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## **Eye for an Eye, Tooth for a Tooth**

### **Exodus 21:23-25**

**But if there is harm, then you shall pay life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.**

There are two ways to interpret the Hebrew idiom, an “*eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.*”

The first way is to understand this idiom is to always apply it literally. If someone breaks your leg, you break the leg of the offender. If someone gives you a black eye, you offer a black eye in return.

The second way to understand this is to examine in a judicial system of fair and equal counter measures. The idea is to make things even, in such a way that reconciliation is reached by all parties. The idea is to neutralize offenses.

Hebraically, when life is intentionally taken or through absolute negligence, there is no way to make things even other than taking the other parties life. Of course, in this case we are entering into the area of capital punishment.

There is a clear process involved for such situations. For example, David committed murder, but his life was not taken. Why? For more on that subject, we recommend the teaching “*Should We Stone Our Children?*”

The chapter of Exodus 21 covers such examples, in which life is taken. However, other examples are given to us as well.

When an offender causes his own slave to lose an eye, then that slave is to be let free. This is to make things even. The offender is not to literally lose his eye, but to lose his servant.

Sometimes to make things “even” monetary compensation is to be involved. This example is also given in the context of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

### **Exodus 21:33-34**

**When a man opens a pit, or when a man digs a pit and does not cover it, and an ox or a donkey falls into it, the owner of the pit shall make restoration. He shall give money to its owner, and the**

dead beast shall be his.

The fact that the first instance in the Torah related to the concept of an “*eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth*” is embedded in the context of reconciliation, not retribution, helps us understand the actual intent behind this commandment.

But there is more there in order to help us understand this better.

### **Exodus 21:23-25**

But if there is harm, then you shall pay life for life, eye for (*tachat*) eye, tooth for (*tachat*) tooth, hand for (*tachat*) hand, foot for (*tachat*) foot, burn for (*tachat*) burn, wound for (*tachat*) wound, stripe for (*tachat*) stripe.

In the English, the word “for” simply carries an element or feeling of revenge or retribution in this commandment. However, the Hebrew word here, means several possible things. In the examination of the different definitions, we better understand the context and intent of the word in Hebrew, the original language, instead of limiting our understanding to the English language.

### **The word here means:**

- 1) under
- 2) beneath
- 3) below
- 4) instead of
- 5) at the feet of
- 6) down
- 7) in the place of

Do these interpretations of this word carry the sense of revenge and retribution? ...or perhaps, a humbling and sense of humility?

In looking closely at these definitions, we can clearly see that there is a level of humility here, not revenge.

It is more about responsibility and doing what is right when something has gone terribly wrong.

Most actual claims and harms in the Torah, except those requiring capital punishment, were settled by payment in goods.

If we would simply keep reading the context following the idiom of “*eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth*” we would see this idea of reconciliation and responsibility really begin to present itself. Consider reading on further ‘til chapter 22, verse 16 to really see the context.

The three times in the Old Testament where the phrase “*an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth*” is mentioned all relate to civil situations, something being judged before a duly constituted authority: a judge, or magistrate, etc. “*An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth*” is not a statement that is in any way related to personal relationships. However, that’s precisely what the Pharisees had done with it. They took a divine principle for the courts, and they made it a matter of daily vendettas.

The concept of an “*eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth*” became a system of abuse and exploitation.

This is human nature at work.

For example, look at the U.S. court system today. How many lawsuits make an attempt to do more than just make things even? How many lawsuits try to take advantage of someone who wronged them?

The system is overloaded with such cases. The same situation existed in the first century.

Jesus, his Hebrew name being Yeshua, also tried to deal with the rampant “*eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth*” situations.

**Matthew 5:38-42**

“**You have heard that it was said**, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.

This saying of Yeshua is generally interpreted as criticism of the Torah based commandment, given to us by our Creator, and often taken as implying that “*an eye for an eye*” encourages excessive vengeance rather than an attempt to limit it.

Would our Messiah teach against what the Father gave us as the Word of God?

Was our Creator evil for giving us the commandment an “eye for an eye?”

Was His perfect law not good enough and needed to change?

Was the author of Psalm 119 crazy, and the law of God needed to be made better and more perfect?

Of course not?

Perhaps something is simply being misunderstood...

Yeshua is teaching against the false doctrine or teachings of the first century. Yeshua specifically said, “*you have heard it said*, not “*it is written.*”

If he would have said, “*it is written*”, then Yeshua would have been teaching against and changing what was written in the Word of God. But He was not doing any such thing.

By him saying, “*you have heard it said*” speaks to the false teachings of the Pharisees.

There is a big difference between the Word of God, and teachings about the Word of God.

If you do not believe that to be true, then simply look at the mess we have today as it relates to doctrine.

They had the same problems in the first century as well.

Look at the meanings of “*tachat*” again.

It can also be defined as “*at the feet of.*”

This is a picture of a servant.

In Bible days, when you were at the feet of someone meant that you put yourself under their authority.

They were your teacher and you were their disciple. You thought more of the person you sat at the feet of, than yourself.

So we could say that Yeshua was challenging the TEACHING on the Exodus passage and NOT the actual passage. He was giving us the correct interpretation.

We must always check what we are being taught by any man against God’s Word.

While one has the right to demand retribution, Yeshua’s interpretation of the Torah calls us to be humble and forgive. Which requires more love? Forgiveness.

There is something else worth mentioning about Yeshua’s comment on turning the other cheek.

*But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.*

The context of eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth involves the reconciliation of circumstances related to permanent consequences to the victim...whether that be losing an eye, or having scars from burns or by some other means.

A slap on the cheek causes no permanent consequences. It is not to be included in the context of “*an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.*”

Yeshua basically says, “get over it”, as there is nothing here to reconcile.

However, on the flip side, there are circumstances in which real threat of real permanent damage could occur to us or our family. Such circumstances merit protecting and defending ourselves.

In addition, unfortunately, sometimes those circumstances become a reality and real permanent harm results. In such situations, as for a “*eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth*” model teaches in the Torah, the offender needs to take responsibility, exercise humility and servanthood, and make things even with the victim. On the other side, the victim needs to realize that the Torah is a system that facilitates love and reconciliation, not retribution and revenge...thus it needs to be treated as such...a system of equal weights and measures.

*We pray you have been blessed by this teaching.*

*Remember, continue to test everything. Shalom!*

*For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at [www.testeverything.net](http://www.testeverything.net)*

**Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.**

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