

Numbers 5:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Speak unto the children of Israel, When a man or woman shall commit any sin that men commit, to do a trespass against the LORD, and that person be guilty;

Analysis

This verse introduces the law of restitution when someone commits trespass against another, describing it as 'that sin which men commit' to do wrong against the LORD. The Hebrew identifies the sin as 'ma'al' (לַעֲוֹן, 'trespass, unfaithfulness'), emphasizing breach of trust and covenant violation. Significantly, wrong done to another person is simultaneously wrong against God—there's no distinction between horizontal (person-to-person) and vertical (person-to-God) sin. This reflects the reality that humans are made in God's image, so mistreating people offends their Creator. The phrase 'that person be guilty' (Hebrew 'asham', אָשָׁם) indicates legal culpability requiring satisfaction. God's justice system recognizes that sin creates objective guilt requiring resolution, not merely subjective feelings needing comfort. The following verses detail restitution plus twenty percent and a guilt offering, establishing that justice requires both horizontal restoration (restitution to the wronged party) and vertical reconciliation (sacrifice to God). This anticipates the gospel reality that Christ's atonement addresses both dimensions—reconciling us to God and enabling reconciliation with others.

Historical Context

Numbers 5:5-10 expands on Leviticus 6:1-7, providing additional details about restitution when the wronged party or their family members are unavailable to receive it. Ancient Near Eastern law codes (Hammurabi, Hittite laws, etc.) included restitution requirements, typically ranging from equal recompense to

multiple-fold restoration depending on the offense. Israel's law was unique in connecting restitution to the wronged person with ritual atonement to God, acknowledging sin's dual dimensions. The twenty percent added to restitution (Numbers 5:7) exceeded the principal, teaching that sin's consequences include interest and that restoration requires generosity beyond mere equality. The requirement for a guilt offering ('asham', אֲשָׁם) ensured that even after human restitution, the offender recognized their offense against God requiring blood atonement. This system functioned throughout Israel's history, though later prophets would condemn those who offered sacrifices while refusing to make restitution to wronged neighbors (Isaiah 1:11-17; Amos 5:21-24).

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How does the equation of sins against people with sins against God shape our understanding of social ethics and justice?
2. What does the requirement for both restitution and sacrifice teach about addressing sin's horizontal and vertical dimensions?

Interlinear Text

דִּבֶּר	אֶל	בְּנֵי י	יִשְׂרָאֵל	אִישׁ	אִוְ	אִשׁ ה	כִּי
Speak	H413	unto the children	of Israel	When a man	H176	or woman	H3588
H1696		H1121	H3478	H376		H802	
יַעֲשֶׂה	מִכָּל	חַטָּאת	הָאָדָם	לְמַעַן	ל	מַעַל	
shall commit	H3605	any sin	that men	commit		to do a trespass	
H6213		H2403	H120	H4603		H4604	
בִּיהוָה	וְאִשְׁמָה	הַנֶּפֶשׁ	הַהוּא:				
against the LORD	be guilty	and that person	H1931				
H3068	H816	H5315					

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