

## The Law: An Overview

How have you viewed the “law of Moses?”

The Law from an Airplane:

The Text:

Exodus 19 - Mount Sinai

Exodus 20 - 10 Commandments

Exodus 21 - 40 - Giving of laws and instructions regarding  
the Tabernacle and its furniture

Leviticus - Priestly Manual

The Means to Approach God (ch. 1-10)

Laws of Sacrifice (1-7)

Consecration of Priests (8-9)

Historical Interlude: Nadab and Abihu (10)

The Means of Maintaining Fellowship with God  
(11-25)

Laws of the clean and unclean (11-15)

The day of Atonement (16)

Prohibitions for people and priests (17-23)

Laws of religious feast and years (23-25)

Historical Interlude: A blasphemer stoned  
(24:10-23)

Conclusion

Promises and Curses (26-27)

Vows and Tithes (27)

Numbers - Further Duties and Laws

Census - (1)

Arrangement of the camp - (2)

Duties of Certain Peoples - (3-4)

Laws (5-6)

Consecration of the Tabernacle and Priests (7-8)

Passover Celebrated (9)

Israel Leaves Sinai (10)

Deuteronomy - 2nd Giving of the Law

Recorded speeches of Moses to the new generation before they enter the promise land. Does not include all the law but highlights key features and encourages them to obey the law.

## **Features of the Law**

God took similar ideas and concepts that were prevalent in ancient near eastern cultures and redefined them for his purpose. He gave these greater meaning and true distinction as being offered to the true and living God. All the features of the law are teaching and preparing a people to understand the significance of the gospel message.

*Holy Ground* - In ancient times, where deities were worshipped were marked and considered holy ground. Israel marked Sinai (Ex. 19:12,23)

*Holy Mountains* - High places and mountains were fitting places of worship. Mount Megiddo, Tabor, and Carmel all served as holy places of worship in the pre-Israelite times of the Canaanites. The Greeks worshiped the gods on Mount Olympus. God revealed himself to Moses on Mount Sinai (Ex. 19:3). When it was ratified the leaders came part way up the mountain for a communal meal (24:9-12). The mountain was not to be touched by animal or man. Later God chose Mount Zion in Jerusalem as the place for the temple to be located. What made both of these mountains holy was the presence of the living God, first at Sinai in giving the covenant, and second in Jerusalem in taking up residence with His people.

*Holy Buildings* - Ancient peoples built pagan temples often shaped like pyramids or the ziggurat with high terraced steps. For Israel, their sacred buildings would be the Tabernacle and eventually the Temple. The temple partitions and entrance access to various groups will have significance for Israel. The significance of the temples will receive their full explanation in the ministry and work of

Jesus, who offered the “temple” of his body so we may all have access to God.

*Holy Ritual* - Sacrifices and holy ceremony had always been a part of worship to deities. Sacrificial ritual was widespread in the ancient world. God used similar rituals as other ancient peoples, but restored them to their highest and fullest meaning. He regulated appropriate sacrifices and rituals. Sacrifices help us better understand Jesus’ sacrifice and our own daily sacrifice (Hebrews; Romans 12:1-2)

*Holy Priests* - Orders of priests emerged throughout the ancient world. The priest was an important role in ancient society often being the tribal leader or closely connected with him. “According to Deut. 33:9-10, their primary tasks were teaching the laws and commandments to the people, making intercessory prayer by burning incense at the altar of incense, and making sacrifices as they led the congregation to draw near to God through worship” (Ross p. 32). Jesus Christ will be the perfect High Priest and every Christian a priest.

## **Key Terms to Understand the Law**

*Torah* - The term for the general body of Divine Law given to Moses. The Hebrew term involves the idea of “to point out” or “to direct.” It is the “instruction” or “teaching” of God that taught Israel what they were to do to be faithful to God.

*Covenant* - It involves the idea of two parties mutually agreeing to be bound together. Both expressing certain duties, promises, obligations, and responsibilities to one another. In the law, God initiates a covenant with Israel and Israel enters into this covenant pledging their loyalty and under the blessings and curses of obeying or disobeying the law.

*Holy* - Involves the idea of being “set apart” for God. It is consecrated or dedicated to God thus it is holy because of the relationship it has with God. God makes items and people holy. He is holy (without sin) and those in relationship with him must be holy.

*“The Lord spoke”* - The Law comes directly from the Lord! God spoke the 10 commandments to Israel. He spoke the law directly to Moses. 56 times in Leviticus the book records the phrase “The Lord spoke to Moses.” The book of Leviticus opens with this emphasis in Lev. 1:1. The importance of such is to see that the law comes directly from God. It was not written over centuries of Israel’s culture and priesthood formulating these laws. The law is directly from the voice of God! We learn much about God when we study the law.

## **Key Facets of the Law**

Exodus 19:3-8 - Israel was to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation to the Lord. The law was designed to enable them to maintain a proper relationship with the Lord so they could be this kingdom and nation.

The law is often divided into three main components. Though the Bible doesn’t make these categories, they may still be helpful.

- A. *Civil* - Deals with disputes between individuals and the Jewish system of government.
- B. *Ceremonial* - This is all of the ritual sacrifices, offerings, festivals, and priestly duties.
- C. *Moral* - This is all of the key moral laws that describe God’s expectations for Israel.

Some other key facets of the law that we will examine closely:

- A. The Tabernacle (temple) and its furnishings

- B. The Sacrifices or Offerings
- C. The festivals and Sabbath rules
- D. The Role and Duties of the Priests and High Priest
- E. Dietary regulations
- F. Stewardship (tithing and first fruits giving)
- G. Civil regulations
  - 1. Treatment of the poor and demand for justice
  - 2. Slavery
  - 3. Marriage
  - 4. Social services and welfare provisions
  - 5. Cities of refuge

## **Some Primary Theological Lessons within the Law**

**God** - We learn much about God from the law. Ross lays out 8 characteristics of God from the law.

1. *God is holy.* This is the main emphasis of the book of Leviticus. God prohibits from his presence every sinful and diseased person or thing—they were simply incompatible with the holy Lord. The term “holy” is found 87 times in the book. Israel was to be holy because God was holy (Lev. 20:26).
2. *God is eternal and living.* God is active and alive as demonstrated through his communicating His will to Israel. He dwells among them in the ark of the covenant. He created and sustains them.
3. *God is personal.* He revealed himself as a personal God with a personal name (Yahweh). The laws deal with Israel in a personal or individual manner.
4. *God is powerful.* By His power he fulfills his promise and is truly worthy of man’s devotion. Through his victory over Egypt, which is always in the background of the law, and the thunderous voice and lightning from Mount Sinai God demonstrates His power.
5. *God is righteous.* All of God’s laws presupposes that He is moral, ethical, and righteous lawgiver. Moreover, because of what God did for Israel, it is right for him to give laws and grant blessings or punishment based on their obedience.

6. *God is sovereign.* He elected Israel to be a holy nation and announced his dwelling among them. He alone can forgive sin and He is the sovereign director of history.

7. *God is gracious and good.* The entire sacrificial system speaks to the grace of God. The laws are all about Israel maintaining a relationship with God through his mercy and grace. The people owe God a debt of gratitude for all He has done. Their gratitude is the basis for worship of God.

8. *God is jealous.* Beginning with the first and second commandments God declares that He will not share His glory with another god. God demands the best from their fields and herds. He held exclusive rights to the blood of the sacrifices. For violations of the law and disloyalty to the covenant God would bring judgments and punishments.

**Man** - Israel was to be a blessing to the whole world as a kingdom of priests representing God. But the law addresses human frailties, disease, and corruption throughout. Man is shown to be made in the “image of God” as His special creation. The law makes it clear that humans are spiritual, physical, and sexual beings. Thus laws are given regarding all three categories. The law made sure that people learned to distinguish between God and humans and between animals and humans. Man is designed to function in community with others. The law makes it clear that humans have mutual obligations and duties to one another. In fact, Leviticus makes clear that fellowship with God is most practically and meaningfully experience in communion. Everything a person does has a bearing on the well-being of the community.

**Sin** - Man is shown throughout the law to have a sin problem. The law confines man under sin and gives man laws to regulate and guard himself against sin. The sacrifices and laws for forgiveness are all put in place because man has a problem of sin and guilt.

**Salvation** - Israel could maintain a relationship with God, despite their failures, if they loved the Lord with all their heart, obeying his statutes and seeking his forgiveness.

## **The Importance of the Law**

“It not only presents the entire religious system of ancient Israel, but it also lays the theological foundation for the New Testament teaching about the atoning work of Jesus Christ.” (Ross p. 15).

It is in Jesus that these ancient rites found their greatest meaning and ultimate goal.

“Accordingly the main concerns of the book— as well as the Bible as a whole— are how God’s people were supposed to order their lives now that the holy God dwelt with them and how they could maintain a relationship with him so that they could enter his presence to worship him” (Ross p. 20).

Holiness is the goal of the law! The levitical system serviced as the pattern or type of heavenly things, that the sacrifices pointed to and found their true meaning in the Lamb of God, and that the procedures of outward purification signified the true inner cleansing of the heart and conscience from dead works to serve a living God. (Ross p. 18)

How did inspired writers view the Law?

Faithful people throughout history loved the law.

David - Psalm 119 (v. 97 for example)

Joshua - Meditated on it day and night - Joshua 1:8

Righteous Person - Psalm 1:2; 19:10

Nehemiah - 9:13

Ezra - Ezra 7:10

Jesus - Mat. 5:17-18; Often quoting the law

Paul - Rom. 7:12

## **The Purpose of the Law (Ross p. 60-63)**

“The law was given as a gracious provision to a redeemed people to make them a holy nation and prepare them to be a kingdom of priests.”

1. The law was the constitution of the nation of Israel. They were establishing a theocracy. Living by the law was the evidence that they were God’s covenant people and in a number of ways this became a hedge between Israel and the nations, marking them out as a holy priesthood. This is why God would later declare to unfaithful generations they were not his people!
2. The law revealed what was required to be in communion with God. The law revealed God’s holiness and man’s sinfulness, thus they must take advantage of the gracious provisions in the law to have access to God.
3. The law regulated the worship and purity of the people of God. The law laid out all of the details of the rituals and ceremonies. To profane the rituals or fail to enact them was saying there were other ways to God than what He, himself, had declared.
4. The law was a pedagogue (school teacher) leading to Christ (Gal. 3:21-27). The law in many ways laid the full foundation for the full revelation of God’s plan of salvation. A pedagogue was a servant who came alongside the child as a tutor and supervised that child in everything until maturity. The law provided this guard.

## **The Law and New Testament**

Jesus came to a people who were fully entrenched in the law and its practice. Here are some key considerations regarding the law and the NT.

1. Jesus came to fulfill the law, not abolish it (Matthew 5:17-18). In the sermon on the mount, he will take various misapplied laws and go to the heart. Jesus takes us deeper, as He goes to the heart and motive behind the law. Jesus is the only person to have ever perfectly lived so as to fulfill the law. He could be the perfect sacrifice (Colossians 2:13-17; Gal. 3:13-14). Christ is the goal and



culmination of the law because he provided righteousness for those who believe in him (Rom. 10:4, Gal. 3:13-14)

2. The law was given for our instruction and teaching (Rom. 15:4).

The OT was a “shadow” of the principles to be made real in the gospel (Col. 2:17; Heb. 8:5; 10:1). In the sermon of the mount, Jesus made it clear that the full meaning of the law included intent. We learn so much about God, sin, man, faithfulness, worship, holiness, and salvation through the law. God’s intent was to make it easier for the Jews and Christians to better understand the gospel because we understand the Old Law.

3. The law is no longer binding upon Christians, nor anyone else, as it was replaced with the New Covenant. Paul makes this clear in Galatians and Romans (Gal. 3; Romans 7). The Hebrew writer will be the most direct in encouraging his readers to not turn back to the law, but keep the faith in Christ (Heb. 8). The law was given because of sin. It helped man define sin and guarded the Jewish people from going too far into sin, so they could bring forth the Messiah (Gal. 3:19). We are freed from the law in Christ.

- a. *But what parts of the law are obsolete today?* Are the 10 commandments? Are the moral teachings? Civil regulations about treating the poor?
- b. Some suggest the civil and ceremonial parts, but the moral are still principles because they are connected with the character of God.
- c. Ross suggests that the law had regulatory and revelatory components. The regulatory components were the ceremonies, animals, health laws, festivals, etc. While the revelatory aspects are holiness, nature of sin, access to God, forgiveness, and the many other lessons and principles. He says the regulatory aspects came to an end with Christ, but the revelatory aspects did not come to an end, but still reveal truths about God. We might more helpfully think of these as practice (regulatory) and principle (revelatory). Or as we often suggest, all of the law was made obsolete, but the principles therein still communicate truth for our lives today.