

## Moses and the Law

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### A. Introduction

1. Jacob's descendants lived in Egypt for 430 years (possibly 1700 –1270 BC). Over that period their numbers multiplied until they posed an economic and military threat to Egypt. To counteract this, the Egyptians subjected them to forced labour, building the cities of Pithom and Raamses.
2. Because the rigours of slavery did not curtail the Hebrew population growth, the Egyptians sought to impose on them the draconian birth-control method of male infanticide (Exodus 1:15-22). This was another satanic attempt to destroy the Seed.
3. This sets the scene for the advent of Moses, and the birth of a pilgrim nation. It presents to us a vivid example of redemption history – and an analogy of our own salvation in Christ (1 Corinthians 10:1-11).

### B. The electing love of God

1. Why should God bother with an insignificant slave people? The key that unlocks the mystery of election is simply unconditional love (Deuteronomy 7:6-11). It is a matter of the heart, not the head.
2. Yet electing love is not irrational sentiment. God's goal is the salvation of the world; that is, to call people out of every nation to love and serve him. He plans to reconcile all things in his Son and to recreate the entire cosmos, no less (Colossians 1:19-20).
3. Five chosen agencies will effect the plan: The Seed of the woman in Eden; the line of the patriarchs; the nation of Israel; the incarnation of Christ; the church of the firstborn.

### C. The cry for deliverance

1. So great was the hardship of the Hebrews that they cried to God for deliverance (Exodus 2:23). God remembered his promise to the patriarchs and the covenant that he had made with Abraham and his descendants (Genesis 15:13-16; 50:24-25; Ex 2:24-25).
2. Yet nothing happened overnight! Moses is about eighty years of age at the time of the burning bush experience, when God tells him that he is going to intervene on behalf of his people (Exodus 3:7-10). There are lessons to be learned here!
3. The Hebrews' deliverance is God's initiative, revealed at the sign of the burning bush (Exodus 3:8-10) and dramatically demonstrated in Moses' confrontation with pharaoh.
4. God's instrument is a humble man named Moses, even though he was misunderstood and slandered out of jealousy (Numbers 12:1-3). God hasn't changed in his choice of instruments, nor in what he allows them to go through!

## D. The Exodus

1. No reliable scholarship has been able accurately to determine the date of the Exodus. It has proved impossible to reconcile biblical, historical records and archaeological evidence in any satisfactory manner.
2. However, the historic fact remains, God brought his people out of Egypt by a series of powerful acts. These include:
  - a. raising up Moses
  - b. sending plagues on Egypt: blood, frogs, lice, flies, animal disease, boils, hail, locusts, darkness, death.
  - c. the Passover
  - d. the exodus through the Sea of Reeds (mistranslated Red Sea).
3. So important was the Exodus that in ceremonies and psalms the people for ever recalled God's mighty acts (Exodus 13:3; Psalm 136:10-16), incidentally laying the foundation for the Lord's Supper. The Passover stressed the importance of a sacrificial lamb, pointing the way to redemption through the shed blood of Christ (1 Corinthians 5:7).
4. The nation of Israel was forged in the Sinai wilderness. There they received the Law and entered the covenant that was to define them as a theocracy. Religion permeated every aspect of the nation's life, and the Tabernacle in the midst of the camp ensured that nobody could forget the reality of God's presence.
5. Manna, quails and water were all miraculously supplied by God, and neither shoes nor clothes wore out for forty years, and this for some 2.5 million people!

## E. Moses, the man of God

1. Moses stands as one of the greatest men who ever lived. Honoured by Jews, Christians and Muslims alike, his books are foundational to Western and Middle Eastern civilisation.
2. The five books of Moses
  - a. Genesis: Records the origins of history and traces the patriarchal dynasty from Noah to Joseph.
  - b. Exodus: Records the birth of the covenant nation through blood, water and the Spirit, and the giving of the Law.
  - c. Leviticus: Records how to worship through sacrifice, and how to live as a holy people.
  - d. Numbers: Records the wilderness wanderings of an unbelieving generation.
  - e. Deuteronomy: Records Moses sermons to a new generation on the threshold of the promised land.
6. As a law-giver, he is the federal head of a spiritual dynasty that was not surpassed until the coming of Christ (Hebrews 3:1-6). In Moses we have the essence of what it means to be an old covenant person anticipating the new covenant.

7. As a leader, he founded the nation and brought it to the brink of entering Canaan, although because of an act of angry unbelief he was not permitted to enter himself.
8. As a prophet he anticipated Christ (Acts 7:37). He established the priesthood and the entire sacrificial system that pointed the way to Jesus' coming. Though he never entered the promised land during his lifetime, we find him there on the Mount of Transfiguration with Jesus and Elijah (Matthew 17:3).

## F. The covenant of the Law

1. Three months out of Egypt, at Mt. Sinai God gave the nation a constitution (the Law) in the form of a covenant (Exodus 19:1-8). Under this constitution there was no division between the sacred and the secular – the Law addressed every aspect of life (morality, family, wealth, commerce, law and order, war, property, worship, education, health, etc.). It expressed the total government of God. Israel became a theocracy.
2. The law is summed up in the statutes known as the Ten Commandments.
  - a. However, most of what is written is case law: judgements made by Moses and his aides to answer the questions brought to him by the people (Exodus 18:13-26).
  - b. The law is eminently practical, but does not provide us with a systematic set of rules. Rather, it illustrates how to apply the principles of the Ten Commandments.
  - c. This is the basis for true justice, as opposed to arbitrary rules made up by politicians or attempts to legislate for every eventuality. There are two choices for legislators: You have nothing except what the law permits; or, you have everything except what the law restricts. The Pharisees, by making endless rules, defeated the free grace principle of the Law (Matthew 23:23).
  - d. The Ten Commandment are:
    - i. You shall have no other gods. *The Big Guy rules. OK.*
    - ii. You shall not worship idols. *Animal freaks are anoraks. Stick with the Big Guy and your team wins.*
    - iii. You shall not blaspheme. *Respect. Don't mouth off about the Big Guy.*
    - iv. Keep the Sabbath day holy. *Everyone take Saturday off to watch football.*
    - v. Honour your parents. *Look after the old folks or you won't get to be one.*
    - vi. You shall not murder. *Don't drive when you're smashed, stick knives in people or work for psycho presidents.*
    - vii. You shall not commit adultery. *Don't mess about with someone else's spouse.*
    - viii. You shall not steal. *If you ain't paid for it, put it back.*
    - ix. You shall not tell lies. *Don't drop anyone in the doodah by telling lies.*
    - x. You shall not covet. *Play with your own toys. Leave other people's alone.*

3. The entire Law was summed up by Jesus as, *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind... You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets* – Matthew 22:36-40 (Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18).
4. Jesus never came to abolish the Law but to fill-it-full, i.e. to give its heart meaning. The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) is his great exposition of this principle. In doing so Jesus transcended the law with the greater principle of grace and truth (John 1:17).
5. The law has five main purposes:
  - a. To provide a basis for national identity (Exodus 19:5-6).
  - b. To define sin and justice – morally, spiritually and nationally (Romans 5:13).
  - c. To protect the health and survival of the nation – (Exodus 15:25-27).
  - d. To expose human spiritual impotence (Galatians 2:16; James 2:10).
  - e. To bring us to Christ (Galatians 3:23-25).
6. We misuse the Law when we attempt to keep it as an external means of self-justification, i.e. salvation by our own merits. We also misuse the Law when we make it irrelevant to salvation falsely claiming that it is superseded by grace, i.e. we live as we please and assume that God always lets us off.
7. The proper use of the Law:
  - a. Christ, in himself, fulfilled all aspects of the Law perfectly and so became the author of salvation (Hebrews 2:10-12).
  - b. We are saved apart from the works of the Law, by grace, through faith in him (Ephesians 2:8-9).
  - c. New birth so changes our inner nature that we now delight in the Law of God as Christ does. This is now written on our hearts in 'Christ-fulfilling' terms (Ezekiel 36:26-27; Psalm 40:6-8).
  - d. The Bible and the Spirit educate our minds and motivate our wills to obey the Law as an expression of living faith in the face of temptations from the world, the flesh and the devil (Romans 13:8-14; Ephesians 2:10).
  - e. This is the process called sanctification, whereby God's people demonstrate the reality of their election.

## G. Wilderness wanderings

1. No one is certain regarding the location of Mount Sinai, yet it is obvious that this is a time of great volcanic activity and Sinai is a volcano. Little wonder the people were terrified!
2. God grants deliverance to a rebellious nation, as seen in the sin of the golden calf (Exodus 32:9; Deuteronomy 9:6). The people bellyached, literally and metaphorically. (See Phil 3:18-19) That rebellion was based on unbelief, as tragically shown when they spy out the land (Numbers 13-14; Hebrews 3:7-19). Their unbelief commits them to forty futile years in the wilderness, until all those over twenty years of age apart from Joshua and Caleb have died. They might have entered the promised land within two months.

3. The map gives some options as to their possible route. Certainly God led them and provided them with quails and manna, and plague because of their unbelief. This became a repeated pattern: complaining, provision and judgement, and Moses praying for mercy.
4. Moses faced rebellion, water shortages, earthquakes, snakebites, enemy attacks, false prophets, sexual orgies, idol worship, and death. Even he succumbed to the sin of complaining and forfeited entry into the land.
5. Yet God was with the people, manifesting his presence in the Tabernacle and the pillars of cloud by day and fire by night. In spite of the ingratitude of the people he remained faithful to the covenant and after forty years a purified people were ready for its fulfilment.

#### F. Questions for reflection

1. If the Law permeated every aspect of Israel's existence, how much does your faith in Christ do the same for you?
2. How helpful is it to quote Israel's case history law when it comes to current moral issues?
3. What does the law written upon the heart mean for you and how do you express that?

