

Study 0050

Scripture Text: Exodus 20:1-26; Leviticus 18:1-5; Deuteronomy 6:4-25

Up until now, we had been taking a look at the sanctuary, which consisted of an outer court, the tabernacle, and the items of furniture; the priesthood and their ministry; the sacrifices and their significance; and, the feasts (or holy days) which were to make the people remember and meditate on the faithfulness and love of God. All these aspects of the Old Covenant Era worship were held together by one component—The Law.

The Old Covenant Era: The Law

The Law was the ‘thread’ that bound together every aspect of life and worship in Israel, under the Old Covenant Era. You really could not separate religious life from civil life under the Old Covenant Era. The Old Covenant Era worship was thus, governed or regulated by the Law. The Law, as it is commonly referred to in the bible, was presented to the people of Israel by God, through Moses (**John 1:17**), and spans the Books of Exodus through Deuteronomy. The Law consists of provisions affecting how people were to relate to God; how to relate to their fellow countrymen; how to relate to people of other nationalities, as well as people of other persuasions; and, even our conduct toward animals, the land, and property. The one set of laws which is considered the most fundamental, and which can be said to be the foundation for all other laws is what we commonly call the Ten Commandments. In reality, it is believed that there were over 400 ordinances which governed the lives of the people of Israel, and which were introduced into their community to help them approach and maintain a relationship with a holy and loving God.

The Law covered every aspect of the lives of the people of God, and was related and relevant to the worship of God. There were Levitical laws (*laws governing the priesthood, the service of the Levites, etc.*), sacrificial laws (*laws governing sacrifices and offerings*), health laws (*laws governing what constitutes a disease, like leprosy, and running issues; and, what kind of plants and animals the people could eat and not eat*), purification laws (*laws governing how people could be purified after they have been defiled, how people can be made ceremonially clean, etc.*), feast laws (*laws governing the feasts or holy days prescribed by God*), property laws (*laws governing their ownership, disposal, redemption, etc.*), inheritance laws (*laws governing inheritance of property*), military laws (*laws that governed warfare, who could go to battle, how to treat captured enemies, etc.*), moral laws (*laws governing sexual relations, holy living, treatment of slaves, etc.*), leadership laws (*laws governing the choice of leaders, the function of leaders, etc.*), family laws (*laws governing marriage, divorce, remarriage, the rights of wives, the rights of firstborn sons, the rights of daughters, etc.*), and so on.

All these laws were not just for the governance or regulation of the affairs of men; but more importantly, they revealed the nature and character of God, Who is the Originator of the laws. The Laws revealed the holiness of God, and His utter abhorrence of sin. A closer look at the laws (we advise the reader to read and study the Books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy), reveal that God usually began, interjected, or ended a command or an injunction, with the expression, “I am the LORD”, which means among others, “What I am asking you to do, is in line with My nature; you do them, and people will know that I, the LORD God, Who is merciful, gracious, longsuffering, and holy, is the God whom you are serving” (**Exodus 34:5-7**). This was a very significant aspect of the laws, because, the nations around Israel were equally governed by laws, but those laws were largely subjective, inequitable, and discriminatory. In the case of Israel, however, their laws were objective,

impartial, and governed everyone including kings, the wealthy, the poor, the strangers, etc. Israel's laws were just, fair, and equitable; and these sum up the nature of God with respect to His dealings with His people. Adherence to the laws was a strict obligation upon the people of the Old Covenant Era, with its attendant benefits or blessings for following its precepts, and punishments or curses for contravening its injunctions (**Leviticus 26:1-46; Deuteronomy 28:1-68**).

The Ten Commandments, reveal that the first four commandments (**Exodus 20:2-11**) focused on how the people were to live in relation to God, while the last six commandments (**Exodus 20:12-17**) focused on how the people were to live in relation to other people. As earlier noted, there were over 400 other ordinances, which if a man disobeyed in one, he was equally as guilty as having broken all the other laws (**James 2:10-11**). In order to be able to keep all the laws (the Ten Commandments and all the other ordinances) therefore, God summarized them into two simple but greatly significant injunctions: "... *thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength ... And ... Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.*" (**Deuteronomy 6:5; Mark 12:29-34**). The premise of these two injunctions is that if a person loved God with everything and more, and loved his neighbour as he did himself, then, all the laws would have been fulfilled! Although the Law was seen as very difficult to obey, that was not really the case. The problem was man's inability to obey the Law, because the sinful man does not have within him, the ability to love God first, and then love his fellow man like he does himself. If a person loved God and his fellow human being, he would indeed be unable to break any of the laws! The Law thus exposed the weakness of man, while espousing the holiness of God (**Romans 7:5-25**). Many people erroneously believe, and some preachers have even falsely claimed that the Law has been done away with. This is not true! What really happened was that Christ has fulfilled or satisfied the provision of the Law, which demanded that an offender either offers sacrifices to deal with his offence or sin, or serve a punishment or even be put to death, as may be prescribed by the Law. But, after Christ came, the Law was satisfied through His death on the cross, but its provisions were never, and have never, been repealed (**Matthew 5:17-48; Romans 10:4**). It is therefore only by living in Christ that a man can truly fulfil the Law!

Without the Law, the Old Covenant Era worship would not have been any different from what obtained in the nations around Israel! The Law revealed the holiness and love of God for His people, as well as His desire to have them have a relationship with Him. The Law was thus sealed by a Covenant between God and His people. God required that they behave in an appropriate manner, and promised to bless those who obeyed these codes, but punish those who refused to obey them (**Isaiah 1:19-20**). The significance of the Law is vividly captured in **Psalms 19:7-9**, which shows the blessing that accompany those who worship God according to His Law, which is also referred to as His testimony, His statutes or precepts, His commandments, and His judgments or ordinances. The Law was essentially God's code of conduct, or standard, for living and worship, for the Old Covenant Era worshipper. Without it there really was no worship of the One True God! The Law was thus, so important, that the priests were instructed to teach the people the Law (**2 Chronicles 15:3-6; Nehemiah 8:1-18**), as were parents instructed to teach their children (**Deuteronomy 11:18-19; Proverbs 22:6**). One more thing: the initial laws were given in the wilderness which suited the nomadic life they lived then. But before they entered the Promised Land, Moses adapted the Law to suit the permanence of living in the Promised Land, and that is what the Book of Deuteronomy is all about: "The Law a second time".

EXERCISE

Please state true or false to the statements below:

1. The Law is the totality of the Ten Commandments and all other ordinances given by God to Moses.
2. The Law revealed the character and nature of God.
3. Without the Law there really could be no worship of the One True God.
4. There were laws for every aspect of life under the Old Covenant Era.
5. If a man was able to love God and his relatives, he fulfilled the Law.
6. The Law was equitable, fair, and just.
7. The Law was the impediment which did not make people able to worship God.
8. The Law governed everyone under the Old Covenant Era.
9. Even animals and land were covered under the Law.
10. The Law has been abrogated today, and is no longer necessary.
11. To fulfil the Law, a person must be in Christ.
12. The Law is good and perfect, contrary to what many people say.
13. If not for the cross of Christ, we would all be condemned under the Law.
14. The Law enabled worship to hold under the Old Covenant Era through sacrifices.
15. Without the Law, worship and life would be worthless and meaningless.