

# SEED & BREAD

Otis Q. Sellers, Founder

Israel. God's law contained 613 commands, and every one from the first to the last was intended for their good (Deut. 10:13). **Keep his decrees and commands, which I am giving you today, so that it may go well with you and your children after you and that you may live long in the land the Lord your God gives you for all time** (Deut. 4:40, 6:3, 6:18).

With His laws God was establishing a society that was safe for His children, a society with citizens who were moral in character and healthy in body as detailed in Leviticus chapters 11-20, with regulations regarding diet, hygiene, and prevention of communicable diseases, for example. A God whose laws promote the safety, health and wellbeing of his children can hardly be confused with a fire-breathing Godzilla monster.

Quite the contrary, **God's laws are righteous, more pure than gold and sweeter than honey** (Ps. 19:9-10). So sweet and righteous, in fact, that the surrounding nations would take note and admire these laws and be drawn to the God of Israel, which was the reason for forming the nation of Israel in the first place (Ex.19:6; 1 Peter 2:9-10), to serve as priests (go-between) of God to the nations. **Observe them (my laws) carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people."** **7 What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to him? 8 And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?** (Deut. 4:5-8).

Neither the Lord's punishments nor His rewards ever came out of the blue. God laid these out ahead of time (Lev. 26; Deut. 28; Amos 3:7) for all to learn, understand, and obey.

## I WILL DWELL AMONG THEM

God wanted evil purged from the promised land (Deut. 13, 19, 17, 21, 22, 24) and He wanted the Israelites to be purified through His law, all for one important reason: The Lord God will one day dwell in the midst of them (Ex. 29:45-46; Rev. 21:3). The Lord will be living right alongside them, so the people and the land needed to be pure in His presence. **Be holy, because I am holy** (Lev. 11:44-45, 19:2, 20: 7, 26).

Based on our study, anyone still looking to "eye for an eye" as proof that the God of the Old Testament is a vengeful Godzilla monster should move along. There's no fire-breathing to be seen here.

**ISSUE NO. 350, March 2023**

**THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY**

P.O. Box 1609, Canyon Country, CA 91386 [seedandbread.org](http://seedandbread.org)

Email [rustywoft@aol.com](mailto:rustywoft@aol.com) to receive Seed & Bread pamphlets at no charge.

## God or Godzilla A study of "eye for an eye" By Candy Davis

Exodus 21:22-27 \* Leviticus 24:17-22 \* Deuteronomy 19:16-21

"Eye for an eye"

Reading these words, how many are quick to picture the God of the Old Testament as a monstrous, fire-breathing Godzilla, out for red-hot revenge? If so, then this study of the biblical principle of "eye for an eye" may change your mind.

Let's begin with a lesson from English class. If I tell you to "bite the bullet," I don't expect you to literally chomp your teeth into a 9 millimeter round. Ridiculous. "Bite the bullet" is what's called an idiom, a figurative way of telling you to do something difficult or unpleasant you've been putting off.

### THE PUNISHMENT FITS THE CRIME

In the same way, the phrase "eye for an eye" is not to be taken literally. No gouging out of eyeballs is intended. Absurd. "Eye for an eye" is a figurative way of saying that, in matters of public justice, the penalty for an injury along with its compensation should be proportional to the offense. The punishment should match the crime as we read in Leviticus 24:18-20 (NIV throughout). **Anyone who takes the life of someone's animal must make restitution** [replacement or money equal to animal's value]. **Anyone who injures their neighbor is to be injured in the same manner: fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. The one who has inflicted the injury must suffer the same injury** [suffer a compensating punishment].

With the expression "eye for an eye" we have one of God's laws for Israel which served as a basis for the nation's judicial system. "Eye for an eye" was the standard by which judges appropriately punished perpetrators and awarded damages after a crime. Never was God's principle of "eye for an eye" meant to advocate personal hot-headed revenge! Far from it. It was no bloodthirsty Godzilla, but a compassionate God whose judicial policy of "eye for an eye" prevented men and tribes from seeking vigilante vengeance. Placing restrictions on penalties avoided two extremes in judicial sentencing: Punishments that were too harsh, or ones that were too lenient. Or in the words of Goldilocks, not too hot, not too cold, but just right. Equitable. Fair. In other words, the punishment fit the crime.

## EQUAL JUSTICE FOR ALL

If the Lord God were a Godzilla monster, we could expect Him to be stingy in providing justice under the law, but this is not the case. God in His mercy and compassion provided equity under the law for all humankind.

The household servants of Israel, for example, were protected under the law from oppressive, heavy-handed owners. **An owner who hits a male or female slave [servant] in the eye and destroys it must let the slave go free to compensate for the eye. And an owner who knocks out the tooth of a male or female slave must let the slave go free to compensate for the tooth** (Ex. 21:26-27).

Also receiving equal justice under God's law were people who were not Israelites by ancestry. **You are to have the same law for the foreigner [non-Israelite] and the native-born. I am the Lord your God** (Lev. 24:22).

The Lord is not stingy, nor does He play favorites in providing equal, fair justice for human beings (Ps. 98:9). God shows no partiality (Deut. 10:17-19; Lev. 19:15, 33-34). **Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?** (Gen. 18:25)

## HIGHEST VALUE PLACED ON HUMAN LIFE

Regarding the expression "eye for an eye," I said that these words should be understood in a figurative sense; however, one significant exception does exist: In the case of deliberate, premeditated murder, the principle of "life for life" must be enforced literally. For the crime of murder, the killer is sentenced to death. **Anyone who takes the life of a human being is to be put to death. A life for a life** (Lev. 24:17, 21; Deut. 19:21).

The death penalty is a topic of high contention in modern times, but for the ancient Israelites it was standard fare. Centuries before establishing His law for Israel, God had declared to Noah, **Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed** (Gen. 9:6).

A penalty as severe as death demonstrates the esteem the Lord holds for human life. We learn in Genesis 1:27 God's reason for assigning this value: **So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them.** The human race is created in the very image and character of God. No other living being can claim this status. Your dog can't. My cat can't. It is only upon human beings that God places the highest value of all, and please note— this includes the life of the *unborn* human. As we read in Exodus, if a pregnant woman gives birth prematurely from men hitting her while fighting nearby, and the baby dies, the guilty party repays with his life (Ex. 21:22-25).

## CITIES OF REFUGE

What if a killing was accidental?  
God in his mercy and compassion (Ps. 103:8; Lam. 3:22) gave

special consideration to one who killed unintentionally, without malice aforethought. In cases of manslaughter, the offender was able to flee to one of six designated cities of refuge where he was given a fair trial (Ex. 21:12-14; Num. 35:6-32; Deut. 19:1-7). If the death was determined to be accidental, the offender was allowed to remain in the city of refuge, living safely until the death of the high priest. If he ever left the city *before* that time, the culprit could be executed.

For any reader looking to charge the Lord with hypocrisy citing Commandment #2 **Thou shalt not kill** (Ex. 20:13), please understand that the word "kill" in Hebrew is *rāṣaḥ* which means *to murder*. Thou shalt not *murder*.

## TWO OR THREE WITNESSES

God makes certain his system of punishment is fair by adding a fail-safe requirement consisting of testimony by two or three witnesses before any penalty can be handed down, including the penalty of death. **One witness is not enough to convict anyone accused of any crime or offense they may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses** (Deut. 19:15, 17:6; Num. 35:30).

What if a witness lies?? We read in Deuteronomy that a witness testifying falsely must receive the same punishment intended for his fellow Israelite who stands accused. **Eye for an eye. If a malicious witness takes the stand to accuse someone of a crime, 17 the two people involved in the dispute must stand in the presence of the Lord before the priests and the judges who are in office at the time. 18 The judges must make a thorough investigation, and if the witness proves to be a liar, giving false testimony against a fellow Israelite, 19 then do to the false witness as that witness intended to do to the other party. You must purge the evil from among you** (Deut. 19:16-19).

## HEAR AND FEAR

The above verse continues: **The rest of the people will hear of this and be afraid, and never again will such an evil thing be done among you. 21 Show no pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot** (Deut. 19:20-21, 13:11).

The penalty of death, as with all penalties prescribed in the law, served the purpose of curtailing further crimes. People would hear of the consequences and be afraid to commit the offenses themselves. As a further deterrent to crime, penalties were carried out swiftly in the Jewish judicial system. **When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, people's hearts are filled with schemes to do wrong** (Ecc. 8:11).

## SO IT MAY GO WELL WITH YOU

In childhood, did your parents say "it's for your own good" when laying down the law? God the Father was no different with His children