

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 (עֶבֶד עִבְרִי, 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

וְכִי	יִכֶּה	אִם יִשׁ	אֶת	עֶבְדֹּו	אִו	אֶת	אֲמָתוֹ	בִּישׁ בָּט
H3588	smite	And if a man	H853	his servant	H176	H853	or his maid	with a rod
	H5221	H376		H5650			H519	H7626
וּמֵת	תַּחַת	יָדוֹ	יִנָּקֵם:	יִנָּקֵם:				
and he die	H8478	under his hand	he shall be surely	he shall be surely				
H4191		H3027	H5358	H5358				

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