

Exodus 22:16-24

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/exod/exod-22/exodus-2216-24/>

Here are various offenses against persons and against God's order. This passage deals with the consequences for someone living a life disloyal to the covenant. The LORD prohibits the abuse of society's vulnerable—strangers, widows, and orphans.

The first crime in this section was sexual in nature. It addresses when *a man seduces a virgin who is not engaged, and lies with her*. This was a scenario where a man enticed (*seduces*) an unmarried and unengaged woman who was a *virgin* to have sexual relations with him. There does not seem to be coercion or forcible rape in view here (as in [Deuteronomy 22:28 – 29](#)). Here, she seemed to be a willing participant. In such a situation, the man *must pay a dowry for her to be his wife*. The *dowry* was a payment to the family for the loss of the daughter.

The man must take the woman to be his *wife* and pay the *dowry*. However, in v. 17, *if her father absolutely refuses to give her to him, he shall pay money equal to the dowry for virgins*. An unmarried and unengaged daughter was part of the father's family and was thus considered valuable. The loss of the daughter's virginity was considered a loss for the family and needed to be compensated.

However, it was up to the father to decide if this was a poor situation for the daughter. If he believes this would not be a good situation for her, then the man seducing the woman is required to pay the *dowry* without getting the wife. There is no provision to decide who did the seducing. It seems that the responsibility falls upon the man notwithstanding. This creates economic jeopardy for any male. This law encourages marriage first, rather than risk having to pay a *dowry* and potentially not receiving a wife. It is far easier, and financially wise, and in line with God's standard, to avoid this crime by paying a *dowry* up front and getting married with the father's approval before beginning a sexual relationship with a woman.

Verse 18 is another crime. It states that *you shall not allow a sorceress to live*. Sorcery was the use of magic to alter circumstances. Compare this to "divination" ([Deuteronomy 18:10](#)) which was a practice to predict (but not

alter) the future. Both practices frequently used drugs to enhance the experience, and both were connected to pagan religious practices.

Here only mentions the female (*sorceress*). Accordingly, some translations translate this as “witch.” The same root word is found in [Deuteronomy 18:10](#) and is the male form, translated “sorcerer.” Sorcerers were also forbidden. This verse states that a *sorceress* should not be allowed *to live*, which sounds less severe than *shall surely be put to death* as seen in the next verse (also in [Exodus 21:12, 14, 16](#)). The result was the same, however. Any female practicing sorcery was not to be part of the covenant community.

Bestiality is the subject of the next crime. It simply says that *whoever lies with an animal shall surely be put to death*. This statute would be placed here in light of the fact that bestiality was apparently a common practice in Canaanite religion. This can be observed in [Leviticus 18:3](#), [Leviticus 18:23](#), where the practices of Egypt and Canaan are listed, and bestiality is included. Such an activity was likely connected to various forms of pagan worship.

Verse 20 is the third of three laws concerning pagan worship (vv. 18 – 20). This law was equally clear and concise—*He who sacrifices to any god, other than to the Lord alone, shall be utterly destroyed*. The word for *be utterly destroyed* (Heb. “kharem”) can also mean “put under a ban.” That which was banned needed to be separated from the community. In this case, the person sacrificing to a god other than the LORD alone must be banned (that is, killed).

In each instance, these practices threaten the rule of law under God, and the resulting self-governing community based on treating others as you desired to be treated. Sorcery is generally used to gain advantage, to extract from or punish others. Sexual immorality puts appetite above responsibility, tears the fabric of the family, and diverts energy from production and care to self-gratification.

Verses 21 – 27 contain laws that deal with various forms of oppression. The first section deals with abusing those who are vulnerable in society, the poor and the needy. This included a non-Israelite living in Israel. Verse 21 states that one *shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him*. To *wrong* the *stranger* was to treat him with hostility. The word used here (Heb. “yana”) is used in [Leviticus 19:33-34](#) as the opposite of “to love someone as yourself.” Nor were Israelites to *oppress* strangers. This means that they were prohibited from abuse or causing distress in their lives. They were not to become the oppressors because they knew what it was like to be

oppressed—they *were strangers in the land of Egypt*. By protecting the most vulnerable, including the non-citizen, the rule of law ensured that every citizen had full rights under the law, and could live free from fear of oppression.

In verse 22, the Israelites were not allowed to *afflict any widow or orphan* (note the word *any* here). The word for *afflict* (Heb. “anah”) has the idea of humiliating, exploiting, or inflicting physical or emotional pain on anyone of these very vulnerable people. Doing so came with an ominous warning: *If you afflict him at all, and if he does cry out to Me, I will surely hear his cry; and My anger will be kindled, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless*. For the LORD to *hear his cry* meant that He was going to respond, resulting in the victim’s deliverance ([Exodus 6:5](#)) and the death of the afflicter by God Himself.

Biblical Text:

¹⁶ **“If a man seduces a virgin who is not engaged, and lies with her, he must pay a dowry for her *to be his wife*.¹⁷ If her father absolutely refuses to give her to him, he shall pay money equal to the dowry for virgins.**

¹⁸ **“You shall not allow a sorceress to live.**

¹⁹ **“Whoever lies with an animal shall surely be put to death.**

²⁰ **“He who sacrifices to any god, other than to the Lord alone, shall be utterly destroyed.**

²¹ **“You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.²² You shall not afflict any widow or orphan.²³ If you afflict him at all, *and* if he does cry out to Me, I will surely hear his cry; ²⁴ *and* My anger will be kindled, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless.**