

Introduction to the Law of Moses
(Exodus 20:18-21:27)
Expository Lessons from the Book of Exodus

I. Review from Previous Lessons

- a. The Lord has just spoken the 10 Commandments to the Israelites gathered at the foot of Mount Sinai, about two months after departing Egypt.
- b. Now the Lord gives Moses additional laws for the Israelites to follow.

II. The People are Terrified and Surrender to the Lord

- a. Read **Exodus 20:18-21**.
- b. More details are given when Moses recounts this part of the story in **Deuteronomy**.
 - i. Read the parallel passage in **Deuteronomy 5:22-33**.
 1. This passage also discusses what happened immediately after the 10 Commandments were given to the people.
- c. Storyline:
 - i. The people are terrified by all they saw and heard when the Lord descended on Mount Sinai and spoke the 10 Commandments.
 - ii. They tell Moses that if they hear any more from the Lord, they will die.
 1. The Israelites surrender to the Lord. In effect, they hoist the white flag or 'throw in the towel', and announce their unconditional surrender.
 - iii. They tell Moses that he should approach the Lord and find out what He wants them to do. They insist that *whatever* the Lord tells Moses, they will do it!
 - iv. The Lord is pleased with what the people say (indicating that they fear God and will obey Him).
 1. The Lord makes a fateful comment to Moses that is worth noting here: "Would that they had such a heart in them so as to fear Me and guard My commands all the time, that it might be well with them and their sons forever." (**Deuteronomy 5:29**, LXX, OSB)

- a. The *fear of the Lord* is a good thing. We explored this, including the positive things Jesus and the apostles said in the New Testament about fearing God, in our lesson on **Exodus 19**.
- b. The Lord sees fearing Him as something that is good for us, in that it will keep His people from sin.
- v. The Lord tells Moses to dismiss the people. The Lord will continue with Moses and is about to speak more commands to Him. The plan is for Moses to communicate all the additional commands (beyond the Ten Commandments) to the people.
- vi. In **Exodus 20:21** it says that Moses then “drew near the thick darkness where God was”.
- d. There was one very important detail of that exchange, which is in neither the **Exodus 20** nor **Deuteronomy 5** account. He provides that detail in **Deuteronomy 18**.
 - i. Read **Deuteronomy 18:15-19**.
 - ii. In this passage, God shows another reason why “*This is good*” – when the people said, “We no longer want to hear the voice of the Lord directly like this...” (from **Deuteronomy 5**). *The people said they would listen to a man* that the Lord sends to speak to them.
 - 1. The Lord plans to send *one other man* to speak to the people in the future: another prophet who would be “*like Moses*”.
 - a. **Warning:** Anyone who will not heed the voice of *that prophet* will be called to account! Peter points to this in **Acts 3:22-23**, warning the Jews that they will be cut off if they do not heed the voice of Jesus, the prophet promised by Moses.
 - b. God sent many prophets after Moses. How can we tell which one He is referring to?
 - i. The promise is that God would “raise up” a prophet like Moses. Any ideas what that might be referring to?
 - 1. I believe Peter is making a very logical connection in that statement pointing to the *resurrection of Jesus* as the definitive sign. He was indeed “raised up”, literally! Consider the point Peter is making in **Acts**

3:26 about God “raising up” Jesus, after Peter quotes the **Deuteronomy 18** prophecy in **Acts 3:22**, that God would “raise up” this prophet.

- ii. The prophet would be “*like Moses*”. If we look carefully at the life of Moses, we should expect to be able to see the parallels.
- iii. Eusebius (writing c. 320 AD) makes the point in *Proof of the Gospel*, Books 1 and 3, that the unique feature of Moses among all the prophets who followed, was that He was the only one who brought new laws. All the prophets who followed (until Jesus) simply called the people back to following the Law of Moses.
- iii. Jesus is the one that the Lord was referring to here.
 - 1. After he started following Jesus, Philip found Nathaniel and told him, “...We have found Him *of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote*—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” (**John 1:45**, NKJV)
 - 2. Jesus challenged the Jews, “For if you believed *Moses*, you would believe Me; for *he wrote about Me*.” (**John 5:46**, NKJV)
 - 3. Peter in **Acts 3:22-23** and Stephen in **Acts 7:37** both explain that Jesus is the one who fulfilled this promise given through Moses. He is the promised prophet that the Lord planned to send, who would be “like Moses”.
- iv. Eusebius, in *Proof of the Gospel* Book 1, chapter 6, writes about Jesus, the promised prophet who would be “like Moses”. Being “like Moses”, he would be bringing in new laws and a new covenant.
 - 1. “For the text which says that the new will be quite unlike the old clearly implies which one was the old:
 - 2. “I will make a new covenant, not according to the covenant I made with their fathers, in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt.’ (This is from **Jeremiah 31:31-34**, designated **Jeremiah 38:31-34** in the LXX)
 - 3. “‘Not according to the covenant of the Mosaic Law,’ he says. For that was introduced to the Jews at the exodus from Egypt. It might have seemed that he was introducing a new covenant

opposed to the religious ideals of the Abrahamic saints, if he had not distinctly said:

4. "Not according to the covenant, which I made with their fathers, in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt.'
 5. "He prophesied that the new covenant would not be according to the one enacted at the time of the Exodus and the wanderings in the wilderness, but according to the ancient one under which the pre-Mosaic saints flourished. And, therefore, for the future you may confidently classify the ideals of religions worshippers under three heads, not two: the completely idolatrous, who have fallen into the errors of polytheism; those of the circumcision, who by the aid of Moses have reached the first step of holiness; and thirdly, those who have ascended by the stair of Gospel teaching.
 6. "If you regard this as a mean between the other two, you will no longer suppose that perverts from Judaism necessarily fall into Hellenism, nor that those that forsake Hellenism are, therefore, Jews. Recognizing the third division in the middle, *you will see it standing up on high, as if it were set on a very lofty mountain ridge, with the others left below on each side of the height.* For as it has escaped Greek godlessness, error, superstition, unbridled lust and disorder, so it has left behind Jewish unprofitable observances, designed by Moses to meet the needs of those who were like infants and invalids. And as it stands on high, hear what it says as it proclaims the law, which *suits not Jews alone, but Greeks and barbarians, and all nations under the sun...*"
- v. The two analogies that Eusebius uses are:
1. The Law of Moses as just the first step, and the gospel of Jesus as the full stairway to our destination.
 2. Three mountain ridges.
 - a. The pagan way of life being the lowest ridge;
 - b. The Law of Moses being the intermediate (higher) ridge; and
 - c. The gospel law of Jesus being the highest ridge, one that towers above the other two.

III. All Kinds of Miscellaneous Laws

- a. Starting in **Exodus 20:22**, continuing for the next few chapters, are miscellaneous laws that were part of the Law of Moses.
 - i. This is where many who start out wanting to read the entire Bible “hit the wall”. Up to this point (50 chapters of **Genesis** + first 20 chapters of **Exodus**) this has been an interesting story.
 1. For many who hope to read through the entire Bible from cover to cover, the part we are about to enter, the second half of the **Book of Exodus**, is like “heartbreak hill” on the Boston Marathon course (part way through that grueling course, where the road becomes much steeper and more difficult, where many are tempted to ‘give up’ and stop running).
 2. In an endurance race, when it gets more challenging (and painful), many are tempted to quit. When the road gets tougher, it is sometimes hard to remember why we started on the course in the first place. However, this is precisely where we need to ‘dig deeper’ and persevere to finish the race we first set out on.
 - ii. The later part of **Exodus**, plus **Leviticus** and parts of **Deuteronomy**, are Jewish laws that are no longer in effect. Many find them boring and hard reading, and are tempted to quit reading at this point.
 1. Like hitting “heartbreak hill” in the Boston Marathon, it gets hard and many stop here.
 - iii. We know from **Acts 15** that Christians do not need to follow all of these rules.
 - iv. Paul says that the old requirements of the Law of Moses were done away with at the cross: “...having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And *He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross*. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.” (**Colossians 2:14-15**, NKJV)
- b. In legal documents, a part of the original contract that has been amended out is often indicated by using *overstrike* font (like parts of the U.S. Constitution that were changed by amendment).
 - i. Sometimes I have wondered if it would be easier to read the Bible if it had *overstrike* type in it (to indicate parts of the Law of Moses that are *no longer in effect*). We would be heading into the “overstrike” section,

with many pages of text with lines through it (laws, sacrificial system, temple construction and articles, etc.)

- c. **Question:** Should we skip this part of the Bible?
- i. I asked this question in our midweek discussion this past week, in the form of “Paul says that all Scripture is useful for Christians; and that *whatever* was written in the past was written *to teach us*. (See **2 Timothy 3:16-17** and **Romans 15:4**.) Why should Christians read parts of the Law of Moses that are *no longer in effect*?”
 - ii. Some reasons we should read this part of the Bible as well:
 1. One member of our group, Cyrille, addressed this question by recalling an old saying from his native country, Cameroon. That is: “If you don’t know where you came from, it is hard to know where you are going.”
 2. If you don’t understand details of the Law of Moses, you will not appreciate major points being made throughout the New Testament.
 - a. **Book of Hebrews** (tabernacle worship, priests, sacrificial system)
 - b. **Acts 10-11** where Peter is struggling with whether the Gentiles (who do not follow the Law of Moses) can be saved; **Acts 15** where the apostles wrestle with this issue, and Paul’s problems with the Jews later in **Acts**.
 - c. **Romans, Colossians, Ephesians and Galatians** (often misunderstood and taken out of context by Evangelical Protestants)
 3. Even the first step of the stairway points us in the right direction.
 4. While the laws have changed, with Jesus bringing in a greater law, *the nature of God has not changed*. We can see the heart of God revealed here and understand Him better, including His concerns.
 5. Many foundational New Testament teachings are made by pointing to details in the Law of Moses.
 - a. In church discipline, in **Matthew 18:16** Jesus points back to **Deuteronomy 19:15**, in saying that the second step (after going 1-on-1) is to bring one or two others

along, that “by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established”.

- b. When Peter calls Christians to live holy lives, he says “...but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’” (**1 Peter 1:15–16**, NKJV; quoting from a statement that appears repeatedly in the Law of Moses, especially in **Leviticus**)
- c. The two greatest commandments are found in the details of the Law.
- d. While many Christians do not think the Old Testament is important for non-Jews to read, consider the points that Paul makes from the details of the Law of Moses when instructing a *predominantly Gentile church* in Corinth: “You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led.” (**1 Corinthians 12:2**, NKJV)
- e. There is a significant amount of New Testament teaching that references the Law of Moses. Unless you understand what the New Testament writers are talking about, you may not fully appreciate these New Testament teachings. For example:
 - i. In **1 Corinthians 5**, regarding discipline in the church, he quotes from the Law “Put away the evil person from among you” (**Deuteronomy 17, 19, 22 and 24**)
 - ii. In **1 Corinthians 6**, regarding sexual sins and other sins of the flesh, he says “Your body is temple of the Holy Spirit”, which points back to **Exodus 20** with the Spirit filling the tabernacle.
 - iii. In **1 Corinthians 9**, regarding financial support for those devoting their full time to the work of the ministry, he quotes from **Deuteronomy 25:4**, “Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain”.
 - iv. In **1 Corinthians 9**, regarding supporting those in the ministry, he also points back to the Law, that those who ministered to the temple ate from

what the people brought to be sacrificed
(**Leviticus 6, 7 8, 10**, etc.).

- v. In **1 Corinthians 10:18-19**, when discussing why those who participate in the Lord's supper (that they cannot also participate in the pagan meals of demons), Paul points back to the Law. He reasons based on how the Jewish priests partook of the sacrifices made at the temple altar. This also points back to the details of the sacrificial requirements throughout **Leviticus**.
- vi. In **2 Corinthians 6:14**, when talking about being separate from the world, he says "Do not be yoked with unbelievers", alluding to the statement in **Deuteronomy 22:9-11**, "you shall not plow with a donkey and ox yoked together".
 - 1. Why was this peculiar requirement about not plowing with two different animals included in the Law of Moses?
 - 2. Is God only concerned that a team of animals pulling their plow in a straight line, or was there something hidden in this requirement that was *intended for us*?
- vii. In **2 Corinthians 6:16-18** in his explanation of why we need to be separate from the world, Paul quotes from **Leviticus 26:12**.
- viii. When talking about his planned third visit, Paul quotes from **Deuteronomy 19:15**, "by the mouth of two or three witnesses".
- f. Paul also made extensive references to details of the exodus story in his letters to the Corinthians; the above are just the ones related to the "obscure" details of the Law of Moses.
 - i. Clearly even in a Gentile church like Corinth, the Christians were taught the Law of Moses, even the details of laws no longer in effect. And Paul used it to reinforce Christian teachings.
- iii. You need to dig deeper when reading this material.
 - 1. Read **Psalm 1:1-2**.

2. Read **Psalm 119: 97-105**.
3. **Question:** Why do God's people need to *meditate on the Law all day long (thinking about it deeply, turning it over in their minds)*?
 - a. The picture of meditating on the Word of God is reflected in the clean animals who "chew the cud", working on the food they ate earlier, to thoroughly digest it and get all the nutrition out of it.
 - b. Why wasn't it good enough to just *read the Law once*, and then do what it says?
 - c. Meditating on the Law *builds wisdom!*
 - d. Through meditating on the Word of God we can wrestle with the *nature of God*, and dig out truths embedded in the Scriptures.
- iv. Therefore, we will need to dig a lot deeper in this part of the Bible. Our goal here should be to read the details of the Law *the same way that Paul did, and as he wanted the Corinthian Christians to do!*

IV. Diving into the Details

- a. As you read the various laws of Moses which we are no longer required to follow, ask yourself, "*What can I learn about God: His character, His heart and His desires for His people?*".
- b. Read **Exodus 20:22-26**.
 - i. No idolatry. Very specific (however, they violated this command soon anyway).
 - ii. Don't make gods of silver or gold for yourselves.
 1. Perhaps there is something in this command that speaks to the dangers of greed today, as well (the danger of making money, gold and silver, our gods).
 - iii. **Question:** Why was it unacceptable to God for the people to use tools on the rocks they built their altars with? From my own experience in building stone walls and repairing stone foundations in New England with stone, I can tell you that it is hard to fit odd-shaped stones together without trying 'improve' their shapes with a hammer and rock chisel.

1. However, rocks in Scripture were often used to foreshadow the Christ (consider **1 Corinthians 10:4**, **1 Peter 2:4-8** and **Daniel 2:31-45**).
 2. The rocks to build the alter had to be a natural creation of God, unaltered by the hands and tools of men.
 - a. Perhaps this suggests that in some ways God does not want men to try to innovate nor improve upon what He has left us naturally.
- iv. Concern for modesty and nakedness.
- c. Read **Exodus 21:1-11**.
- i. This passage covers rules related to slavery.
 - ii. Note that Jesus did not come to free slaves, nor to bring about democracy. Slavery was widespread in the ancient world. Someone could become a slave through debt, in punishment for a crime (such as theft, where the thief was unable to repay the penalty required), or through being a captive on the losing side of a war.
 - iii. Slavery continued even in the early church. Paul writes in his letter to **Philemon** (a slave owner) to receive back his former slave, Onesimus.
 1. Paul tells slaves to get their freedom if they can (**1 Corinthians 7:21**). However, he says not to worry about it in any case.
 2. Slaves are told to be submissive and respectful to their masters, serving them as they would serve Christ.
 - iv. Here the Law *puts limits on* slavery among the Jews.
 1. The owner must let the slave go after six years of service.
 2. In **Deuteronomy 15:12-18** the same subject is addressed. In that passage it adds that when the slave is released in the seventh year, the former owner is to supply him generously with gifts from his wine, sheep, wheat, etc.
 3. There is a strong incentive for the slaveowner to be kind to his or her slave, even to treat the slave as a member of the family.
 4. While this may be difficult for our modern ears to hear, consider what Eusebius said: the Law of Moses was *the first step* up from the way the pagans lived; but Christ's law (His kingdom teaching) allows us to ascend *the entire stairway!*

- v. I once heard a Jewish Bible teacher connecting the ceremony of the ear pierced on the doorframe, with the Passover blood on the doorframe. I don't know if the two are connected, but wanted to pass that along for you to at least consider.
- vi. Also, protections here on how husbands treat their wives, not dealing deceitfully with her, selling her into slavery if she does not please him, required to provide for a first wife even if you take another. So we see here protections of wives. Of course Jesus and the New Testament writers (inspired by the Holy Spirit) take this to a whole new level: abolishing polygamy, marriage till death, husbands treating their wives as Christ treated the Church, etc.

d. Read **Exodus 21:12-27**

i. Limits on vengeance.

1. The Lord makes a distinction between first-degree murder and manslaughter (pre-meditated vs. unintentional).
2. Jesus refers to this when he says in the Sermon on the Mount, "*You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth'*" (**Matthew 5:38**, NKJV)
3. No massive retaliation is allowed. The response cannot be more than the original offense. (This is *a first step* toward what will come later: the higher standard later raised by Jesus banning any retaliation for evil, and calling his followers to love their enemies in **Matthew 5:39-42**.)
 - a. Consider how this could have restrained the massive retaliation done earlier by two of the sons of Jacob, after their sister was raped by Shechem, as recorded in **Genesis 34**.
 - b. They committed genocide, killing all the men of the town and taking their wives and children as captives, plundering all their possessions, and even hamstringing all their animals.
 - c. Later, because of their violent over-reaction against the evil done to their sister, both Simeon and Levi were condemned by their father Jacob on his deathbed (**Genesis 49:5-7**).