

THE COVENANT CODE: VARIOUS LAWS EXODUS 22:19-31

Moses continued to receive revelation from Yahweh concerning various other subjects the Lord knew would become issues over the course of the nation's history.

The next command deals with a particular sexual deviancy we today call bestiality. Simply put, it involves a person having sexual relations with an animal. This is not as uncommon as most people would think; every once in a while, an article will pop up in the news reporting on the arrest of some person for committing this offense.

Exodus 22:19 ¹⁹“Whoever lies with an animal shall surely be put to death.

This is not an ambiguous command; whoever commits this offense was to be put to death. The manner of execution was not specified; it didn't necessarily have to be accomplished by means of stoning.

The most obvious reason for this command is it would set Israel apart from all the pagan cults operating in the area that were established as fertility cults; God wanted the Israelites to forsake any vestiges of paganism including participating in their deviant sexual practices. Bestiality was a magic ritual engaged in by pagans as a religious observance thought to insure fertility. Magic was performed in order to subvert God's created order and to manipulate demonic forces in order to obtain the desired result. Jehu condemned the Baal worship of Jezebel calling it “harlotries” and “witchcraft” (2 Kings 9:22). Pagans thought the

gods engaged in this sort of deviancy; therefore, it was appropriate for them to engage in it as well. "In Ugaritic poetry it is narrated that Baal had intercourse with a cow in order to be saved magically from the death that awaited him as a result of the devices of Mot the king of the netherworld; and in the epic of Gilgamesh there are references to the relations of the goddess Ishtar with various animals."¹ Mot or Mut is the Hebrew word for death; it should be obvious how closely aligned death and Satan are with pagan rituals and they should be avoided at all costs.

A second important implication of this command is this act is something that pollutes and distorts the moral fiber of the covenant community as God designed it to be; indeed, it pollutes and distorts humanity as God originally intended man to live. It should be very obvious to everyone that this is not the way God designed human sexuality to manifest itself; human sexuality is strictly a human, male/female prerogative. God's design in creation suggested that every living thing was only to mate with other living things of the opposite sex and of the same kind. It is completely contrary to nature to do anything contrary. Any sexual activity outside those boundaries seems to be a particularly rebellious act and a very serious affront to the God who designed sexuality and created male and female human beings to operate within the boundaries He established. God set limits and it is not up to any human being to decide whether or not

¹ U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1967), 290.

those limits pertain to him because they do whether he knows it or not and whether he likes it or not.

In Leviticus, the death penalty was extended to include the life of the animal and the offense was not limited to men alone.

Leviticus 20:15–16 ¹⁵If there is a man who lies with an animal, he shall surely be put to death; you shall also kill the animal. ¹⁶If there is a woman who approaches any animal to mate with it, you shall kill the woman and the animal; they shall surely be put to death. Their bloodguiltiness is upon them.

This simply seems to be an amplification or clarification of the command given in Exodus. We shouldn't read any more into it than that in terms of why the animal is to die in one Scripture and not in another.

Hittite law imposed the death penalty on a man who committed bestiality with cattle, sheep, and pigs, but if the act was perpetrated on a horse or a mule, it was permissible. Whether it was allowed in the Hittite worship rites or not, I do not know although I suspect it was, and I do not know why it was allowed with some animals and not with others.

The next command concerns offering sacrifices in worship.

Exodus 22:20 ²⁰He who sacrifices to any god, other than to the LORD alone, shall be utterly destroyed [תָּרַם].

This reinforces and amplifies the command to have no other gods before Yahweh (Ex. 20:3); it is the very first of the Ten Commandments.

Some theologians want to claim that syncretism was Israel's persistent idolatry problem rather than an outright rejection of Yahweh in order to replace Him with pagan gods. Syncretism is the amalgamation of some of the tenets of

different religions into a single unit of belief. The claim is the Jews added the pagan gods to Judaism without totally rejecting Yahweh. Syncretism was part of the problem, but the Scriptures tend to indicate that over time they did reject God in favor of paganism and only retained the outward appearances of Judaism. That's not syncretism; that's rejection. By the time of the Babylonian captivity, paganism was being practiced even in the inner court of the Temple (Ezek. 8:16). Having said that, it must be recognized that God always had a faithful, believing Remnant among the Jewish people and He still does.

Here is one theologian's explanation concerning his definition of syncretism, but I think he downplays the extent and the pervasiveness of paganism into Judaism prior to the Babylonian captivity. "Syncretism, the merging and blending of religious beliefs, was so common in the ancient world as to be virtually ubiquitous. A typical ancient person [Israelite] would not deny that Yahweh existed but might well deny that he was the only God, or, indeed, that he was anything other than Israel's national god, i.e., one god among many gods of many nations. Israel's temptation was to follow this line of reasoning and to appreciate Yahweh as their national god (national deliverer and defender) but to find in Baal and Asherah the divine expertise for crop and animal fertility, in Dagon the divine expertise for grain abundance, in Molech the divine expertise for family prosperity. It can even be said that when the Israelites were tempted to do when they entered into idolatry was never to reject Yahweh outright but simply

to reject his exclusivity."² While this situation certainly describes syncretism, the Israelites went beyond that. They may have kept the name of Yahweh but they forgot His Word, they diminished Him and elevated the pagan gods and their worship over Him. His commands were designed to keep Him in the forefront of their minds and not on anyone or anything else. This was so serious a challenge to God and to the continuity of the covenant nation that the death penalty was to be imposed on anyone worshiping false gods.

Utterly destroy, *הָרַם*, means to destroy, to doom, to devote. This is the same word used by Yahweh in the command to destroy the Canaanites when the Israelites entered the land (Dt. 7:2). This is a strong word that refers to total destruction. The Israelites were to purge from among their midst those who sacrificed to idols. The primary, or at least the first, instance of Saul's disobedience was his failure to utterly destroy Amalek by allowing the king and the best livestock to live (1 Samuel 15:3, 8-9). Amalek was to be completely destroyed as punishment for fighting the Israelites during the Exodus. The other reason for totally destroying the Canaanites was in order to remove any pagan influence those idolatrous people could introduce into the covenant community.

The next command dealt with interpersonal relations between the Israelites and strangers, widows, and orphans. Israel was set apart from God and they were to stand out as different among the other nations of the world. One way they did that was their treatment of the poor and disadvantaged who had diffi-

² Douglas K. Stuart, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture: Exodus* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 515 n. 185.

culty caring for themselves. No other nations treated those on the margins of society the way Israel was supposed to treat them. Whether Israel ever actually did this the way God intended is doubtful especially later in their history as a nation.

Exodus 22:21 ²¹“You shall not wrong [יָנִה] a stranger [גֵּר] or oppress [לָקַח] him, for you were strangers [גֵּר] in the land of Egypt.

Deuteronomy 10:17–19 ¹⁷“For the LORD your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality nor take a bribe. ¹⁸“He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing. ¹⁹“So show your love for the alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.

Other ancient law codes in the Ancient Near East did not give this kind of consideration to resident aliens in their various nations. Aliens generally had no rights, no social standing, and they were often mistreated and even enslaved. That was not to be the situation in Israel where the stranger and those often left behind at the fringes of society such as widows and orphans were not to be abused or taken advantage of and not only that, they were to be proactively protected.

God reminded them they were once resident aliens in Egypt and, after a time, were quite harshly treated there. Stranger, גֵּר, means alien, stranger, or foreigner; it refers to one who is of a different geographical or cultural group often with less rights than the reference group. God was putting emphasis on the fact the Israelites had been resident aliens in a land where they not only had less rights than the citizens in that land, the Egyptians, but they were seriously mis-

treated. The Israelites were to treat aliens in Israel, people with few legal or civil rights, yet who were more or less permanent residents, with the same kind of treatment they expected within their own homeland. "Alien" or "resident alien" are better translations than "stranger" because the word refers to those who are more or less permanently living in Israel. The HCSB translates it "foreign resident" and the NET Bible translates it "foreigner." The Israelites really weren't strangers in Egypt; they had been there for some years before being pressed into slavery making them resident aliens. Oppressing people living in Israel as resident aliens was forbidden because the Israelites had been oppressed in Egypt, not to mention it is always the right thing to do anyway. Oppress, **לָחַץ**, means pressing, crowding, tormenting, or crushing; it refers to causing someone trouble and hardship by controlling and confining as an extension of a pressing motion. It is apparent how this word can describe the plight of the Israelites in Egypt; they were crushed under the harsh burden of involuntary servitude. The Israelites were not to treat the resident alien in Israel as they themselves had been treated in Egypt. To this day, the Jews are, as a group, a very benevolent people and this mindset has been part of Western civilization due to the influence of Judeo-Christian values based on the Word of God that go all the way back to this period of time in history. This Scripture certainly carries that sort of application for us as Christians living in this dispensation.

Wrong, **לָחַץ**, means to oppress or to violently treat another person; it is referring to the oppressor. Taken together then, this Scripture was a command to

treat the non-Israelites living among them with fairness and decency just as they would want to be treated and just as they were definitely not treated during their time in Egypt. They needed to remember the oppression they suffered in order to avoid oppressing others.

This Scripture and others like it have been seriously abused by liberal Christians who think there should be open borders between nations. They seemingly believe Scriptures such as this obligate the believer to welcome without question anyone in who wants to come in and give them a nice tax payer funded living just for showing up. None of this is biblically correct. God established nations and boundaries and each nation has a right to control who enters their nation and to remove those who illegally enter it. Illegal aliens shouldn't be mistreated, but they shouldn't violate our immigration laws and be allowed to abuse our kindness and generosity either.

Next, the treatment of widows and orphans is discussed.

Exodus 22:22–24 ²²“You shall not afflict [עָנָה] any widow [אַלְמָנָה] or orphan [יָתוֹם]. ²³“If you afflict [עָנָה] him at all, and if he does cry out to Me, I will surely hear his cry; ²⁴and My anger will be kindled, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless.

Afflict, עָנָה, means to be afflicted, disturbed, or oppressed which results in a state of feeling anxiety and distress. The problem for widows was their lack of standing apart from a husband in what was a patriarchal society. Some commentators claim that widows could not inherit land and, generally speaking, it went to the oldest son, but at least in the case of Naomi, absent surviving sons to

care for her, she was able to sell Elimelech's land to his Kinsman Redeemer (Ruth 4:1-9). Provision was made for daughters to inherit their father's property if they had no brothers to inherit it (Num. 27:1-11), but there was no provision for widows to inherit their husband's property. Certainly, widows who could not somehow work in order to provide for themselves, and opportunities for women to work were probably quite limited, and who had no children to care for them, could be left to starve and be taken advantage of. They could also be forced into a situation uncomfortably similar to involuntary servitude in order to survive. The God of Israel didn't intend for that to happen to widows in Israel.

Widow, אֵלְמָנָה, obviously means a woman who has lost her husband, but in Hebrew it also refers not only to bereavement but to the loss of economic and social protection and security within the community. One commentator pointed out that a number of women in the Bible who were, in fact, widows were never described as such using the word because they had some means of support whether they married again right away to another man like Abigail and Bathsheba or had some inheritance from the husband's estate or a kinsman redeemer like Naomi.³ Tamar was called a widow and she had to return to her father's house in order to survive (Gen. 38:11).

Apparently, widows wore garments that identified them as widows and this would have served to identify them as an easy mark or as one who was in need if she had no family to care for her. When Tamar was dealing with her fa-

³ Victor P. Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 413.

ther-in-law Judah by posing as a prostitute, she “removed her widow’s garments” and dressed for her role (Gen. 38:14, 19). The widow’s garments were probably the clothes worn while in mourning, but whether they wore them until remarriage, the rest of their unmarried lives, or for some specified period of mourning I could not discover.

One way the culture of that time took care of widows was what in Israel was called Levirate marriage whereby a brother was expected to marry his sibling’s widow.

Deuteronomy 25:5⁵“When brothers live together and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be *married* outside *the family* to a strange man. Her husband’s brother shall go in to her and take her to himself as wife and perform the duty of a husband’s brother to her.

The brother could refuse to perform this duty, but it was considered to be a shameful shirking of one’s familial and community responsibilities (Dt. 25:7-11).

God is the defender and protector of widows. One way He accomplished His purpose was through Israel as a nation, His nation, that was supposed to support and protect them.

Psalms 68:5 ⁵A father of the fatherless and a judge [יָדֵן] for the widows, Is God in His holy habitation.

Judge, יָדֵן, means judge, defender, or protector. Israel, as a nation set apart from all others, was to care for widows in ways other cultures of the time did not. As a father of orphans and a defender of the widow, Yahweh was expressing His personal relationship with the weak and defenseless. As Judge, He

acts in fair and benevolent ways towards widows and orphans. His example was to be Israel's example and the means through which He could care for them.

God commanded farmers to leave part of their crops in the field so that widows and orphans could glean them and obtain food and there was blessing promised for the farmer who was obedient to the command. That was how Ruth got into a field to obtain grain (Ruth 2:1-7).

Deuteronomy 24:19–22 ¹⁹“When you reap your harvest in your field and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow, in order that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. ²⁰“When you beat your olive tree, you shall not go over the boughs again; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow. ²¹“When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not go over it again; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow. ²²“You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I am commanding you to do this thing.

Widows and orphans were also allowed to partake of the third-year tithe of produce.

Deuteronomy 14:28–29 ²⁸“At the end of every third year you shall bring out all the tithe of your produce in that year, and shall deposit *it* in your town. ²⁹“The Levite, because he has no portion or inheritance among you, and the alien, the orphan and the widow who are in your town, shall come and eat and be satisfied, in order that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do.

Among the many commands the Israelites violated by the time of the Babylonian captivity, was the command to care for the widows and orphans.

Isaiah 1:23 ²³Your rulers are rebels And companions of thieves; Everyone loves a bribe And chases after rewards. They do not defend the orphan, Nor does the widow's plea come before them.

Ezekiel 22:7 ⁷“They have treated father and mother lightly within you. The alien they have oppressed in your midst; the fatherless and the widow they have wronged in you.

These abuses were part of the reason why Israel was eventually divinely disciplined by God and destroyed. Violating these commands was part of their overall pattern of rebellion and disobedience that resulted in the discipline God promised He would impose on them for their unfaithfulness. The consequences were revealed in the curses of Deuteronomy 28. As the Israelites mistreated widows and orphans, so their wives and children would suffer the consequences of disobedience.

Deuteronomy 28:30 ³⁰“You shall betroth a wife, but another man will violate her...

Deuteronomy 28:41 ⁴¹“You shall have sons and daughters but they will not be yours, for they will go into captivity.

Before the Mosaic Law, decent, godly people took it upon themselves to care for widows and orphans. In that time and place, there were no governmental assistance programs to care for people and no charitable organizations; therefore, the community had to assist them or they would perish. Unfortunately, these people may have been few and far between because there were also plenty of people around at that time who were all too willing to take advantage of the widows and orphans.

Job 29:12–13 ¹²Because I delivered the poor who cried for help, And the orphan who had no helper. ¹³“The blessing of the one ready to perish came upon me, And I made the widow’s heart sing for joy.

Job 24:3 ³“They drive away the donkeys of the orphans; They take the widow's ox for a pledge.

Orphans were in the same situation as widows if they were unable to care for themselves. If they had no inheritance, they would be at the mercy of others in order to survive. Human nature being what it is, orphaned children would be susceptible to exploitation and abuse. God didn't intend for that to happen in Israel either.

Orphan, יָתוֹם, means fatherless child and generally applies to boys. It does not necessarily mean a child with no parents at all; it can refer to a boy who has a living widowed mother.

If widows and orphans were abused, and as noted above they were, God's righteous anger would be aroused and those who abused and took advantage of widows and orphans would be avenged by God on behalf of the helpless. He would bring about their death by means of the sword and their wives would themselves become widows and their children would be fatherless. This is a divine proclamation of *lex talionis*. What they reaped, they would sow; as they did to the disadvantaged, so would their family be counted among the disadvantaged. In this case, it would be righteous justice imposed by a Judge who could not Himself err or be unjust unlike sinful human beings who can never operate in total righteousness. Whether this was strictly a promise that Israel as a national entity would suffer the consequences presented in the curses of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, or whether individuals would face retribution in the

form of divine, temporal discipline carried out throughout the history of the nation, or both, isn't specified, but it was most likely a corporate, national issue of judgment that was imposed by God on Israel and Judah through the pagan agents of Assyria and Babylon. However, I'm not ruling out the possibility that God would discipline the man as an individual who abused them. The primary reference to the sword is relating to warfare which must refer to the final covenant curse involving national destruction and removal from the land at the hands of hostile forces.

It was easy to be poor and disadvantaged in that time and place, but it was not so easy to escape those circumstances. Life was hard and God wanted to ensure that poor people were not further brutalized by people who took advantage of them and beat them even further down. This wasn't just a concern for resident aliens, widows, and orphans, but it was a concern for the poor people throughout the covenant community.

Exodus 22:25–27 ²⁵“If you lend [לֹאֲהֵב] money to My people, to the poor among you, you are not to act as a creditor to him; you shall not charge him interest. ²⁶“If you ever take your neighbor's cloak as a pledge [קְבִיל], you are to return it to him before the sun sets, ²⁷for that is his only covering; it is his cloak for his body. What else shall he sleep in? And it shall come about that when he cries out to Me, I will hear *him*, for I am gracious.

Poverty is not a problem that will be solved this side of the Messianic Kingdom. No amount of social engineering and redistribution of wealth is going to solve the problem of poverty in this age despite all the good intentions of well-

meaning but naïve people who think they can solve it if they just get enough of rich people's money in their hands to give to poor people.

Matthew 26:11 ¹¹“For you always have the poor with you; but you do not always have Me.

In the meantime, God provided guidelines for the treatment of poor people in Israel.

The first command involved lending money to the poor. It is noteworthy that Yahweh referred to them as “My people.” That doesn't mean God wasn't concerned about the welfare of wealthy Israelites, but it does mean He was particularly concerned about the marginal people in society who were vulnerable to abuse and degradation at the hands of the more powerful.

Lend, לָוָה, simply means to lend or to borrow and the exact meaning as it pertains to each individual depends on which side of the transaction they are on. If you are loaning money to someone, you are a lender; if you are receiving money from someone, you are a borrower. Obviously, the lender must have the resources on hand to be able to loan money to others which meant they were wealthy. Most people lend their money to others in order to earn a return on their capital, but that was forbidden in Israel. One dispensational commentator believes, “This is not calling for ‘no interest loans’ for everybody but for fairness and deference when the loan was made to the poor.”⁴ That was not the intent

⁴ Kevin D. Zuber, “Exodus” *The Moody Bible Commentary*, gen. eds. Michael Rydelnik and Michael Vanlaningham (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2014), 148.

and it is not what the text says; the intent was that interest was not to be charged for loans between Israelites.

Deuteronomy 23:19–20 ¹⁹“You shall not charge interest to your countrymen: interest on money, food, or anything that may be loaned at interest. ²⁰“You may charge interest to a foreigner, but to your countrymen you shall not charge interest, so that the LORD your God may bless you in all that you undertake in the land which you are about to enter to possess.

One of the blessings promised Israel for faithful obedience was they would be the head of the nations and those nations would borrow from Israel rather than Israel being required to borrow from the nations. As noted in Deuteronomy 23:20, loans to other nations would be made at interest.

Deuteronomy 28:12 ¹²“The LORD will open for you His good storehouse, the heavens, to give rain to your land in its season and to bless all the work of your hand; and you shall lend [לְנוֹה] to many nations, but you shall not borrow [לְנוֹה].

On the one hand, God promised blessing for the one who lent money to the poor in good faith, and on the other hand, He promised to remove the wealth of the rich person who took advantage of the poor and give it to the gracious man who did not take advantage of them.

Proverbs 19:17 ¹⁷One who is gracious to a poor man lends to the LORD, And He will repay him for his good deed.

Proverbs 28:8 ⁸He who increases his wealth by interest [נִשְׁדָּה] and usury [תַּרְבִּית] Gathers it for him who is gracious to the poor.

Interest, נִשְׁדָּה, is a charge for borrowing money which is an amount of money paid back to the lender in addition to the principal of the loan. Usury, תַּרְבִּית, is a practice involving charging an excessive, exorbitant, and unjust amount of in-

terest. Interest alone was forbidden among the Israelites, but usury goes well beyond the concept of interest; it is nothing more than a form of theft. It is a practice that exponentially increases the burden of debt. Very often, usurious debts are collected by means of force because people can't pay it back. People who need to borrow money in the first place, are not in a position to pay back exorbitant, usurious amount of interest on the loan.

Leviticus 25:35–37 ³⁵Now in case a countryman of yours becomes poor and his means with regard to you falter, then you are to sustain him, like a stranger or a sojourner, that he may live with you. ³⁶Do not take usurious interest from him, but revere your God, that your countryman may live with you. ³⁷You shall not give him your silver at interest, nor your food for gain.

The Israelites were to sustain the poor and not take advantage of them. In so doing, they would be honoring the God of Israel. They weren't supposed to charge interest on loans and they were not to feed them for gain. If they became indentured servants, they were not to be treated as slaves but as hired laborers.

In a sense, any interest charged to an Israelite by one of his brethren was usury because the normal interest rate between them was supposed to be 0%. In Nehemiah 5:1-13, 1% interest between Israelites was considered by Nehemiah to be usury. In this case, a famine caused them to mortgage their fields, vineyards, olive groves, and homes in order to buy food and pay the king's property taxes. Their children had been forced into involuntary servitude for their parent's failure to repay the loans. They were being forced to pay interest on the loans which obviously increases the debt burden whether it is usurious or not.

Nehemiah 5:11 ¹¹“Please, give back to them this very day their fields, their vineyards, their olive groves and their houses, also the hundredth *part* of the money and of the grain, the new wine and the oil that you are exacting from them.”

Just as oppressing widows and orphans were among the reasons for invoking the curses for disobedience in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, so too was charging interest. Violating these commands was part of forgetting Yahweh and rebelling against His authority.

Ezekiel 22:12¹²“In you they have taken bribes to shed blood; you have taken interest and profits, and you have injured your neighbors for gain by oppression, and you have forgotten Me,” declares the Lord God.

It was not against the Law to hold some sort of property as a pledge to repay a loan; we generally refer to that property as collateral. We just noted in Nehemiah that farms, vineyards, olive groves, and homes were lost when mortgaged. The Hebrew understanding of a pledge is exactly as we still think of it. Pledge, קִבֹּל, means to require a pledge (collateral) or demand a security; the lender temporarily possesses an object belonging to a borrower as security for repayment of a loan. In the Exodus command, a cloak was used as an example of a pledge. Poor people didn't have much they could use as a pledge, but they had a cloak. A cloak for a poor person was an indispensable part of his life; therefore, it had to be returned to him by sunset so it could be used that night to keep warm.

God promised to hear the pleas of the poor who were being abused by their creditors. No specific penalty was specified for the malefactor presumably

because God would impose temporal discipline according to the facts of the situation. It's clear He was willing to take up the cause of the poor Israelite debtor in the case of any abuse he was suffering at the hands of a lender.

An Ancient Near East scholar examined some Akkadian laws concerning interest and found out their interest rates were 20% for cash loans and 33 1/3% for grain. I don't think borrowing was a good idea in that place!

The next command involved a prohibition on cursing God and the rulers of Israel.

Exodus 22:28 ²⁸“You shall not curse [קָלַל] God, nor curse [אָרַר] a ruler of your people.

There are two different words used here for “curse” with the stronger word applied to the God of Israel. Although some commentators view these two words as synonyms, the meanings of the two seem to be different enough to warrant understanding them to carry some variations of meaning. The word that applies to God, קָלַל, means to disdain, despise, or be vile; it refers to being in a state of contempt for an object, in this case Yahweh, showing little regard or value for Him. The word that applies to the rulers or leaders of Israel, אָרַר, means to curse or to place a curse on a person; it refers to invoking harm or injury by means of a statement through the power of a deity by calling for the person to be bound with a spell, hemmed in with obstacles, or to render the ruler powerless to resist whatever the person wants to do contrary to the ruler's wishes. It was

the will of God that people be obedient to their leaders. This referred to leaders at any level of authority in Israel; it wasn't restricted to the king or priests.

The concept of respect for God and leaders is still applicable today. Through Peter and Paul, we are commanded to be in subjection to our governmental leadership.

Romans 13:1 ¹Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.

1 Peter 2:13–14 ¹³Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, ¹⁴or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right.

The next command concerns the firstfruits of the harvest and the firstborn son, oxen, and sheep.

Exodus 22:29–30 ²⁹“You shall not delay *the offering from* your harvest and your vintage. The firstborn of your sons you shall give to Me. ³⁰“You shall do the same with your oxen *and* with your sheep. It shall be with its mother seven days; on the eighth day you shall give it to Me.

Giving to God the firstborn sons and the animals of the herd is obviously tied into the concept of redemption developed earlier in Exodus in connection with the Passover (Ex. 13:1-16). The animals were sacrificed, but the sons were redeemed by means of payment which served as the substitute for their lives.

Exodus 13:15 ¹⁵‘It came about, when Pharaoh was stubborn about letting us go, that the LORD killed every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of beast. Therefore, I sacrifice to the LORD the males, the first offspring of every womb, but every firstborn of my sons I redeem.’

This was the first mention in Scripture of dedicating the firstfruits of the harvest to God and that command would be amplified later in Scripture in several places. Withholding what belongs to God was considered to be a rebellious act.

The next command referred to eating meat that had been killed by wild animals.

Exodus 22:31 ³¹“You shall be holy men to Me, therefore you shall not eat any flesh torn to pieces in the field; you shall throw it to the dogs.

This command had to do with holiness and purity. Animals killed in this way had not been properly prepared as food fit for God's people to consume. They were not to eat the animal's blood and those killed in this way did not have their blood properly removed from the body. Eating it rendered them unclean.

Leviticus 17:14–16 ¹⁴“For as for the life of all flesh, its blood is *identified* with its life. Therefore I said to the sons of Israel, ‘You are not to eat the blood of any flesh, for the life of all flesh is its blood; whoever eats it shall be cut off.’ ¹⁵“When any person eats *an animal* which dies or is torn *by beasts*, whether he is a native or an alien, he shall wash his clothes and bathe in water, and remain unclean until evening; then he will become clean. ¹⁶“But if he does not wash *them* or bathe his body, then he shall bear his guilt.”

Depending on when the animal was killed, eating flesh that have been dead awhile raise some obvious health concerns. Since the Law was designed to provide guidelines for holy living and worshiping Yahweh, and it was designed to set Israel apart from the pagan nations, one can assume the pagans ate meat in this condition. That may not be correct, but it seems likely.