

The Story – Moses Part 3

Last week we talked about Moses and the plagues and Passover. Finally, the Israelites are allowed to leave Egypt. By the time they arrive at the Red Sea, Pharaoh has changed his mind and is pursuing them with horses and chariots. God miraculously opens up the Red Sea and allows his people to pass over on dry ground and then as Pharaoh and his troops chase them into the sea bed God closes the water over them and they are drowned in the sea. The Israelites are free from their slave masters and God begins to prepare them for entrance into the promised land. The way he does that is through the giving of the law. Moses is called the law giver. Of course God gave Moses the law and our focus today is really on the law and not so much on Moses. Keep following along in your reading guide!

We've been watching a video called the Torah Series and I want us to watch the next segment and then we are going to talk about Moses and the Law.

Think about this. When the Israelites first went to Egypt, we are talking about a family – Abraham the father and his twelve sons and their families. 430 years later they march out of Egypt as a nation, a people. It's one thing to live as a family, it's another to live as a nation. God wants to reconstitute this group of a half million or so slaves into the People of God, the new community of God on the earth. So God brings the people to Mt. Sinai and gives to Moses the laws by which the people, the nation of Israel were to live. Through these laws God would show them how to live together, how to live for God and how to shed the culture of Egypt and all the sinful practices they had seen and heard for the past 430 years and embrace a new life of holiness. The laws would also prepare them to refuse to embrace the culture of the land of Canaan where they were headed.

Just a little study note. When we talk about the law we can be talking about a couple of things. The law can refer to any and all of the more than 600 laws and commandments God gave to the Israelites. The Law can also refer to the first five books of the Bible. Sometimes we talk about the whole religious system of the Old Testament as the law, in contrast to the New Testament message of grace. The context tells us which one we are talking about.

We can kind of organize the laws into three categories. There were civil and criminal laws to regulate their social life. There were liturgical/ceremonial/religious laws that regulated their worship along with detailed instructions on building a tabernacle that would travel with them in the wilderness. The religious laws included instructions on the sacrifices, on the feasts

and celebrations. It instructed them on how to worship God and included instructions for the priests, how they were to dress, how they were to live, how they were to conduct themselves. The book of Leviticus is a whole book of laws for the Levites, the priests, to know how the people were to live and worship. Then there were the moral laws, including the ten commandments, telling us how to live and how to treat one another. The commandments called us to live a holy life because the Lord our God is holy.

All these laws in Exodus and Leviticus and Deuteronomy and Numbers – it's exhausting to read them all because some of them are very specific. There are regulations about skin rashes and mildew and on and on. What's the point for us? Why did God give them such detailed laws? What does it all mean? Consider:

God's law established order for a new society. The civil and criminal laws spelled out penalties for certain offenses and crimes, how to deal justly and mercifully with one another. Remember this was a whole new, free society and they needed structure and order and law.

God's law provided boundaries and protection for His people. It set them apart from all the people and nations around them. "Don't do as these nations do or it will bring judgment."

God's law kept His people physically, morally and spiritually healthy. The law included dietary laws and laws concerning purity, not touching the dead, etc. that kept the people healthy.

God's law revealed something of the nature and character of God to his people. He was holy, just, jealous in the sense that they were to have no other gods, compassionate.

God's law made plain the obligations of the covenant. As the video said, God had asked nothing of them up to this time, now he explains the covenant. "If you will do this, I will do this."

That's all well and good for Israel, but why does it matter to us? The law shows us **God cares about us even to the tiniest detail of our lives.** Every detail is important to God. And remember that these folks had spent 430 years in a foreign, pagan culture. There were even subtle, little things that God wanted to remove from their lives so they could truly be the people of God and walk with him and live for him. The little details can eventually corrupt the big decisions. But God cares so much that nothing is too small for God to care about or notice in your life. He cares about you and the law reminds us of that! Even though we are no longer bound to these Jewish civil laws, we see what God was doing, his character revealed in this.

If you read Leviticus you see instructions about how to trim your beard, what to do about mildew, the list goes on. God cares about his people. He wanted Israel to live the blessed life he intended for them and he wants the same for all of us so he shows us the path to blessing is through obedience to his law, his word, his order. That's why he gives us his law, his commandments, his instruction and wisdom and guidance for our lives.

God gave the Law to show us how to live a holy life. Let me emphasize again that God was calling his people to holiness. Holy means separated – separated from sin and set apart to God. The Israelites were not to live like the Egyptians or like the Canaanites or any of the other godless nations surrounding them. Instead, they were to live in a way that was pleasing and honoring to God. That's the call to all of us as well. God intended that we live counter-culturally. We aren't supposed to embrace the call of our secular culture, we are supposed to embrace the call and command of God! That's what God was calling the Israelites to by the giving of the law. He was saying then and he still says today, "come out from among them and be holy, separate. Live in obedience to God's commands. Live like the people of a holy God."

I should point out that we are no longer bound by the civil and ritual laws of the Old Testament. We aren't required to eat kosher or show our skin rash to the priest. Nor are we required to offer sacrifices because Jesus is our once and for all sacrifice. However, the moral and ethical laws, for instance the ten commandments and all of the laws and commands that are reinforced or restated in the New Testament, we are bound to obey those laws. Love the Lord with all your heart and all your soul and strength and love your neighbor as yourself. This is the essence and heart of the law for us. Jesus said all the law hangs on these commands. So what's the point in us reading Leviticus and Numbers and Deuteronomy, learning about the law? Again, they show us how much God cares about the little things. They show us God's holy nature and character and his desire for us to live holy lives.

Understand, they show us that **The Law is good.** We tend to have a negative attitude toward the law, like it is repressive and overbearing but the bible says "his commandments are not burdensome." 1 John 5:3 God's law was given for our own good, to repress evil. A not so subtle plug, but I recommend you read my book, *Not Just Idle Words* to understand the positive side, the gift that the law of God is to us. For every "thou shalt not" there is a "thou shalt" we are to celebrate!

The reason we don't like the law is, the law confronts the evil in our own sinful nature. The law is given to repress and restrain evil. When God gave the law to Moses on Mt. Sinai, the people stood at the foot of the mountain and trembled in fear. It was a frightening experience for them. Perhaps the reason it was so frightening was because these sinful folks were coming before a holy God and his holy law. It is the same for us. When we read the law, we realize we are sinners and law breakers. We realize we aren't holy and God and his law are holy. What can we do about our unholiness? Our sinfulness? The law points us to the solution. The law helps us see we need a Savior, someone that can fix what is sinful and broken in us. That brings us to the next thing God gave to the Israelites.

The Law made provision for sinful people to approach a holy God. Through the law provision was made so that Israel could approach a holy God. Specifications were given to Moses and the priests for building a tabernacle, a place in the middle of their encampment where God would meet with them and where sacrifices were to be made to atone for and cover their sins. The problem was, it was only a temporary fix to the problem of our sin. The sacrifices offered at the tabernacle had to be offered day after day, year after year. They were only a shadow and type of the ultimate sacrifice that would be made that would once and for all save us from our sins. That's what we need to see as we read Exodus and as we study the Law: **The Law, the tabernacle and the sacrifices all foreshadow and point to Jesus.**

The video pointed out that the book of Exodus ends with Moses unable to enter the tabernacle and the presence of God. Not even Moses was good enough to enter the presence of God without a sacrifice being offered, sins being forgiven, atonement being made.

Moses couldn't enter God presence and neither can we, apart from a sacrifice, but for us it is no longer the sacrifice of a sheep or a goat, but the ultimate sacrifice, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. You see it's the law that brings us to that place where we recognize our sin and our sinfulness and we realize we can't enter his holy presence apart from trusting in His sacrifice. The bible says, **"So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith."** Galatians 3:24 The law led us to realize we are law breakers. We aren't holy. We've sinned and have to bear the penalty and unfortunately, from the beginning the penalty for sin has been death. "The soul that sins must die" the bible says. For the Israelites in the wilderness God said, **"The life of a creature is in the blood and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life."**

Leviticus 17:11 The blood of those animals that gave atonement was pointing to the ultimate and complete sacrifice of Jesus. Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins the bible says, but through the blood of Christ, offered on Calvary, his blood cleanses us from sin and cleanses our conscience from choices that lead to sin. His cleansing enables us to live a life pleasing to God. It's his sacrifice alone that can make us holy. The bible says, **“We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” Hebrew 10:10** What do we do? Believe it! Believe that by his sacrifice your sins can be forgiven. Believe and ask him to save you and forgive you.

Can you picture yourself with the people of God, somewhere out in the wilderness near Mt. Sinai. Moses has given 613 laws and you're thinking, "I'm in trouble. I've broken half of those on the first day out. I've sinned and this holy God that causes the mountain to rumble and quake when he speaks, he isn't going to be happy with me breaking his laws. I'm doomed!" Then Moses says, "Don't be afraid. God has provided a means of atonement, a way for your sins to be forgiven, a way for you to be made clean and whole again. God has provided a perfect sacrifice, the lamb of God that takes away our sins. Believe him and accept his provision, his salvation. Believe upon Jesus. Tell him, "I believe you took my place. Your blood was shed for my sins. I believe and I ask you to forgive me."

That's what the giving of the law is all about for us. We've broken his laws, but provision has been made for our salvation. As John the Baptist said, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." Repent and receive his forgiveness today and you will have eternal life.