

Exodus 21:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Now these are the judgments which thou shalt set before them.

Analysis

Now these are the judgments which thou shalt set before them.

'Judgments' (מִשְׁפָטִים, mishpatim) means judicial decisions, case laws, ordinances—applications of the Decalogue's principles to specific situations. The Ten Words (ch. 20) provide foundation; the mishpatim build the superstructure of covenant community life. 'Set before them' (תַּשְׁלִימָה לְפָנֵיכֶם, tasim lifneihem) echoes 19:7—formal presentation for acceptance. These aren't suggestions but divine legislation governing Israel's society. The mishpatim reveal God's justice: protecting the vulnerable (slaves, widows, aliens), limiting revenge (lex talionis), and establishing due process. Unlike Hammurabi's Code (which predates Moses), these laws ground justice in God's character, not king's decree.

Historical Context

The Book of the Covenant (Exodus 20:22-23:33) is Israel's first legal code, given immediately after the Decalogue. The mishpatim address civil, criminal, and ceremonial matters, creating comprehensive covenant society.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How do the mishpatim (case laws) apply the Decalogue's principles to everyday life?
2. What does God giving detailed legal codes teach about His concern for justice in society?

Interlinear Text

וְאֵלֶּה הַמְשֻׁפָּטִים אֲשֶׁר תָּשִׁיב מִשְׁמָרָתְךָ בְּפִנֵּיכֶם:
H428 Now these are the judgments H4941 H834 which thou shalt set H7760 before H6440

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 4:14 (Judgment): And the LORD commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and judgments, that ye might do them in the land whither ye go over to possess it.

Deuteronomy 6:20 (Judgment): And when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What mean the testimonies, and the statutes, and the judgments, which the LORD our God hath commanded you?