

# An Eye for an Eye

By: B. J. Wilson

*Ye have heard that it hath been said, **An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth:** (Matt 5:38-41)”*

[**Hath been said**]*—*Jesus refers here to the law of retaliation in Ex 21:24. This law obliged the offender to suffer the same injury he had committed. Christ finds no fault with the rule as applied to magistrates. The Almighty God of Heaven had given it through Moses to be used by magistrates in their decisions of law. (See also Ex 21:24, Lev. 24:20, and Deut. 19:21.) Beginning in Exodus 21:1 is a series of instructions to Moses to be used as a guide to the magistrates in courts. It was never intended to for men to take vengeance into their own hands (Lev 19:18).

[**Eye for an Eye, Tooth for Tooth**] -- Chapter 21 of Exodus begins with The Almighty God’s instructions to Moses: *“Now these are the judgments which you shall set before them”* . . . Beginning with the law on servants continuing with theft, violence, animal control, law on personal injuries, etc. By mentioning this Jesus intends to qualify the overly used broad interpretation of the eye-for-eye law. This law of retribution, designed to take vengeance out of the hands of private persons and commit it to the magistrate, was abused in the exact opposite way to the commandments of the Decalogue. Immediately following this pronouncement Jesus continues: *“. . . turn the other cheek to him also.”* Quite obviously, in this case, Jesus is speaking to individuals. In verse 40 Jesus continues his oration to individuals: *‘If anyone wants to sue you’* This is absolutely an instruction to an individual. ‘Eye for an eye’ was an instruction only for the magistrates to pronounce.

Today we have a better instruction, frequently called the Golden Rule: *And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise.* (Luke 6:31)