

Review:

- Exodus is a journey from slavery to dwelling with the presence of God.
- How to structure a society where the presence of God can dwell?
- Importance of reading the commands through the lens of how to set up society rather than individual holiness laws.

**1. The Book of the Covenant:**

- Scholars refer to **Exodus 21-23** as the “book of the covenant” – see Exodus 24:7

Verse	Topic
- Ex. 21:2-11	- treatment of servants (Hebrew <i>'ebed</i> = either slave or indentured servant)
- Ex. 21:12-36	- personal injury (tort law)
- Ex. 22:1-15	- property laws
- Ex. 22:15 – 23:5	- Social responsibility, justice, and mercy.
- Ex. 25 – 40	- building the Tabernacle

**2. Ancient Near East (ANE) Law Codes:**

- An excellent area of study is comparing Exodus's “law code” with other “law codes” found in ancient civilizations in the Mesopotamian region.

**3. Ancient Law Codes** that archaeologists have discovered:

- King Ur-Namma, the city-state of Ur (southern Iraq), dating approx.. 2100 BCE.<sup>1</sup>
- King Lipit-Ishtar – southern Mesopotamia – 1900 BCE.
- Code of Hammurabi – Babylon – 1800-1700 BCE.
  - Eight-foot tall black stele now housed in the Louvre, Paris, France.
- Middle Assyrian Laws (MAL) – Northern Mesopotamia along the Tigris river – 1250 BCE.

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<sup>1</sup> Sarna, N. M. (1991). Exodus = [Shemot] : the traditional Hebrew text with the new JPS translation (First edition). Jewish Publication Society, p. 273.

#### 4. Torah Improvements:

- The commands in Exodus are similar in ways to law codes, but important distinctions should be noted!
- When there is a difference in the Torah from a similar ANE law, the Torah makes improvements!
- Differences:
  - Eternal nature - Delivered by God rather than a human king.
  - Image of God – favors the sacredness of human life rather than property.
- No vigilante justice – administration of justice through judges at a societal level and out of the hands of the individual or the mob.
- Limitation on Punishment – exact equivalence for the injury. Punishment fits the crime.
- No vicarious punishments – in other law codes, a person of high status could have someone else (a daughter) take the punishment on their behalf.
- No desecration of the human body
  - Penalties for Theft –
    - Cut off hand?
    - Torah requires monetary payment as retribution for theft. No desecration of the body. No incarceration.
- Demands equal justice for all – including the King.

**6. Wisdom of the commands:** Look for the wisdom underlying the commands and how they affect society rather than a simple rule to follow:

- Exodus 21:28-32 – homicidal animal and the responsibility of the owner.
  - The community carries out stoning.
  - The owner must be responsible for an animal capable of killing.
  - The only place in Torah where a person can ransom their life for a capital offense. It recognizes that the owner likely did not have an intent to kill someone.
- Exodus 21:1-3 – bearing faithful witness
  - Importance of not following the crowd in matters of justice.
  - Importance of not following the crowd as a witness in other areas of life.
- Exodus 21:4-5 – Seeing the humanity in your enemy
  - This commandment intends to use a moment in time for individuals to make a connection with their enemy.