

Exodus 23:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

If thou meet thine enemy's ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again.

Analysis

If thou meet thine enemy's ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again.

Love your enemy—practically. Don't just avoid harming enemies (passive); actively help them (active). Returning straying livestock is costly—takes time, effort. The command assumes you'll recognize the animal as belonging to your enemy—you know each other's property. Temptation would be to ignore it ('serves him right') or keep it (petty revenge). God commands opposite: restore what's lost. Jesus radicalizes this: 'love your enemies, do good to those who hate you' (Luke 6:27). Paul quotes verse 5: 'if your enemy is hungry, feed him' (Romans 12:20). Gospel love is counterintuitive, costly, and Christlike.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern cultures practiced reciprocity—help friends, harm enemies. Jesus and Paul quote Old Testament commands (like this one) to show God always required enemy-love, not just friend-love.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does actively helping your enemy (returning livestock) exceed merely not harming them?
2. What practical ways can you 'return your enemy's ox' in modern contexts?

Interlinear Text

כִּי	תִּפְגַּע	שׁוֹר	אֵיבֶכָּ	אִו	חֲמֹר	תֵּעָה
H3588	If thou meet	ox	thine enemy's	H176	or his ass	going astray
	H6293	H7794	H341		H2543	H8582
תָּשִׁיבֵהוּ	תָּשִׁיבֵהוּ	לּוֹ:				
bring it back	bring it back	H0				
H7725	H7725					

Additional Cross-References

1 Thessalonians 5:15 (Parallel theme): See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men.

Matthew 5:44 (Parallel theme): But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;