

# Exodus 21:23

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life,

## Analysis

---

**And if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life,**

Lex talionis principle: 'life for life' (נֶפֶשׁ תַּחַת נֶפֶשׁ, nefesh tachat nefesh)—exact equivalence, not escalation. This LIMITS revenge, preventing blood feuds. If injury is minor, penalty is minor; if death results, death penalty follows. Ancient cultures allowed unlimited vengeance (Lamech: 'seventy-sevenfold,' Genesis 4:24); lex talionis caps punishment at the offense level. Jesus doesn't abolish this civil justice principle but transcends it personally—'turn the other cheek' (Matthew 5:39) governs personal relations, not civil magistrates. God ordains governments to 'bear the sword' (Romans 13:4) in executing justice.

## Historical Context

---

Lex talionis appears in Hammurabi's Code (c. 1750 BC) and Hittite laws. Israel's version is more humane—applying equally regardless of social class (Hammurabi's penalties varied by status). Eye-for-eye limited rather than encouraged revenge.

## Related Passages

---

**1 John 4:8** — God is love

**1 Corinthians 13:4** — Characteristics of love

## Study Questions

---

1. How does lex talionis (eye-for-eye) actually limit rather than promote revenge?
2. What's the difference between Jesus' personal ethic (turn the other cheek) and civil justice (lex talionis)?

## Interlinear Text

---

וְאִם	אֲסִי	וְהָיָה	וְנָתַתָּה	נַפְשׁוֹ	תַּחַת
H518	<b>And if any mischief follow</b>	H1961	<b>then thou shalt give</b>	<b>for life</b>	H8478
	H611		H5414	H5315	

  

נַפְשׁוֹ
<b>for life</b>
H5315

## Additional Cross-References

---

**Deuteronomy 19:21** (Parallel theme): And thine eye shall not pity; but life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.