

Exodus 21:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And if a man smite his servant, or his maid, with a rod, and he die under his hand; he shall be surely punished.

Analysis

And if a man smite his servant, or his maid, with a rod, and he die under his hand; he shall be surely punished.

This provision regulates Hebrew servitude (עבד עברי, eved ivri), protecting indentured servants from exploitation. Unlike ancient Near Eastern chattel slavery, Israel's system limited bondage to six years with mandatory release, reflecting God's concern for human dignity. These laws temper economic necessity with compassion, ensuring even servants retain personhood and future hope. The regulations reveal God's heart for the vulnerable and point to ultimate redemption —Christ freed us from sin's slavery to serve Him voluntarily.

Historical Context

Debt-servitude in ancient Israel allowed impoverished persons to work off obligations while maintaining basic rights. These protections were revolutionary compared to surrounding nations' perpetual slavery systems.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does this law reveal God's character—His justice, mercy, or holiness?
2. What New Testament principles build upon or fulfill this Old Testament regulation?

Interlinear Text

בְּשֵׁבֶת אִמְתָּתוֹ בְּשֵׁבֶת אִמְתָּתוֹ
H3588 smite And if a man H853 his servant H176 or H853 or his maid H519 with a rod H7626

וְמֵת וְמֵת תַּחַת הַמֶּתֶת יְהִי מְלֵךְ יְהִי מְלֵךְ
H4191 and he die H8478 under his hand H3027 he shall be surely H5358 he shall be surely H5358

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