

TOPIC: FORGIVENESS UNDER THE LAW OF MOSES

Lesson Outline

- *Introduction/Definition of terms*
- *Key Bible Passages*
- *Was It Forgiveness or Vengeance?*
- *The Administration of Justice vs An Eye for An Eye.*
- *Examples of forgiveness in the O.T.*
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INTRODUCTION/DEFINITION OF TERMS

Earlier in this series, we've looked at the Marriage Under the law of Moses. Today we shall consider Forgiveness under the Law of Moses. To better help you understand this lesson, we're not talking about how God forgives sins under the Old law, but we're talking about how people forgave each other under the law of Moses. Was there forgiveness at all or it was "an eye for an eye"? This is what we seek to address.

What is forgiveness?

According to Wikipedia, Forgiveness is defined in a psychological sense, as the intentional and voluntary process by which one who may initially feel victimized, undergoes a change in feelings and attitude regarding a given offense, and overcomes negative emotions such as resentment and vengeance (however justified it might be).

Psychologists generally define forgiveness as a conscious, deliberate decision to release feelings of resentment or vengeance toward a person or group who has harmed you, regardless of whether they actually deserve your forgiveness.

Elsewhere, Forgiveness is defined as letting go of past grudges or lingering anger against a person or persons. "forgiveness" literally means "to let go,". The synonyms for forgiveness are pardon, exoneration. The opposites of forgiveness include: blame · cruelty · punishment · malignance · avarice · revenge · vengeance · castigation etc.

*"Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: 39 But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also **Matt5:38-39**".* Reading through the book of **Mathew 5:38-39** one could just conclude that the people who lived under the law of Moses did not forgive one another and vengeance was the order of the day.

It is the burden of this lesson to let us know if it was forgiveness or vengeance all the way.

KEY BIBLE PASSAGES

A. Exodus 21:12-36.

B. Lev 24: 19-21

"And if a man cause a blemish in his neighbour; as he hath done, so shall it be done to him; Breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth: as he hath caused a blemish in a man, so shall it be done to him again. And he that killeth a beast, he shall restore it: and he that killeth a man, he shall be put to death".

C. Deuteronomy 19:21

You must show no pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, and foot for foot.

WAS IT FORGIVENESS OR VENGEANCE FOR THOSE WHO LIVED UNDER THE LAW?

Lev 24:17-22

17 And he that killeth any man shall surely be put to death. 18 And he that killeth a beast shall make it good; beast for beast. 19 And if a man cause a blemish in his neighbour; as he hath done, so shall it be done to him; 20 Breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth: as he hath caused a blemish in a man, so shall it be done to him again. 21 And he that killeth a beast, he shall restore it: and he that killeth a man, he shall be put to death. 22 Ye shall have one manner of law, as well for the stranger, as for one of your own country: for I am the Lord your God.

The passage first states the general rule: “Anyone who takes the life of another person shall be put to death (Lev 24:17)”. Other passages in the Law make it clear that the death penalty was reserved for murder and was not to be applied in cases when someone took another’s life without premeditation or malicious intent (Exo 21:12-21).

The death penalty was not to be exacted if “a man injures” another person. If he did, he had to be punished or pay damages to the extent that he had injured the other person (Lev 24:19). “Eye for eye” was simply a way of saying the punishment (or damages) should fit the crime (Lev 24:20).

The “eye for eye” law is known as the “*lex talionis*”, a Latin term meaning “law of retaliation”. It is also found in Exo 21:23-25 and Deut 19:21. It is associated with the quest for personal revenge. Does the teaching of this passage regarding the “eye for eye” principle justify such attitudes i.e., retaliation? Did the law of Moses sanctioned unforgiveness or revenge? it did not.

In the Old Testament, as in the New, it teaches that vengeance belongs to God (Deut 32:35 1 Sam 25:32-35; Psa 94:1; Prov 20:22; Lev 19:18; Prov 24:29; Rom 12:19). Furthermore, the Law forbade the Israelites to seek vengeance (Lev19:18) and taught them to do good to their enemies (Exo 23:4-5; Prov 25:21-22).

The “eye for eye” principle was intended to provide guidelines for determining how a wrongdoer was to be punished or to pay for his crime and not to promote unforgiveness. The punishment was supposed to commensurate the crime., the payment made by the wrongdoer to the victim had to be equal to the wrong done to him. Personal revenge, unforgiveness or retaliation was not under consideration in this passage, nor was it permitted by the law of Moses. As Mahatma Ghandi puts it an eye for an eye will make the whole world go blind.

THE ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE VS AN EYE FOR AN EYE

The administration of justice regarding the “eye for eye” formula further shows that this law was not meant to promote unforgiveness between individuals who lived under the Law. The law of “eye for eye” was not to be administered from one individual to the other. under the law of Moses, retribution was restricted to the judicial administration. Decisions were rendered in public, with proper legal protections (Deut 19:15-21).

Notice verse 18 and 21 (21 *And thine eye shall not pity; but life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot*). After the judge has made inquisition in verse 18, he was not to be carried away by emotions in administration of the “eye for eye” in verse 21.

The law required at least two witnesses to corroborate testimony before a person could be condemned (Deut 17:6). Such law allowed the punishment to fit the crime.

So, the two things to note here is that:

- *the law of “an eye for an eye” does not mean that if Mr. A. slaps Mr. B, then he (Mr. B) must slap back in retaliation, this will amount to unforgiveness and contrary to Lev 19:18.*

- *The law of “an eye for an eye” was not meant to be administered by individual upon another individual but by a judicial system and the intention was to ensure that the punishment fit the crime committed, hence “the eye for eye” formula.*

EXAMPLES OF FORGIVENESS IN THE O.T.

1. Jacob and Esau (Genesis 25, 27, 32, 33)

Jacob offended Esau by taking his birthright (Genesis 25:29-34) and also by deceiving their father Isaac into giving him (Jacob) the larger portion of the inheritance.

In the end, Jacob had to run for his life. He fled to another country to seek refuge. It was many years before he returned to his own family. When he did, he heard that his brother Esau was looking for him. Then Jacob was scared. He devised a plan so that his brother could only destroy half of Jacob’s wealth if he was caught. (Genesis 32)

When they finally met, Esau ran to Jacob and hugged him and kissed him and showed forgiveness and mercy. He had so forgiven Jacob that he was surprised Jacob would even think that there might be hard feelings between them. (Genesis 33).

2. Joseph (Genesis 37-50)- Forgiveness to his brothers

Joseph’s brothers became jealous and eventually sold him into slavery when he told them of his dreams and they fear he will rule over them. Gen 37: 8-9.

When their father passed away, the brothers began to fear even more that Joseph would finally show his hatred towards them for the sins they have committed (Genesis 50:15). Joseph was heartbroken when he learned they still did not trust him and that they feared what he would do to them (Genesis 50:17). *This amazing story of forgiveness culminates with these words from Joseph to his brothers:*

“And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God? But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive. Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them.”
(Genesis 50:19-21)

3. David forgave Saul

1 Samuel 24:10-12

Behold, this day your eyes have seen how that the LORD had delivered you to day into my hand in the cave: and some bade me kill you: but my eye spared you; and I said, I will not put forth my hand against my lord; for he is the LORD's anointed.

David even went ahead to extend kindness and forgiveness to the household of Saul in person of Mephibosheth (2 Samuel 9).

CONCLUSION

We must see the positives intention of this law that it was meant for protection rather than the promotion of unforgiveness. This law prevents a person from demanding or exacting more punishment than necessary. This law also protects the innocents and the vulnerable because the Lord says the same standard must be employed both by the native Israelites and the strangers dwelling with them. ***Leviticus 24:22 Ye shall have one manner of law, as well for the stranger, as for one of your own country: for I am the Lord your God.***