence (liberation) of women was unthinkable, God's good design was to provide for them a covering that ensured their wellbeing within their home and asserted their value outside the home.

21:8-11 offer clarity to the nature of this work contract. The daughter is not just being sold into slavery; her father is establishing a contract on her behalf for marriage that would have provided a life for her. This in no way implies that all arranged marriages gave women the status of *slave* or *handmaid*. Instead, in certain circumstances where a man either needed to protect his assets as an inheritance for his children (i.e. a widower) or in the instance a man did not have an inheritance to leave to his children, he would contract with a family for a wife-servant, paying the super wife-servant price, so that any children born of the union would have servant status and not be entitled to an inheritance. In the former situation, it was a way of protecting the status of the family and in the latter it was a way of protecting the father's honor.

The prohibition against leaving (*she shall not go out as the male slaves do*) is not a reflection of her gender, but of her married status. The *male slaves* here are those mentioned in 21:1-6, those who intentionally contracted to work for a period of six years and then to be released in the seventh year. The woman contracted to be a wife-servant has no such promise of release because the marriage is to be for life. However, that does not leave her without protection. 21:8 states if she does not please her master - the issues here is not her faithfulness, but his favor - the master may get her but go off her and no longer want her - he must allow her to be redeemed (bought back by her family) and has no right to sell her to a foreign people. If the master is not contracting for her to be his bride, but the bride of his son, he must deal with her as he would a daughter. If he takes another wife he is still required to treat her as a wife, which is to say he must provide for her food,

clothing, and their conjugal relationship. If he does not, she is released from the covenant to him because he has not kept his vow so that she might establish a relationship with someone else.

4. Covenant

God's people are going to represent him in the world. They are a people unto him, his own peculiar possession. Because of that they must live differently. They will not live like the people of earth.

Neither the God of the law nor the giver of the law spend time rebuking the institution of slavery (or indentured servitude or work contracts or arranged marriages). Rather, they address how an Israelite is to live in the midst of a world where such things exist. How can the children of Israel who have been freed from Egyptian oppression prevent oppression from taking a foothold among them? The answer is to treat others as people of sacred worth, created in the divine image.

Exodus 22:21 You shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.

Exodus 23:9 You shall not oppress a sojourner. You know the heart of a sojourner, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.

Leviticus 18:3-5 You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not walk in their statutes. You shall follow my rules and keep my statutes and walk in them. I am the Lord your God. You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the Lord.

Deuteronomy 15:12-15 If your brother, a Hebrew man or a Hebrew woman, is sold to you, he shall serve you six years, and in the seventh year you shall let him go free from you. And when you let him go free from you, you shall not let him go empty-handed. You shall furnish him liberally out of your flock, out of your threshing floor, and out of your winepress. As the Lord your God has blessed you, you shall give to him. 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. But if he says to you, 'I will not go out from you,' because he loves you and your household, since he is well-off with you,

The new covenant did not specifically bring forward this law, but it did carry forward laws about the interaction of masters/lords and servants/slaves within the body of Christ and without.

- **Ephesians 6:5-9** Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free. Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.
- **Colossians 4:1** Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.
- **1 Peter 2:18-25** Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.
- **Philemon 12-16** I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart. I would have been glad to keep him with me, in order that he might serve me on your behalf during my imprisonment for the gospel, but I preferred to do nothing without your consent in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own accord. For this

perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, no longer as a bondservant but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother—especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

5. Christ

The gospel is powerful for eternal salvation, but it is also practical for earthly situations. Exodus 21:7-11 is an example of God teaching his people how to respond to the fallen world in which they live. This is not a recommendation of slavery, but a response to it. In a world where slavery exists, how do the people of God demonstrate that they are different, distinct because of their belief in God who delivered them from slavery? They do so by ensuring the protection and provision of women even in a situation where a woman must enter an arranged marriage/contracted servant situation. In that situation they ensure that the woman is treated with the dignity accorded all image bearers. The new covenant demands the same sort of dignified relationship between image bearers even as it asserts for those in the covenant community called the church to voluntarily dissolve the institution of slavery person by person. So how do we keep this law? We endeavor in every working relationship we have to treat all people with dignity and especially to ensure the protection and provision of women. That means that we are not indifferent toward their needs, we are not degrading in our words, we are not crude in our interactions, we are not unjust in our pay scales. It also means that we seek to bring justice and equity and freedom to situations where slavery still exists.