***Stealing

RV143-01***

We are studying Revelation 8:7 through Revelation 9:21, dealing with the subject of "The Trumpets of Doom." This is segment number 11.

We have seen that in the final months of the seven-year tribulation era in the future, people will know that God in heaven is a reality. They will understand that the continuing judgments that they are suffering under are His doing. At that point in time, we may confidently conclude that there will be no more arrogant intellectuals questioning the existence of God. They'll know that He's out there. There'll be no more delusions about the fact that God is a person, and not a "Star Wars" impersonal force. There'll be no more questions at that time that human beings are not potential gods, as they find themselves unable to control their lives and their circumstances. There'll be no question that the suffering and death which will have destroyed, at that point in time, half of the human race, is from the only sovereign God.

These realities about God will, however, not bring mankind to repentance. It will simply harden the human race and its hatred of God, and in resistance to His will. At the end of the sixth trumpet judgment, the rebellion of mankind against God and against His Word will in fact be greater than ever before.

So, at the end of the ninth of the Revelation, John has pointed out that the condition that he observes of the human race at that time, as it will exist in the tribulation era in the future, is that they are totally unrepentant of their idolatry, including the worshiping of the image of the antichrist. And their idolatry is, in fact, demon worship. They are totally unrepentant of their acts of murder, including the horrendous practice of abortion. They are totally unrepentant of their drug use, and the occult practices which accompany drugs. And they are totally unrepentant of their illicit and perverted sexual conduct. This indictment of mankind will include all economic levels; all classes; all races of people; and, all levels of education.

**Stealing**

Revelation 9:21 ends with one more unrepentant attitude. That is relative to their thefts. John closes this with the words, "Nor of their thefts." The word "thefts" looks like this in the Greek Bible: "klemma," from which we get the English word "kleptomaniac" – a person who is addicted to stealing. This word in the Greek refers to taking something that belongs to another without that individual's permission. In the tribulation, there will be no respect for private property. The government at that time will be purely socialist. Therefore, it will feel free, as all socialistic governments do, by the power of the gun, to take from people the fruits of their labor, and to redistribute those to favored groups of non-producers.

Stealing in the tribulation, then, will be twofold, as it is today: on the part of people; and, on the part of government. It will in fact become a way of life, with violence exercise and those who resist the thief, whether on a personal or a governmental level. This kind of action will be justified by the thieves. They'll be justified by the welfare groups that are the beneficiaries of this kind of government stealing. They certainly will be justified by the politicians who will be the beneficiaries of public office power as the result of this redistribution of wealth. All of this will be justified on the basis that it is fair to share the material wealth of a society. This will be considered power to the people, and it will be viewed as the ultimate expression of justice.

This spirit is already upon us today. The crime of theft is so great that police cannot cope with the problem. In the tribulation era, society itself will approve it, and they will defend it as a necessity in order to survive the scarcities with socialism always creates in a society.

Probably most of the people who are flooding the prison system of the state of Texas today, to the degree that we cannot find enough room to incarcerate those who have been condemned (those who have been convicted), are in there because of theft. Stealing is condemned in the Word of God, because it, in effect, robs a person of part of his life, which he used to secure the wealth which was stolen.

Criminals in the tribulation will probably be more violent and more cunning in taking the possessions of other people than they are today. Thievery taking place today is bad enough, and it is shocking that we find that it is taking place in the highest economic and cultural levels of society, and there isn't anything that is able to slow it down. We live in a society of thieves.

The reason for this is that there is no longer respect for the Bible, so there are no ground rules for human conduct. Therefore, just because the Bible says, "You will not take what does not belong to you from another person without his permission," doesn't mean that you have to obey it.

So, what are we seeing? We're seeing men of refinement, culture, and education being inside traders in the stock market; being caught; and, sent to prison. The thing that we have to remember is that most of them who've been on the inside, taking advantage and capitalizing through this system of stealing, have not been caught. We are hearing of the horrendous practices and the procurement by the Pentagon of our military needs. Here again, people have become wealthy by being given inside information on what the government needs; what the government plans to spend; and, what it is willing to do, so that people who are bidding know how to bid. The whole procurement system has been one criminal action. People throughout the public bureaucracy are being uncovered daily as embezzlers of public funds.

The principle against stealing goes back to the law of God in the Mosaic era, and we find it stated, of course, in the moral code of the Ten Commandments. You can read about that in Exodus 20:15, where it is a very straightforward statement: "You shall not steal." The Hebrew word for "not," in this case, is a very strong one, and it means that you just don't do it. The word "steal" means taking the property of another without his consent. It prohibits taking another's possessions by coercion or by fraud.

**Damaging and not Restoring One's Property**

In the Bible, theft has a broader meaning, and this is the meaning that applies today, basically, as well as it will in the tribulation, In the Bible, theft includes damaging another person's property and not restoring it.

I was at the pool the other day with a few people, and there was a young lady in our group, and the pool manager walked up and said, "Does anybody own the green car out there?" And this girl says, "Yes, it's mine." He said, "Well, somebody just rammed into you; backed off; and, drove away, but one of our city workers here on the cleanup crew got his license number." In the Bible, this is called "stealing," and it is forbidden. It's not too popular even in our society, under our legal system. So, when you ram into somebody's car, and you bust up something, if you don't leave your note and name and everything under the windshield wiper, so that they can get in touch with you (you just drive off and you leave what you have done), that is stealing.

**Denying a Person the Use of his Possessions**

In the Bible, stealing is also denying a person the use of his possessions. If you don't pay him his salary, you're stealing. If you don't make the payments that are due to this person for services and products received, you're a low-down thief. I don't care how you may want to dignify yourself, and how you may want to view yourself, and how you may want to justify yourself – in the Bible, it is very clear that if you deny a person the freedom to use his possessions, you have been guilty of an act of thievery.

It is, of course, also destroying the value of another person's property. If you destroy the value of a person's property, in the Old Testament, this was stealing.

Furthermore, the theft factor is not determined by whether the act was willful. A lot of stealing is justified by the fact you didn't mean to do it. But whether you intended to or not is irrelevant.

In the "Dallas Times Herald" last Sunday, you may have read about a former Miss America, Bess Myerson. The little news note said, "Former Miss American television personality Bess Myerson pled guilty Friday to shoplifting, seven weeks after her arrest, her arrest at a Pennsylvania department store. Miss Myerson, 64, was arrested May 27 after leaving the Hill store with $44 in merchandise."

I should say that this is a very wealthy lady. This lady has lots of money to begin with, and she picks $44-worth of merchandise: "She said again in a statement Friday that she was only leaving the store to lock her car, and planned to return and pay for the merchandise." Well, if you suddenly remember that you need to put a nickel in your meter, don't walk out with the merchandise. Put it on the counter and say, "I'm going to be right back," because it kind of looks like you intend to walk off with it. And you might even do it unintentionally. But it is an act of theft.

Furthermore, stealing can be done by legal means as an excessive taxation to prosper favored individuals and groups within a society.

**Theft is not Determined by the Value of the Object Taken**

The act of theft also is not determined by the value of the object taken: "Ah, this doesn't cost much. Who's going to miss this? It's not stealing. It's not very valuable." That doesn't determine whether it's stealing or not. Nor is it determined by the wealth of the person from whom you're taking it: "He'll never miss it. He's got plenty."

**Theft is not Determined by the Character of the Victim**

Nor is theft determined by the character of the person from whom you are taking these possessions. Robin Hood was a hood in the fullest sense of the word. The guy didn't like the sheriff of Nottingham, so he kept running around Sherwood Forest, ripping off the various personalities of the king and his governmental entourage. Robin Hood had a good purpose, he was going to take it from the rich to give to the poor. That's always good, especially if you're part of the poor. Nevertheless, it was an act of stealing. So, we are always interested in the story of Robin Hood, but it is a classic example of downright theft, because Robin Hood justified it on the basis of the character of the sheriff of Nottingham and the evil King John.

**Theft is not Determined by the Knowledge of the Victim**

The fact of theft has not been changed either because the victim doesn't know that he's being ripped off. This is like fraud in something you sell to people. It's stealing. You sell them something that you know is no good. It is an act of theft.

**Theft is not Determined by Need**

Furthermore, if you need something (maybe you even need it in order to physically survive, so you help yourself), confiscation is still theft, and it is something that you have to go back later and correct.

So, the principle against stealing is clearly stated in the Word of God. It was viewed as a very serious violation of the moral code on the part of the Jewish people, and it was referred to and reemphasized in many places. It is not just a small occasional reference. In Leviticus 19:11, God very explicitly says, "You shall not steal."

In Zechariah 5:3, we have that same principle again reiterated: "Then he said unto me, 'This is the curse that goes forth over the face of the whole earth. For everyone that steals shall be cut off as on this side according to it, and everyone that swears shall be cut off as on that side according to it." It is to be cut off from the people and the blessing of God when you are guilty of stealing.

Ezekiel 22:29 stresses the same thing: "The people of the land have used oppression, and exercise robbery, and have vexed the poor and needy. Yeah, they have oppressed the sojourner wrongfully." It is easy to pick on the weak, especially when you're trying to steal.

We gave one more in Isaiah 1:23 which condemns this practice: "Your princesses are rebellious and companions of thieves. Everyone loves bribes, and follows after rewards. They do not judge the fatherless, neither does the cause of the widow come unto them."

**Stealing Undermines Personal Freedom**

Stealing simply undermines personal freedom in a society. We in the United States do not know what it is like to live in a society where stealing is a way of life. You do not have to go very far south of the border of Texas to discover how stealing is a way of life. Once you cross that border, you have to change your whole outlook and your whole attitude about protecting what you have.

I suppose that this is, in part, why I have noticed that in Latin American countries, you stand on the street, and you look down the street, and what you see is a line of walls on both sides, carefully blocking in the little bit of territory that they're trying to protect. In a nation of great poverty, this is a very natural reaction on the part of people. That's why I say that in the tribulation, socialism will have created such enormous scarcities that people who have no moral compunctions will be driven to stealing.

During World War, a nation like China was a very poor country. It still is, for that matter. It was hard in China, even in big cities, to remember that you could not move around without being aware of the fact that you had to keep everything buttoned down. It didn't matter what it was. I was in the downtown part of a large city one day, and I had some pile of paper that I was going to have some printing done on, and I left it on the seat of the Jeep, and walked into an establishment to take care of some other problem. When I came out, that pile of paper was gone, just because I made the mistake of leaving it on the seat. It was easily taken. So, you have to shift mental gears, and in the tribulation, this is going to be a real burden. Stealing undermines your personal freedom and movement.

**Wealth**

Theft occurs because it is a shortcut to wealth. It bypasses, however, the basic biblical principle which is set forth in Ephesians 4:28, by which we are to get wealth. Paul says there, "Let him that stole steal no more. But rather let him labor working with his hands, the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needs." Working and stealing are opposite approaches for securing money and property. Working is divine viewpoint; and, stealing is human viewpoint. The Word of God says, "Get your wealth by your own personal labor, so what you spend is the result of the fruits of your labor." Your faithfulness as the steward of God, in what He has given you, will enable you to have some financial reserves even to help other people who genuinely are in need, and who need your assistance so they will not be driven to thievery.

**Inheritance**

You can also acquire wealth in the Bible by inheritance, and also by gifts. That too is legitimate. It is interesting that the liberal political mentalities in our society want to pass laws against inheritance, so that people who come into a family of great wealth will be limited to how much their parents can leave them, and the rest will go to the state.

The Bible approves of personal wealth, however, that one has gained through legitimate labors. In Proverbs 13:11, that bit of wisdom is stated: "Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished. But he that gathers by labor shall increase." Wealth gotten in the right way comes under God's prospering and blessing. If you get it in the wrong way, it has a way of dissipating.

**God Provides Wealth**

The Bible warns us against certain specific attitudes which are conducive to stealing. One: the Bible says, "Do not forget God when you have come to prosperity as the result of your faithful efforts. In Deuteronomy 8:17-18, this instruction was given to the people of Israel: "And you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.' But you shall remember the Lord God, for it is He who gives the power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore unto your fathers, as it is this day." What Moses is recording here, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is warning the people that when they have been obedient to doctrinal principles, they will be prosperous. And now they have gotten wealth, and they might start crediting themselves, and their human efforts, and their cleverness with that wealth. He's saying, "Don't do that." People who are inclined to do that are also inclined to expand their wealth by stealing. If you have received wealth, just remember that you have received it because, not only that God has rewarded your efforts, but that He has given you the capacity physically to be able to do that work and to earn that money.

**Defrauding other People**

Another warning is against using the power of wealth to defraud other people. Once you have wealth, you are in a certain position of power that you can exercise in an improper way over other people. In James 5:1, therefore, we had this admonition: "Come now you rich men. Weep and howl for your miseries which shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten." You've got it in an illicit way: "Your gold and silver are rusted, and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. He has heaped treasure together for the last day. Behold, the hire of the laborer, who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, cry. And the cries of them who have reaped are entered into the years of the Lord of Sabaoth. You have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton. You have nourished your heart as in the day of slaughter."

This passage is warning that people who have wealth should not take advantage over people who are in weaker or positions. Verse 6 says, "You have condemned and killed the just, and he does not resist you because he is helpless."

Also, of course, there is that classic verse that the people of the world love to misquote: 1 Timothy 6:10. And that is: "The love of money is the root of all evil." When people who do not understand the Word of God quote this verse, they like to say, "Money is the root of all evil." That is a falsehood. There's nothing evil about money, whether you have a little of it or a lot of it. It is the love of what you have that is the root of evil: "Which, while some have coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."

Furthermore, the Bible for this reason also, in 1 Timothy 6:6-9, warns us not to become obsessed with becoming wealthy: "But godliness with contentment is great gain." How do you get godliness? By learning doctrine, and living up to that it. God says that that is the greatest thing that you possess: "For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment, let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition." Once you get the lusting for money, you don't mind cutting corners, and you don't mind even doing a little stealing on the side.

So, the Bible has some explicit directions which are going to be totally ignored in the tribulation era, and God is going to be enraged over it, because He has made Himself clear on the subject of stealing.

**Private Property (The Dominion Principle)**

Before God, there is a great sanctity to private property. This is one of the reasons we know that we can condemn some systems, such as the system of communism, which has no respect for private property. It is not sanctified. Property is a central feature of the earth that God has told man to subdue. This is the dominion principle. We have it in Genesis 1:26-27. God said, "Let us make man in Our image after Our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creep upon the earth. So, God created man in His Own image. In the image of God He created him. He created male and female."

This is the basic principle for the accumulation of wealth, and it's a legitimate pursuit under the guidance of God the Holy Spirit. It is a proper objective to accumulate the means for us to function with materially in a society. The dominion here does not, of course, extend to dominion over people as the Covenant Theologians, the postmillennialists, and the Re-constructionists are now suggesting. It is a dominion, you can see by simply reading these Scriptures, over God's material creation.

In Exodus 19:29, the Jewish people were told that the earth is the Lord's, but God has made man the custodian of His creation. It is Satan who perverts that proper custodial calling. So, when God says, "I'm making you the custodian of My creation," this connotes private property which is held in trust by individuals who, under divine enlightenment of Scripture, are to use that property for the glory of God. The Bible throughout advocates the private ownership of property.

However, 1 Corinthians 10:31 makes it clear that personal possessions are to be used for the Lord's glory because we are the stewards of God's money.

So, how much of your paycheck belongs to God? No longer is it as it was in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, the answer to that question was 10%. He had a claim upon it. It was a legal obligation, and you had better do it. In the New Testament, that 10% has been increased to 100%. It is a totally different system. The whole thing belongs to God. Then you go to God and say, "How much of this can I use? I'd like to spend it on this. Is that OK? I might spend some on this. Is that OK? And I'd like to spend some here. Is that OK?" And of course, God intends for you to use a great percentage of it in your personal ministry in achieving His work.

Because of the principle of private ownership, God's economic system in the Bible clearly is that of capitalism – creating an accumulation of money which acts as capital with which you can do things. This is God's order of things.

It is true that in Acts 2, you read about a communal system that the Christians had established, where they shared everything. That was because they chose to do that. It was not a suggestion by God to them that this was the economic system under which they should live in the church age. Don't make any mistake about that. This was purely a voluntary agreement: "We have some tough times. We're going to pull what we have, and we're going to make it together."

This was very clearly pointed out, in Acts 5:4, in the incident where Ananias and Sapphira had sold a piece of property, and then they were trying to lie about having given it all to God's work, when indeed they had not done any such thing. It is interesting to observe that in Acts 5:4, Peter indicates the fact that private property was the way they were operating within the context of this communal arrangement. He says: "While it remained the property, was it not your own?" "When you were the owner, wasn't it yours to do with as you please? And after it was sold, wasn't it in your own power after you sold it?" Couldn't you do whatever you wanted with that money?" "Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied unto men, but unto God." Of course, the penalty was death for both Ananias and his wife, Sapphira.

So, the point here is very clearly that private property possession is God's way of doing things. And any nation in history demonstrates this – that operates on private property ownership is (capitalism) is a nation that prospers. Where you have rejection of the sanctity of private property ownership, that leads to loss of personal freedom. Then the state controls your possessions, and it dictates the use of what you have, because the state is interested in pursuing the will of the wisp of equality in material possessions.

The opponents of private property like to make a lot over the abuses of rich men and big business, but they ignore the fact that poor people are just as abusive of material things, and are very much inclined to want to take what does not belong to them. The government, of course, can always steal by passing laws, so that they can take from the productive and enterprising citizens, to distribute to the nonproductive and the indolent. You do this by excessive taxation, particularly of those who have worked the hardest, and thus have prospered the most.

If you keep your ears open during this current presidential election, you will discover that this is one of the prime objectives that is being offered by one of the parties: "Put us into office, and we're going to get those rich suckers. We're going to strip them of all that money that they don't need, and shouldn't have. We are going to play Robin Hood for you, and we are going to distribute to you for folks who need it, and who should have it, and who have a right to have it." However, the American people have been educated. They're not too smart. They're not too savvy in political matters, and most of them are very ignorant about the Constitution, including Christians. So, they do not know how the system works. They do not know that it is Congress who has spent these enormous sums of money and, that it is the result of a liberal Congress that has done that. So, I want you to start keeping your ears open.

You will find that the word with the big "L" ("liberal") is not being used. The Socialist Party is not in this country now calling itself liberal. The new word is "progressive." You listen to these candidates who are pure-blooded liberals, by their past performance, who are determined to come into office, and they are going to tax the fool out of the citizens of this country, so they can distribute to those poor folks who are hungry, and who are without clothing, and who are wandering the streets at night. The word now is "progressive." However, whether you call it "liberal" or "progressive," it is equally condemned by the Word of God – that the fruits of anybody's labors should be taken without that individual's permission and agreement, and that is stealing.

God's way is for the productive use of our earnings, as Ephesians 4:28 tells us, to help those who are genuinely in need. Government, after all, cannot give but that which it has first taken by force from those who have created wealth in a society by their labors. Property means power, so in socialistic and communist states, they don't like private property ownership. So, they impose the rule of an elite group, and that's the condition of the antichrist.

As you look upon that statement at the end of Revelation 9: "They would not stop from their thefts," that's not a very meaningful statement unless you have all this background of knowing why the living God, who is sitting up there; looking down; and, watching all this, is so enraged, and His wrath is so great. What they are what they are violating is a basic principle of human relationships by what is being done in the thievery of the tribulation era. I think it is downright immoral for government to pick on wealthy people through excessive taxation. There is some kind of a strange mental twist that says, "If you happen to have a lot, you should become the object of a lot of siphoning off, by power of government, of your wealth.

The penalties for stealing were very serious in the Old Testament. They do not apply to us directly today, but they do give us some guidelines, and it would be useful, I think, to review them. These are laid out for us in Exodus 22:1-15. As you read through that chapter, you will see how God has given a great deal of attention and consideration to making it clear to the society of Israel how they must conduct themselves relative to property rights of other people. The basic punishment when you stole under the Mosaic Law was that you had to give it back. You had to make restitution. But the principle was not only to restore to the victim what you took from him, per se, but it also took into account the fact that you have denied that person the use of his material possessions by which he has been increasing his wealth. So, therefore, restitution not only meant you gave back what you took, but you also gave back a percentage of what this person could have earned had he had the possession of his animals or whatever it is you denied him from.

Exodus 22:1 says, "If a man steal an ox or a sheep, and kill it or sell it, he shall restore five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep. So, you restored all the oxen you've taken, and you threw in five more, because oxen were the tractors. This was what plowed the fields. This was your work animal. An oxen had to be taught how to do that properly. So, to restore what you had taken was to restore the time that this person could have been training animals to do his work. The same principle was true for sheep. You had taken away from him what he could have had in reproducing these animals. So, you had to turn back four sheep for every one you had stolen.

In dealing with the thief, the situation was very clear and very severe. Exodus 22:2 says, "If a thief be found breaking in, and be smitten, that he died, there should be no bloodshed for him." If somebody broke into the Jew's house at night under darkness; the person jumped up; he was confronted by the thief; and, in the struggle, he kills him, the person is innocent of his death. But if it's daylight, then it's different.

Verse 3 says, "If the sun be risen upon him, there should be no bloodshed for him, for he should make full restitution. If he has nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft." If it is daytime, and you see who the thief is, you must not kill him. He is obliged to make restitution. And if he says, "I can't pay you back, and I can't add the penalty," then he is sold into indentured servitude, and he works for a salary that is kept by the person to whom he owes the funds.

Exodus 22:4 tells what happens if somebody is caught red-handed with the stolen property. If the theft be certainly found in his hand alive, whether it be ox, or ass, or sheep, he shall restore double." So, if there has been no damage to the property, the live animal is to be taken, plus one more. So, the principle of restitution includes penalty for denying another person the use of his property.

If you damage a person's property, there is a responsibility. This is true for property that is borrowed. Several years ago, there was a seminary student with us. We had one of those slick road conditions (ice on the road; he borrowed one of our member's cars; made a turn on Grauwyler; hit a little steep spot; went skidding down the hill and off into the curb; and, tumbled the car over beside the road up against z tree. He asked me, "What should I do about this damage?" And I said, "Fix it." He borrowed the car; damaged it; and, asked what he should do about it. You have damaged the person's property. Here, it was under the conditions of theft. Exodus 22:5: "If a man shall cause a field or vineyard to be eaten, and shall put in his beast and shall feed in another man's field, of the best of his own field, and of the best of his own vineyard, he shall make restitution."

If some sneaky character comes over, and looks at his neighbor's field, he might say, "This is a good place for me to let my animals feed." So, when nobody's looking, he lets them wander over there instead of using his own field. If so, he has to make restitution for that.

Verse 6 says, "If fire break out, and catch in the thorn, so that the stacks of grain, or the standing green, or the field be consumed therewith, he that kindled the fire shall surely make restitution." If you have used up part of another person's possessions, you will return to an equivalent amount. If you create a loss by setting fire to a field, you must restore what this person lost. It doesn't matter whether the damage was accidental or intentional. You are responsible for what you did. People who will not meet a legitimate claim of restitution today have to be sued.

Sometimes people leave things with you. You're responsible for the goods that they have given you to your trust. Sometimes it's valuable. You're going out of town. You've got all this jewelry, and you don't want anything to happen to it, so you leave it with someone. Or, you've got your little dog who needs to be fed and cared for, and you leave it with someone.

Verse 7: "If a man shall deliver unto his neighbor money or stuff to keep, and it'll be stolen out of the man's house, if the thief be found, let him pay double. If the thief be not found, then the master of the house shall be brought unto the judges to see whether he has put his hand into his neighbor's goods." There was a system of legal decision-making to see if the person that you gave the goods to says, "It's been stolen," but he's lying. He really is embezzling it. Well, then you have to go to a court of law and God, as the King, would guide the judges in discerning this matter, to protect the owner from embezzlement, or to protect the caretaker for what was not his fault: "For all manner of trespass, whether it be for ox, for donkey, for sheep, for raiment, or for any matter of lost thing, which another challenges to his, the cause of both parties shall come before the judge; and, whom the judge shall condemn, he shall pay double unto his neighbor." Conflicting claims are decided by the judge.

The custodian who loses the property in his care must take an oath that he is innocent (it wasn't his fault). Then God will deal with him if he's lying. That's what Exodus 22:10-11 tell us.

However, if the property is stolen, he shall make restitution to the owner. So, if somebody gives you something to keep, and it's stolen, you should pay back. If no property has been destroyed through personal negligence, then, of course, the person who is the custodian is innocent.

Verses 14 and 15 describe what happens if you have rental and loan liabilities. It says that you're liable for property you have damaged. And you're not liable for no-fault damage to property that you have borrowed, especially if the owner was present, or if you paid a user's fee. If you pay a user's fee, then the person that you have paid should expect damage to the property.

So, as you see, there's a great deal in the Old Testament that makes it very clear, under various conditions, of what stealing is. It covers all the gamut, basically, of taking what doesn't belong to you – taking advantage of another person's life, and denying him the use of his possessions.

In the 8th century B.C., the prophet Isaiah warned the Jewish people that God was going to bring a great condemnation upon them, including military invasion and enslavement. This was to come upon them for a variety of reasons. These are described for us in Isaiah 1:21, where, we read, "How has the faithful city become a harlot?" Spiritually, the city of Jerusalem had become a spiritual adulteress: It was full of justice. Righteousness lodged in it, but now murderers." The capital, Jerusalem, was dominated by murderers, including, no doubt, the murder of abortion: "Your silver has become dross; your wine mixed with water. Justice and righteousness are absent from the city. Government leaders are rebels, and companions of thieves."

Verse 23: "Your princesses are rebellious and companions of thieves. Everyone loves bribes, and follow after rewards. They do not judge the fatherless, neither does the cause of the widow come unto them." These people are indifferent to the justice for the weakest people, and their sin included stealing.

Verse 22 says, "By making silver become dross, and wine mixed with water." What are they talking about? This was talking about taking the coinage, which was based upon weight of the silver coin, and mixing the coin with base metals like lead, so nobody would know the difference. Consequently, you could take your silver; divide it up; melt it down; make your own coins; and, have lead or some other metal in it that nobody could distinguish. The result would be that you had stolen from people by giving them something of less value. It was counterfeiting.

Furthermore, they were taking a product like wine; mixing water with it; and, selling it as full-strength wine. This was again cheapening the product. This is always characteristic of an inflationary economy, and that's why the Jews were doing this. They were trying to make the money stretch, because of the inflation that they had created. When inflation comes, in the way you try to cover your tracks is by decreasing the value of the product.

I notice that one of the ways this is done is in candy bars. As inflation rages, the candy manufacturers make a big wrapper, and then when you take hold of it, it squishes down to a little candy bar inside. But when you looked at it, there on the counter, you said, "Boy, that's a big bar. That's a good buy. I'll buy that." But when you open the wrapper, you found there was only a small bar inside. This is their way of conning you into thinking that you are getting a full product. Mixing the water with a wine is a method of stealing.

So, here's a summary of what the Bible has to say about stealing. The moral principle against stealing is one that most people can understand. Most of us don't like to be ripped off. The attraction of stealing to our old sin nature is something that all the rest of us do understand. We all would like to rip somebody else off. The injury that we experience as victims of theft is also well-known to us. How sad it is indeed to find something of value that has been removed from your possession.

Therefore, the reason that God forbad stealing is easily seen. But what constitutes an act of stealing is not always so readily understood. The basic issue is violating the biblical principle of private property ownership. Any unauthorized appropriation of another person's private property constitutes stealing. This appropriation denies that person his personal freedom. The Jewish law regarded theft as a serious offense, and the penalty was basically restitution plus an added penalty.

Today, the merchandising system that we live in makes stealing very easy. You can go into a store, and you can pick up shirts; you can pick up stuff in the grocery store; or, you can pick up things anywhere, because it's an open display of merchandising. So, therefore it is a great temptation, and requires a scrupulous personal quality of integrity on the part of the person not to help himself.

We live in a society where indebtedness is encouraged. This is viewed as being economic progress. So, people learn to indulge their desires who cannot pay for them at the moment. When was the last time your credit card company called you and said, "Why can't we lend you some money?" I have a stack of checks at home. All I have to do is sign them, and they're mine. They're worth $500,000 dollars, and they're free. The credit card company sends them to me. They don't think I'm using my credit card in the proper way (in the maximum way that I could). They are trying to help me along. So, they are encouraging this indulgence of indebtedness. Great stress is laid in the progress when they send you those checks on what you need those checks for – all the good things that you could be spending these on, and all the good things that you could be doing, if only you would sign that check and add that to your credit card. The stress is laid upon having things. The stress is not laid upon paying for those things.

So, a debtor very easily becomes a thief through default on his payments. This is one of the great ways that Christians steal from other people. Somebody has done you a service, and you don't pay for it. You have stolen. If somebody provides you with a product, and you don't pay for it, you've been guilty of thievery. So, I guess we all ought to ask ourselves, "Whom do you owe something today?" Perhaps you ought to go home and sit down, and make arrangements in your mind to get yourself paid up so that you get back in temple fellowship. You're paying a big price of being out of fellowship when you are stealing through failure to pay for products and services delivered.

God is enraged at this, and this kind of rip off is going to be tried in the tribulation. It will be widespread, and that's what God means when He says that He is angry about these thefts.

**Kidnapping**

Let's close and summarize it with some forms of stealing. The Bible says that kidnapping a person is stealing. When you kidnap a person, you deprive him of his freedom (Deuteronomy 24:7). In the Old Testament, Exodus 21:16 tells us that kidnapping was punishable by death. It is a brutal act of theft to take a person, and to deny him his freedom.

**Unpaid Bills**

A second form of stealing is the theft, as we've been referring to, of your unpaid bills. You delay in paying for products and services you've received beyond the agreed time. You have to remember that the merchant indebts himself to provide those products and services to you. Then he has to pay his costs from the profit of your payments to him. When you don't pay him, he has a cash flow problem. So, he has to go out and borrow money and pay interest, because you had been stealing what you legitimately should have been paying him. The same thing is true with the credit card. The principal in the Word of God is very clear. Romans 13:8 says, "Don't owe anybody anything, except love." You never pay off your debt of love. But the rest of it, among Christians especially – see to it that you have your bills paid. Don't owe anybody anything.

**Unpaid Wages**

The third way of stealing is that of wages unpaid. Leviticus 19:13 places upon the Jewish people the responsibility of making payments of a person's wages when they are due. In the ancient world, this was paid on a daily basis. The labor was dependent for that day's earnings for that day's needs. And to hold his payment till the next day was declared to be an act of stealing. Deuteronomy 24:14-15 clearly declare that that is thievery – to hold back the person's wages.

In Jeremiah 22:13 and in James 5:4, God condemns those who gain wealth by holding back the wages that legitimately belong to the people who have worked for them.

**Taking an Employer's Money**

On the other side of that coin, it's important for us to remember that control of the employer's money in business does not pass to his employees. When the employees try to take charge of the employer's money in business, they too are guilty of stealing. You may choose to go out on strike with your fellow workers. That's your privilege. But it is not your privilege to tell that employer that he can't hire someone else to replace you if you choose to go out on strike. The whole affirmative action concept of the American government is a violation of this principle of no stealing, because it denies the employer the freedom to make the best judgments for that which is best for his business.

The Socialist Party of the United States is very fond of the minimum wage laws. They have not yet learned their lesson – that when you start raising the salaries that people must be paid, a lot of people never get a job, because the employer is just not going to hire them. He makes some other arrangements. So, minimum wage laws have been clearly demonstrated to be laws for decreasing employment opportunities for people who have no skills.

**Stealing from God**

There is a fourth way of stealing that we should be aware of, and that is stealing from God. Malachi 3:8-12 tell the Old Testament Jewish people that when they didn't pay their tithes to God (and that's what that is – you pay your tithe), you are a thief. The Christian, under the freedoms of grace however, may also rob God, because the Christian's 100% belongs to God. You may deny the portion that God has given you as His steward for his work. And you too, then, are in the position of stealing from God, and that's not a smart thing to do. Spiritually immature Christians are very erratic, stingy givers, and that's what causes this feast-and-famine conditions and God's work.

**Theft by Borrowing**

There is, of course, theft by borrowing that we have referred to. You borrow something and you never return it. Small sums of money are borrowed, and you forget it. Mooching off of people is stealing. Knowingly writing a bad check is stealing.

**Gambling**

Another way of stealing is theft by gambling. The Bible clearly declares that possessions that we have are to be secured by our labors, or we can receive them as a gift. Gambling is of the essence a theft, because it is neither earned nor received as a gift. And gambling leads to many other sins in order to maintain the gambling practice. This simply violates Ephesians 4:28: "Get what you have by means of your labors." And it condemns wealth which is gotten by any other way.

I've been interested in listening to the TV ads promoting the parimutuel betting practice (horse races) which is now legalized in the state of Texas. I was appalled to hear that ad encouraging people, and that announcer that said, "Earn money the old-fashioned way." Right away my mind is thinking, "What's the old-fashioned way with horse racing?" He says, "Earn money the old-fashioned way – by winning it." That's a lot more old-fashioned than even I am. I never knew that that was the way you gained wealth – by winning it. But here, clearly, on public television, you are told that gambling is good. That's the way to go. Gambling is basically taking from another person which he has foolishly put himself in a position that he must helplessly give up to you what he has placed at jeopardy. Yes, Las Vegas is glamorized. If you've never been there, you don't know what it's like. It's a wonderful place. You walk through it. There's all these elitist people. But I'll tell you something else. As you walk around Las Vegas, you will discover that it's a vulgar, degrading, ugly, brutal place. The meanness is everywhere on the faces of the people who are trying to win something through nothing.

So, what we have, in closing out Revelation 9, is the astounding picture of human depravity with mankind seething in pain and suffering, totally unrepentant of his thievery – one of the things for which God, throughout human history, has brought great judgment upon the human race. At that time, religion will be widespread, but the devotees will be operating on morality of the sin nature. Therefore, stealing will be OK. There will be no force present to maintain law and order, and there'll be no standards within people to rise to morality relative to stealing. It's going to be a jungle. All restraints are going to be removed from the sinner, and the sin nature is going to have a field day. All of this is under the New Age principle that this kind of abandonment of the Word of God is real freedom.

So, what happens? They will all end up as the slaves of Satan, and as the objects of God's eternal punishment. It is no small thing to read in that book that they were unrepentant of their thefts, because the God whose moral code they are violated on that, has been well aware of what they've been doing, and they have touched upon a major area of divine wrath. For that reason, in very large measure, the people of the tribulation era will suffer very greatly. Let us learn from their example. Let us not follow their pattern. Let us establish personal integrity with what we do with our possessions, and how we treat the possessions of other people.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1984

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