



UNDERSTANDING SCRIPTURE

CHRISTIAN LIFE CENTER
DISCIPLESHIP INSTITUTE

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THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS

Matthew 22:35-40 *Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."*

THE LAW, GOD'S COVENANT WITH MAN

1. The Old Testament Law was God's three-fold Covenant with His people. In it He established the way they were to worship Him, the ethics governing community life, and the boundaries in regard to the relationship with cultures around them.
 - A. A covenant is an agreement between two people or two groups that involves promises on the part of each to the other. Human covenants were either between equals or between a superior and an inferior. The latter is certainly the case with God's Covenant.
 - B. The covenant of salt was in practice throughout Old Testament times.
 - 2 Chronicles 13:4-5 *Then Abijah stood on Mount Zemaraim, which is in the mountains of Ephraim, and said, "Hear me, Jeroboam and all Israel: Should you not know that the LORD God of Israel gave the dominion over Israel to David forever, to him and his sons, by a covenant of salt?"*
 - Salt is considered to be the purest of all earthly materials and is used in many religious ceremonies as a symbol of purity. During Old Testament times, agreements and promises were sealed by salt covenants. Each man would take salt from his pouch and place it in the pouch of the other. Their agreement could not be broken unless they could each retrieve their own grains of salt.
2. The Law was given through Moses, who received the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. Read Exodus 19 and 20. They are also seen in Deuteronomy 5:6-21.
 - A. Preamble in Exodus 19:3-6.
 - B. Stipulations or the commandments, Exodus 20:1-17.
 - C. Blessings in Deuteronomy 28:1-14.



3. The Law is also referred to as the Pentateuch, or the book of the Law. The Commandments themselves are found almost entirely and four of the five books called "The Law," Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. As well, the Law included the 600 plus specific Commandments the Israelites were expected to keep as evidence of their loyalty to God.
4. The Old Testament Law was a generous gift to Israel, bringing much blessing when obeyed. It is not a grouping of annoying regulations limiting people's freedom.

THE PURPOSE OF THE LAW

1. The Law was not given to bring victory over sin but to lead us to Christ, who would empower us by His Spirit to conquer sin.
 - A. Galatians 3:24-25 *So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.*
2. Christ did not do away with the Law but fulfilled it; respected and loved it, and taught its deeper meaning.
 - A. Matthew 5:17-48 *...Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them....*
3. Although Grace is provided for those who realize their sin, the Law was made for the lawless.
 - A. 1 Timothy 1:8-11 *We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. We also know that law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers--and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.*
4. The Law is still for today. The only difference is that now the Spirit of God enables us to live it out.
 - A. Romans 8:1-4 *There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us...*

THE CHRISTIAN AND THE LAW

Guidelines for understanding the relationship of the Christian to the Old Testament Law.

1. All of the Old Testament Law is still the Word of God *for* us even though it may not be the command of God *to* us.

2. The two kinds of Old Covenant Laws that have not been renewed in the New Testament were the Israelites' civil laws — laws having to do with Israel and the lives of its peoples — and the laws pertaining to Israel's worship and ceremonial regulations.
 - A. When a conflict arose about circumcision and abiding by certain elements of the Law in Acts 15:22-29, the elders in Jerusalem wrote a letter to clarify this issue. However, even that was somewhat tied to the customs of their day and distancing themselves from pagan practices.
3. Part of the Old Covenant is definitely renewed in the New Covenant. Jesus clearly summarized this in Matthew 22:35-40 where He condensed the Law into two specific categories: our relationship with God and our relationship with people. This includes the entire Ten Commandments, since they are quoted in different ways in the New Testament and still binding on us today.
4. Even though the Law represented God's justice and high standards in the Old Testament, we must not exclude His love and mercy as equal to the severity of the standards.
 - A. The New Testament goes a step further in Romans 5:20-21. The context is that sin brought death but for those who receive Christ's sacrifice on the cross, grace was greater in that it is eternal!
5. As a Christian we are to see the Old Testament Law as a paradigm providing examples of expected behavior. The essence of the Law, the Ten Commandments and the two chief laws (Matthew 22:35-40), are enforced in the Prophets and renewed in the New Testament.

THE PROPHETS

1. There are four major prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and 12 minor prophets, the final 12 books of the Old Testament. These were written in ancient Israel between 760 and 460 BC and contain a large variety of messages from God. Prophets such as Elijah and Elisha were written about but did not have their own writings.
2. We must understand that the prophetic books are among the most difficult parts of the Bible to interpret or understand due to their function (purpose) and form (style).
3. As well, to most people the word prophecy means foretelling or predicting the future and what is to come. Problems arise when people use the prophetic books for predictions for issues of today. The prophets were primarily spokespersons for God *to* their own contemporaries.
4. The prophets were Covenant enforcement mediators. The blessings were announced with a warning: if Israel does not obey God's law, the blessings will cease. (Deuteronomy 28).
5. Although the prophets did predict future events, it was primarily for the people of their day which is now past. It spoke of coming judgment or salvation in the immediate future of Israel not necessarily our own future. Although some prophecies were set against the backdrop of greater eschatological futures they sometimes appear to blend.



6. Many of the prophecies were collections of spoken oracles not always presented in the original chronological sequence and often without hints as to where one ends and another begins.

INTERPRETING THE PROPHETS AND PROPHECY

1. **Understand the passage in terms of history, context and literal meaning.** Use the same rules of context. However, understand that prophecies were not always in chronological order.
2. **Note exactly to what and to whom the passage is referencing.**
 - A. Is the prophecy foretelling the future of the people being addressed? What is their response and what are the consequences? Or is the prophet speaking a living message from God for the hour?
3. **Distinguish between direct and typological prophecies.**
 - A. Direct — A prophecy that will be fulfilled in a very real way either in the Old or New Testament. Micah prophesied that Christ would be born in Bethlehem and we see the actual fulfillment in Matthew 2:5-6.
 - B. Typological — A prophecy that uses a type or picture to illustrate or proclaim God's Truth. This is seen in Zechariah 11:12-13 as he represents a shepherd for God's people who is "bought off." Matthew uses this reference in Matthew 26:15 concerning the money paid to Judas for betraying Christ.
4. **Apocalyptic prophecies are difficult to interpret.** They are usually describing a dark reality with a bright ending and must follow the basic rules for interpreting figurative language.
5. **God's ultimate revelation in Christ colors all earlier revelations.**
 - A. John 5:39 *You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me.*
 - B. Hebrews 1:1-4 *God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things...*

CONCLUSION

1. We are still bound, however, to the basic principle, "if you will... Then I will..." For those who obey the stipulations of the New Covenant (loving God and loving our neighbor), the final and eternal result will be blessing, even though the reality of this world is not always guaranteed to be encouraging. For those who disobey, the result is clearly outlined in Deuteronomy 28.
2. What God wanted from Israel is basically what He wants from us: to walk with Him and enjoy a life filled with the blessings that result from obedience to His commands. The prophets can serve as reminders to us of God's zeal to fulfill His Covenant with us.