

From *Exodus 22:6* —

“If a fire breaks out and spreads into thornbushes so that it burns sheaves of grain, standing grain, or the whole field, the one who started the fire must make restitution.” (NIV)

QUESTION: I would like to understand the deeper meaning of this verse.

ANSWER: This Old Testament law is about responsibility and accountability — not just in practical terms, but in moral and spiritual terms as well. In ancient Israel, fire was a common danger. If someone started a fire and it got out of control, destroying another person’s crops or field, the Law required them to *make restitution* — to compensate the victim fairly.

This principle carries spiritual significance, especially when we consider what Scripture elsewhere says about the power of our words and actions.

The book of James compares the tongue to a small spark:

“Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire...”

...“The tongue is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.” (James 3:5-6, NIV)

This imagery warns us that even small words or careless speech can lead to great harm. Just as an unattended spark can destroy a field, careless or malicious speech can damage relationships, reputations, marriages, families, and communities. If we stir up conflict, spread gossip, or sow seeds of discord, the consequences can be far-reaching — and we will be held accountable, just as the law required restitution for a fire.

For example:

- If you spread falsehoods or fuel anger between friends, causing them to separate or even fight, you share responsibility for the pain that follows.
- If you interfere in someone’s marriage and it leads to divorce, bitterness, and family breakdown, you bear the weight of those consequences.
- If your words lead others into sin, you will be held accountable for the damage

caused.

Before we speak, share information, or pass along a secret, we should pause and ask ourselves: *Is this necessary? Is this true? Is this helpful?* If not, it is better to guard our tongues. Because later — spiritually, emotionally, and before God — we must answer for the impact of our words and actions.

This is the deeper meaning of the Exodus passage:

“If a fire breaks out and spreads into thornbushes... the one who started the fire must make restitution.” (Exodus 22:6, NIV)

Shalom.

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