

# 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

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**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

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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

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**1 John 4:8** — God is love

**John 15:13** — Greatest form of love

## Study Questions

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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

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תַּעֲשֶׂה כִּי שׁ וּרְתָּפְגַּע עַל אִבְנָן אַזְכָּר וְסָמֵר הַתְּעִזָּה  
H3588 If thou meet H6293 ox H7794 thine enemy's H341 H176 or his ass H2543 going astray H8582

לֹא תַשִּׁיב כֵּן תַשִּׁיב כֵּן  
H0 H7725 H7725

bring it back bring it back

## Additional Cross-References

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**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;