

# “HOW TO READ THE LAW”

**Tie-In:** The overall focus of Part 2 is how to understand to use the Bible to guide your life, and how to use the Bible as a sword. The Law is the first of four main sections of the Bible we will be exploring. We may be tempted to ignore the Law as irrelevant, but the Law guides us in our life three ways: it tells us who we are, it tells us who God is, and it guides us to the need to follow after Jesus.

**Takeaway:** In this session, we learn that the Law was written in order to help a nation of slaves understand who they are, who their God is, and what promises God has promised their ancestors. Because of Jesus, we are brought into this same story as spiritual children of Abraham, and by reading the Law we better understand the promises God makes to Abraham's children. Moreover, by reading the Law, we better know the heart of the God who gave it. While some laws in the Law no longer apply to us, our God still has high standards for human behaviour we cannot reach by ourselves, which is why the best way to fulfill the Law is to follow after Jesus, the only one who fulfilled it perfectly by truly loving God and loving others.

## 1 WHAT IS THE LAW?

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### 1 INTRODUCTION

- The Law, or the Pentateuch, refers to the first five books of the Bible.
- Context:
  - Author: Moses
  - Timeline: From creation up to the death of Moses
- Purpose:
  - Israel began as slaves in Egypt.
  - They were no longer slaves, they were free people, they were also a people God had personally chosen. But they still had the mentality of slaves.
  - **God wants to turn these former slaves into a nation.**
  - Israel now also exists alongside other people groups with their own gods.
- **God wants to separate Israel, His people, from both their past as slaves and from every other people-group.**

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- In the Law, God gives:
  1. **Identity:** Through the Law, God says: “You are not just a nation of slaves, *this* is who you are
    - Tracing their history from creation, through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob
  2. **A Law:** They don’t know what to do to set them apart as a nation
- When you read the Law, see how each chapter either builds Israel’s identity or their law

### 1 IDENTITY

- The Law answers two questions about Israel’s identity and makes one claim.
  1. Who is God?
  2. Who are we?
    - Are we more than slaves?
    - Who are we descended from? What promises have we inherited from our ancestors?
- **The claim: Israel is the heir to promises God made to their ancestors**
- Promise 1:

#### **GENESIS 3:14-15 (NIV)**

*14 So the Lord God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, “Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life.*

*15 And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”*

- One day, the family of Abraham will give birth to someone who will crush the serpent’s head and overcome the evil that has led humanity into its current condition.

#### **GENESIS 12:1-3 (NIV)**

*14 The Lord had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.*

*2 “I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.*

*3 I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”*

- One day, this nation of slaves, because they are descended from Abraham, will bless the entire world.

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- This is an unconditional promise, meaning Israel did not have to do anything to receive it. God would do it out of His own character.
- God fulfills His promises.
- What does this mean for us non-Jewish people reading the Law today?

### **MATTHEW 3:9 (NIV)**

*And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.*

- John the Baptist is rocking the boat here and challenging the assumptions of the Jewish people. What does it mean to be a child of Abraham?
- God's intent was never to bless one people alone.

### **MATTHEW 3:9 (NIV)**

*If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*

- In Christ, we become heirs to God's promise to Abraham that his family would become a blessing to the entire world.
- **Every promise God makes to Abraham's family is a promise that we have a claim to because Christ has adopted us into the story of Abraham.**
- For an example of these blessings and promises we have a claim to, read Deuteronomy 32.

## 2 THE LAW

- Illustration: Imagine you overseeing Person A make a contract with Person B. The contract states that if B mows A's lawn, trims the trees, waters the flowers, and takes care of the weeds within an hour, A will give B a hundred dollars.
- If you tried to do everything in the contract and show up on A's door, A will not give you a hundred dollars, because the contract was not with you.
- **The laws contained within the Law are similar: the contract was made between God and Israel, not between God and all people.**
  - The Law is a contract with 613 provisions, or 613 commandments.
- So how should Christians read the Law?
- What can you learn from a contract not made for you?
  - **You can learn about the character and personality of the contract-giver.** If the contract-giver is willing to pay one hundred dollars for an hour of work, then you could know they are a generous person.
  - **By reading the Law, we can further understand the character of God.**
  - We learn that He has high standards for human behaviour, that He wants us to be able to relate to Him despite our sinfulness, etc.

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- This is why it is still important to read the Law as Christians, because it reveals the character of God.

## 2 TYPES OF LAWS

- When you read the Law, keep in mind there are different types of laws, not all of which are applicable to us.

### 1. Ceremonial Law

- These are offerings to make people right with God and set Israel apart from other nations.
- E.g. sin offerings, purity rituals
- **The ceremonial law is fulfilled by the cross, and we are not bound by it.**
- Jesus's sacrifice makes us right with God, and now we are set apart from others through the work of the Holy Spirit and by love.

### 2. Civil Law

- These are laws that help Israel function as a theocratic nation under God
- E.g. punishments for crimes, taxes and tithes, etc.
- **We are not bound by these, as we do not live in a society ruled directly by God.**
- Therefore, we cannot judge people by the civil laws, because that is not their purpose.
- Still, the civil law reveals the heart of God towards different sins, towards the poor and the marginalized.

### 3. Moral Law

- These include the Ten Commandments, aside from the Sabbath day.
- The moral law still applies to us today, because God's views on what is moral do not change between people groups.
- **In fact, when Jesus came, He elevated the moral law for Christians.**
  - **He told His followers that in order to truly fulfill the moral law, it was not just a matter of action, but a matter of attitude and a matter of the heart.**
  - To Jesus, we do not only fulfill the commandment "Do not murder" by not murdering each other, but by not hating each other in the first place, by not getting angry, by not dehumanizing others.
  - To Jesus, we do not only fulfill the commandment "Do not commit adultery" by not sleeping with somebody else's spouse, but by not looking upon other people with lust in the first place. Jesus said that anybody who undresses another person in their mind has already committed adultery of the heart.

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- **To Jesus, the moral law does not only concern our actions, but where these actions come from in our heart.**

## 2 WHAT DO WE DO?

- **Then, with the 613 commandments, and the elevated moral law, we can't do this on our own.**
  - We need Jesus.
- What Jesus did for us in His life and on the cross is this:
  - He takes this contract with 613 terms, e.g. mows the lawn, trims the trees, waters the flowers, takes care of the weeds, and 609 other things, and goes up to the contract-maker in our place.
  - Jesus knows what the contract-maker wanted, because the contract-maker is His father.
  - He shows the contract-maker that He fulfilled the terms of the contract in our place and receives the reward for us.
  - Jesus shows us how it's done, and if we follow in His footsteps, we learn how to please the contract-maker too, now not because we want a reward (because Jesus has already received the reward for us), but because Jesus has showed us that taking care of the lawn is important.
- We have two choices: either fulfill the Law on our own, or have faith that Jesus in His grace has fulfilled it in our place.
- Jesus fulfilled not just the law, but the original intent of the Law: to love God and love others well.
- **This is why we study the Law: because the Law points to the one who can fulfill it.**
  - We cannot condemn others using the Law, because we ourselves have failed if we are measured by the Law. If we are not being measured by the Law, then we cannot measure others by it either.
  - **Instead, we can use the Law to introduce them to Christ, to point to the one who knew the heart of God and loved others perfectly. Only by following Him do we have the hope of fulfilling the intent of the Law.**