



Pentateuch

THE PENTATEUCH

EXODUS

Date of the Exodus: Between 1446 BC and 1280 BC.
We don't really know and it doesn't really matter.

God raised up Moses,
Prepared him for leadership,
“Remembered” His covenant.

There are many details in the descriptions of Egypt, the allusions to Egyptian culture and religion, and the construction of the Ark and Tabernacle, that would have been known by a noble Egyptian. **Moses was the original author of Exodus.**

EMPHASES IN THE BOOK OF EXODUS ...

1. Yahweh's miraculous rescue of Israel from Egypt through Moses.
2. Covenant Law given at Mount Sinai.
3. The Tabernacle as the place of God's Presence and the one place for Israel's proper worship.
4. Yahweh's revelation of himself and His character.
5. Israel's tendency to complain and rebel against God.
6. God's judgment and mercy toward His People when they rebel.

MAJOR THEMES OF EXODUS

OVERARCHING THEME: **THE GLORY OF GOD**

1. **THE EXODUS** – God’s miraculous deliverance of His People from slavery.
2. **THE RETURN OF THE PRESENCE** – The return of God’s Presence as the mark distinguishing Israel as God’s People.
2. **THE GIFT OF THE LAW** – The giving of the Law as God’s means of establishing His covenant with Israel.

1. **THE EXODUS – God’s miraculous deliverance of His People from slavery.**

The story of God “hearing” Israel’s cry, seeing their hopeless situation, “remembering” His covenant, raising up Moses, and God’s “holy war” victory over all opposition from Pharaoh and Egypt’s gods in delivering Israel out of bondage that Israel might worship Him.

“The Passover and the Exodus were the two stages of God’s intervention that defined Israel.”

The Passover was deliverance from death to life for Israel – corporate salvation. The Lamb and the event pointed to Christ the Lamb of God, who has fulfilled and transformed the event and the meal.

- 2. THE RETURN OF THE PRESENCE** – The return of God’s Presence as the mark distinguishing Israel as God’s People, different than all the other peoples of the earth. The divine Presence, lost in Eden, returns as the central reality of Israel’s existence. (Exodus 3 and 19)

3. THE GIFT OF THE LAW – The giving of the Law as God’s means of establishing His covenant with Israel. (Exodus 20, 21-24)

This first giving of the Law focuses on Israel’s relationship with Yahweh, and the requirement to reflect God’s character in their relationships with one another.

The continuing interaction of the Bible with the worldview, culture, and literature of the ANE, in this case Egypt in particular, is explicitly evident in Exodus. This is especially seen in the stories of the plagues and the exodus through the sea.

THE PLAGUES

Again, while the events should be regarded as actual historical events, the story is told creatively, using literary conventions to convey the true theological meaning of the plague events.

They are grouped in 3's, with the first 2 of each group preceded by a warning and the 3rd without warning. Then came the 10th plague.

The plagues demonstrated God's power over Egyptian gods and the forces of nature.

These are two of the primary ways of understanding or explaining the plagues:

1. The Plagues show Yahweh's defeat of the gods of Egypt.
2. The Plagues show Yahweh's absolute power over creation and over Egypt (His enemy, the oppressor of His people, and the Empire(s) of this world.).

THE PLAGUES and the GODS OF EGYPT

One perspective sees the plagues as Yahweh's judgment on the whole Egyptian pantheon by defeating a few particular gods of the pantheon.

[Numbers 33:4](#) – The Egyptians buried those who had died by the tenth plague, by which plague “the Lord executed judgments against *their gods*.”

Associations of Plagues with Egyptian gods ...

1. [The plague of blood](#) - directed against the god **Khnum**, creator of water and life; or against **Hapi**, the Nile god; or against **Osiris**, whose bloodstream was the Nile.

THE PLAGUES and the GODS OF EGYPT

2. The plague of frogs - directed against **Heket**, a goddess of childbirth who was represented as a frog.
5. The plague against cattle - might have been directed against **Hathor**, the mother and sky goddess, represented in the form of a cow; or against **Apis**, symbol of fertility represented as a bull.
7. The plague of hail, and ...
8. The plague of locusts - directed against **Seth**, who manifests himself in wind and storms; and/or against **Isis**, goddess of life, who grinds, spins flax and weaves cloth; or against **Min**, who was worshiped as a god of fertility and vegetation and as a protector of crops.

THE PLAGUES and the GODS OF EGYPT

9. The Plague of Darkness - could have been directed against various deities associated with the sun—**Amon-Re, Aten, Atum or Horus**.
10. The Death of the Firstborn - death of the firstborn (No. 10) was directed against the patron deity of Pharaoh, and the judge of the dead, **Osiris**.

Problems:

1. Plagues 3, 4, and 6 ... lice, flies, and boils cannot easily be associated with prominent Egyptian gods.
2. These gods come from widely different times and places in Egypt. Were they well known at the time of the Exodus?

THE PLAGUES and the DE-CREATION OF EGYPT

Another perspective sees the plagues as a progressive decreation of Egypt: the good order of Egypt is brought down into chaos.

- 1. The plague of blood** – the “gatherings of water” over which Aaron held his staff is the same word (mikveh) used for the gathered together waters God called “seas” at creation.
- 2. Plagues 2, 3, and 4** – Frogs, lice, and flies – of water, earth, and air. The Nile swarmed with frogs which then covered the land. The words and sequence correspond with the Genesis creation account. Here, the swarming creatures are out of control, and are bad not good. God is able to “de-create” as well as to create.

THE PLAGUES and the DE-CREATION OF EGYPT

3. The fifth plague affected only field animals. The domestic animals which in creation God had given to humans were now taken from the Egyptians.
4. The sixth plague, boils, would make Egypt's priests unclean, unable to minister. Egyptian religion would collapse.
5. "Hail ... locusts" – would destroy another part of creation, vegetation. This explicitly reverses another part of creation.
6. The plague of darkness – at creation God had brought light to dispel the darkness. Now the reverse is true.

THE PLAGUES and the DE-CREATION OF EGYPT

7. The Death of the Firstborn is forerunner to the death of all the Egyptians at the Red Sea. Instead of creating male and female in His image, God first destroys the firstborn, and at the Red Sea all of Egypt.
8. TEN PLAGUES – Complete, full. “The ten divine utterances by which the world was created and ordered.”

In this explicit creation pattern, Israel sees that God not only creates positively, bringing life out of death and order out of chaos, but he also judges and decrees death, de-creating everything, bringing down the good order of Egypt into chaos.

EXODUS 14 - THE DETHRONEMENT OF AMON-RA

In the Exodus, God delivered His people in a very specific manner in order to gain maximum glory for Himself, and to encourage all of His people, throughout the ages. The greatest spiritual powers against us have been dethroned, and we need not fear the empires of this world. And, God still controls the earth, the sea, and the sky.

Yahweh held back the waters of chaos, creating a corridor of dry ground for His People to pass through and to arise as the Image(s) of the True God in this world.

Pharaoh descended into the corridor, Image and Son of Amon-Ra upon the earth, confident that Amon-Ra would again defeat the serpent god of chaos, Apophis, who ruled the abyssal waters. The Sun would rise again upon a well-ordered Egypt!

BUT YAHWEH released the waters, and the might of Egypt was destroyed by the waters of chaos. *God de-created earthly empire, and de-throned all false gods.*

EXODUS 14 - THE DETHRONEMENT OF AMON-RA

That day, a defining day for ALL of God's people forever, the One True God delivered his People with a mighty hand.

On that day, God re-created his People, by wind and water.

In full view of Egypt and Israel, Yahweh dethroned Amon-Ra.

That day, by the **blood of lambs** and **his mighty power**, God redeemed his people Israel, He re-created them by **wind** and **water**, and set them free to follow Him to the Mountain of worship and revelation, to receive again the PRESENCE of God.

That day, Israel was re-created, arising from the water and the earth as the Image(s) of Yahweh, the One True Creator God. They would follow Him to the Presence, and to the Promised Land, the New Eden overflowing with abundance ("milk ... honey"), returning to the Temple Garden of God where He will dwell with them.

The Exodus became the defining moment for God in relation to His creation and His people.

He is the God who ...

1. remembers His covenant,
2. defeats all opposing powers, and
3. graciously sets His people free to worship and serve Him.

The Exodus becomes the pattern for many NT books: Mark, Romans, Revelation, and so forth.

EXODUS 19-24 - THE COVENANT AT SINAI

EXODUS 19 “3 Then Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain and said, “This is what you are to say to the descendants of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: 4 ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. 5 Now **if** you obey me fully **and** keep my covenant, **then** out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, 6 **you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.**’ These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.”

Israel accepted the covenant, God gave them a theophany, the covenant was written down and sealed in a way common in the ANE.

NOTE: This covenant, and the land covenant, were ***conditional***.

NOTE: Where else does God call His People a “**royal priesthood, a holy nation?**”

EXODUS 19-24 - THE COVENANT AT SINAI

EXODUS 20 – THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

EXODUS 21-23 – COLLECTIONS OF LAW

- > Casuistic Laws – case law. Relationships among God’s people.
- > Apodictic Laws – blanket commands or prohibitions.

All land promises made to Israel were conditional on Israel keeping covenant with Yahweh. *If they did not, they would suffer disease, defeat, destruction, deportation, and death.*

The Land belonged to Yahweh. Israel was ONLY a steward, a guest, a vassal.

Leviticus 18 – “**27** for all these things were done by the people who lived in the land before you, and the land became defiled. **28** **And if you defile the land, it will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you.**”

Israel was a New Humanity with a second chance.
The Land was a New Eden with God's Presence.

ALWAYS REMEMBER,
the land promise was **conditional**.
And Israel **was** going to **fail** to keep covenant,
and **would** receive the due penalty.

The Land was a **type** of the whole earth (now) and the New Earth (the New-Heavens-and-New-Earth).

Romans 4:13 “It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the ***world***, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.”

EXODUS 25-40 – THE TABERNACLE and the GOLDEN CALF

The primary emphasis of “kavod / kabod” (glory) is the weightiness of God’s character, from which His power, presence, and light emanate.

THE PENTATEUCH

LEVITICUS

LEVITICUS picks up where Exodus left off.

God's people need more detailed instruction in how to acceptably approach, and live in, His Presence, and how to live in relationship with one another.

LEVITICUS 1-16 – APPROACHING THE HOLY GOD

This material tells how people who have violated the covenant can be reconciled to God, restore broken fellowship, and continue to enjoy God's Presence.

LEVITICUS 17-27 – LIVING THE HOLY LIFE

This material describes holiness in the lives of God's people who are in relationship with Him AND with each other.

Christians and the Old Testament Law

Guidelines for Understanding the Christian's Relationship to the Law

1. The Old Testament Law was a Covenant between Israel and Yahweh, her God.

It is modeled on the ancient suzerainty covenants.

In ancient cultures an all-powerful suzerain (overlord) would generously covenant with a weaker, dependent vassal (servant). The covenant stipulated obligations on both parties – protection and provision for obedience, judgment for disobedience.

God created the Law in a way familiar to the Hebrews, the suzerainty covenants.
(Genre)

It was a binding contract between Israel, the vassal / servant, and Yahweh her Lord.

There are four major collections of laws:

1. The Covenant Code – Exod 20:22-23:33.
2. The Deuteronomic Code – Deut 12-26.
3. The Holiness Code – Lev 17-26.
4. The Priestly Code – Exod 25-32, 34:29, Lev 16, parts of Numbers.

2. The Old Covenant is not our covenant, but we still learn about God, Christ, and redemption.

The Old Testament (covenant) has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Unless an Old Testament law has been restated or renewed, explicitly or implicitly, in the New Testament, it is no longer directly binding on God's people.

Instead, we learn truths about the character of God and the kind of heart attitudes he expects from his people.

Hebrews 8:13 “By calling this covenant “new,” he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.”

The best way to read Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy is through the lens of Christ in the Book of Hebrews. *The old is gone and the new has come. The leitwort or “key word” of Hebrews: better, better, better ... 13x.*

The old was temporary, pointing to Christ and the Church, which are forever.

3. Some stipulations of the Old Covenant have definitely **NOT** been renewed in the New Covenant.

The Law can be grouped into two overarching categories: Israelite civil law, and Israelite ritual law.

a. Israelite civil law ...

These specify various crimes for which one could be arrested and tried in ancient Israel. No one is living today as a citizen of ancient Israel.

b. Israelite ritual law ...

These describe how all the aspects of worship were to be conducted in ancient Israel. All of this pointed forward to Messiah, has now been fulfilled in Him, and will never be applicable to anyone again.

4. Only those *aspects* of the Old Covenant law which are *renewed* in the New Testament are now the “law of Christ” applicable to Christians.

Some *aspects* of the Old Testament *ethical* law are restated in the New Testament and made applicable to Christians.

They derive their continued validity because they are involved in the two major laws of the New Testament:

Matt 22:36-40 36 "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" 37 Jesus replied: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Jesus was restating and renewing two Old Testament ethical laws:

Deut 6:5 “Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.”

Lev 19:18 " 'Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.' ”

Jesus excerpts certain aspects of some Old Covenant law, in some cases changes their scope, and makes them applicable to his disciples.

This is seen in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:21-48.

5. The Old Testament Law is still the Word of God *for* us even though it is *not* God's command *to* us.

The whole Bible contains all kinds of laws, commands, prophecies, etc., which God wants us to know *about*, but which are *not* directed *toward us personally*, and *not* directed *toward* the *Church* under the New Covenant.

- strike the rock with your staff ...
- stone the rebellious child ...
- go tell John what you see and hear ...
- take handkerchiefs to the sick ...

5. The Old Testament Law is still the Word of God *for* us even though it is *not* God's command *to* us. ... (continued) ...

EXAMPLE:

The blessings and curses associated with keeping or breaking the Law.
(Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 28)

**This was a generalized encouragement and warning, applicable to
CORPORATE Israel IN the Land. These were NOT promises to
INDIVIDUAL Israelites, not even in the Land during the Old Covenant.**

AND, they are NOT promises to Christians today!!

(See suzerainty treaties in Deuteronomy)

The Role of the Law in Israel and in The Bible

The Law did *not* save Israel. God saved Israel!

The role of the Law, in Israel and in the whole Bible, was to show humanity the transcendent holiness of God,

- what God required of humans in order to live perfectly before him, and
- *how impossible it was for any person to ever fulfill this Law.*

This is because the written Law is not exhaustive or comprehensive.

The Law is merely paradigmatic – it sets forth examples of how we should live, teaching us that we must always live this way in every imaginable similar situation.

KINDS OF LAW

1. Apodictic Law – Laws that directly command Israel to do or do not. They are generally applicable, telling Israel the kinds of things they must do or must not do to fulfill their covenant with God.

Remember, the Law merely sets forth examples or samples of what should be done.
For example ...

Lev 19:9-14

- 9 " 'When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. 10 Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the LORD your God. 13 " 'Do not defraud your neighbor or rob him. Do not hold back the wages of a hired man overnight.
- 14 " 'Do not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block in front of the blind, but fear your God. I am the LORD.'"

Consider these questions:

1. Does this mean that if you only raised figs or olives or goats, you were completely exempt from this gleaning law?
2. Does this mean that you could still abuse people with other kinds of handicaps or weaknesses?

Obviously, the law is not (and not intended to be) complete or comprehensive.

It is just as much a sin to do – or fail to do – unnamed things of the same kind as it is the named things.

The Law was meant as a general guide, **not** a detailed description. It is more like a Constitution than like all the federal / state statutes.

Therefore, while the Law is limited in letter, it is *comprehensive in spirit*.

No one can ever perfectly keep so exhaustive a law before a perfect, all-powerful Lord!

Romans 8:1-11

Romans 3:20 “Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.”

(Kinds of Law ...)

2. Casuistic Law

Case-by-case law; or case law.

This law is conditional – **it only applies when your situation fits the case it is describing.**

None of the case law is renewed in the New Covenant.

We can still learn things about God and his plans for redemption.

Deut 15:12-17 - Is God endorsing slavery? Slavery of all kinds in all times?

Deut 15:12-17 “12 If a fellow Hebrew, a man or a woman, sells himself to you and serves you six years, in the seventh year you must let him go free. 13 And when you release him, do not send him away empty-handed. 14 Supply him liberally from your flock, your threshing floor and your winepress. Give to him as the LORD your God has blessed you. 15 Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you. That is why I give you this command today. 16 But if your servant says to you, "I do not want to leave you," because he loves you and your family and is well off with you, 17 then take an awl and push it through his ear lobe into the door, and he will become your servant for life. Do the same for your maidservant.”

This law only applies if ...

1. You are an Israelite with at least one slave; and,
2. Your slave's time of enslavement is over; and,
3. Your slave does, or does not, wish to remain as your slave voluntarily.

If you are not an Israelite, living in ancient Israel, and do not have slaves, then the law does NOT apply to you.

BUT, Christians can learn some principles about God and his dealings with humanity.

We learn ...

1. God regulated slavery in ancient Israel so that it was limited, and it was not cruel or harsh. The slavery permitted then can never be used to justify any kind of slavery today, for Christians are a family in Christ (Philemon).
2. God loves slaves. This was seen in the regulations protecting them, and in the generosity required toward them when they were freed after 6 years.
3. In ancient Israel, slavery could often be practiced in such a fashion that slaves were actually better off as slaves than free (because of the economic conditions of the time).
4. The many restrictions prevented masters from owning slaves completely, like property.

5. We see that God required fairness, treating even slaves with respect as human beings, so much so that they might desire to stay with the family forever.
6. We learn that both free and temporarily enslaved Israelites were all redeemed by God, belonged to God, and should ultimately be free.
7. Because of REDEMPTION, there is ultimately to be only one Master for all of God's People – the LORD.

(Kinds of Law)

3. Legal Series

Apodictic laws usually occur in series.

The Ten Commandments are series apodictic law (Exd 20).

Casuistic laws (case law) is usually organized in topical groups.

In the Covenant Book in Exodus ...

- a. Servants – Exd 21:2-11.
- b. Bodily injuries – 21:18-32.
- c. Property losses – 22:1-15.

(Kinds of Law)

4. Legal Instruction

There are two long instruction genres.

- a. Priestly instruction – instructs priests in professional ritual matters. Lev 6-7, 21.
 - b. Ritual lay instruction – instructs laypeople about how to perform rituals properly. Lev 1-5.
-

THE OLD TESTAMENT and OTHER ANCIENT LAW CODES

The Law of Moses was written around 1440 B.C. (depending on the date of the Exodus).

There were other ancient law codes before this.

1. The Laws of Eshnunna – an Akkadian law code from around 1800 B.C.

A nobleman is punished ...

- for killing a nobleman's slave girl ... two slave girls;
- for killing a nobleman's wife or child ... death;

2. The Law Code of Hammurabi – a famous Babylonian king, from around 1726 B.C.

A free nobleman is fined for causing the death of ...

- a noble woman's fetus ... 10 silver shekels
- a nobleman's daughter ... must kill his own daughter
- a commoner's fetus ... 5 silver shekels
- a commoner's daughter ... $\frac{1}{2}$ mina of silver
- a nobleman's slave's fetus ... 2 silver shekels
- a nobleman's slave woman ... $\frac{1}{3}$ mina of silver

Note several things about these codes:

1. Class distinctions are built into them.

- a. Only fines are exacted for the deaths of slaves or commoners;
- b. The death penalty is only required for killing another male member of the nobility.

2. Gender distinctions are built into them:

- a. Male nobles are only executed for killing other male members of the nobility;
- b. If a nobleman kills a noblewoman, the perpetrator's daughter is killed, not the perpetrator himself.

The Mosaic Law represents a great advance over previous laws in all surrounding cultures.

1. The prohibition against murder is absolute.

Exodus 20:13 “You shall not murder.”

Exodus 21:12 12 "Anyone who strikes a man and kills him shall surely be put to death.
13 However, if he does not do it intentionally, but God lets it happen, he is to flee to a place I will designate. 14 But if a man schemes and kills another man deliberately, take him away from my altar and put him to death.”

2. The compensation for injury to slaves is far more advanced.

Exodus 21:26-27 26 "If a man hits a manservant or maidservant in the eye and destroys it, he must let the servant go free to compensate for the eye. 27 And if he knocks out the tooth of a manservant or maidservant, he must let the servant go free to compensate for the tooth.

Deut 23:15-16 "15 If a slave has taken refuge with you, do not hand him over to his master. 16 Let him live among you wherever he likes and in whatever town he chooses. Do not oppress him."

3. The treatment of family members is far advanced.

Deut 24:16 "16 Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their fathers; each is to die for his own sin."

The Old Testament Law As A Positive Benefit

The Law could NOT – and was never meant to – provide eternal life or true righteousness before God.

The Law did not save Israel. Yahweh saved Israel!

The role of the Law, in Israel and in the whole Bible, was to

- show humanity the transcendent holiness of God,
- show what God required of humans in order to live perfectly before him, and
- *show how impossible it was for any person to ever fulfill this Law.*

This is because the Law is not exhaustive or comprehensive.

The Law is merely paradigmatic – it sets forth examples of how we should live, *teaching us that we must always live this way in every imaginable similar situation.*

Read properly, the Law was an example of God's mercy and love for his People. Here are some examples ...

I. The Food Laws

Lev 11:4-8 4 " 'There are some that only chew the cud or only have a split hoof, but you must not eat them. The camel, though it chews the cud, does not have a split hoof; it is ceremonially unclean for you. 5 The coney, though it chews the cud, does not have a split hoof; it is unclean for you. 6 The rabbit, though it chews the cud, does not have a split hoof; it is unclean for you. 7 And the pig, though it has a split hoof completely divided, does not chew the cud; it is unclean for you. 8 **You must not eat their meat or touch their carcasses; they are unclean for you.**"

The food laws have a serious protective purpose. The vast majority of prohibited foods were forbidden for one or more serious reasons.

1. They were more likely to carry diseases in the climates of the Sinai and Canaan.
2. They were extremely uneconomical to raise in the unique agrarian contexts of Sinai and Canaan.
3. They were favored in idolatrous sacrifices by the heathen peoples the Israelites were forbidden to copy.
4. Some of the forbidden foods were potentially more allergenic than permitted foods.
Israel's primary source of meat is the least allergenic of all meats – lamb.
5. Clean and unclean foods reminded Israel (and Christians) of their election in God, and their duty to pursue holiness.

Mark 7:17-19 “17 After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable. 18 "Are you so dull?" he asked. "Don't you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him 'unclean'? 19 For it doesn't go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body." (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods "clean.")

Acts 10:9-16 “9 About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. 10 He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. 11 He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. 12 It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air. 13 Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat." 14 "Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean." 15 The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." 16 This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.”

II. Laws About the Shedding of Blood

Exodus 29:10-12 10 "Bring the bull to the front of the Tent of Meeting, and Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on its head. 11 Slaughter it in the LORD's presence at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. 12 Take some of the bull's blood and put it on the horns of the altar with your finger, and pour out the rest of it at the base of the altar."

All such laws about the shedding of blood to atone for sin were important for several reasons.

1. They reminded Israel of the holiness of God, and of his covenant requirements for them as his holy people.
2. They reminded Israel of the seriousness of sin.
3. They reminded Israel of the penalties for breaking God's covenant with them, including death.
4. They reminded Israel of God's merciful provision of a substitutionary sacrifice to die for them and redeem their lives.
5. They were types – they pointed forward to Messiah's perfect sacrifice, to be made once and be sufficient forever.

The laws regarding the sacrificial shedding of blood remind Christians through the ages of the same things.

They help us to better understand God's great mercy in providing his own Son as the only perfect sacrifice, the only truly acceptable sacrifice, that can ever be offered.

All Old Testament sacrifices were acceptable because they were made looking forward to Christ.

All of our spiritual sacrifices – prayer, praise, giving, labor, ministry – are acceptable because they are made looking backward to Christ's sacrifice.

It always was and is GOD who in MERCY and GRACE declares his people and our sacrifices acceptable in his sight, on the basis of the Son's perfection.

III. Unusual Laws

Some of the Old Testament Law's prohibitions seem arbitrary and capricious to us, even nonsensical. *There was always a reason of some kind behind what God permitted and what he prohibited.*

A. For example, laws against *mixing kinds* of things ...

Leviticus 19:19 " 'Keep my decrees. " 'Do not mate different kinds of animals.

" 'Do not plant your field with two kinds of seed.

" 'Do not wear clothing woven of two kinds of material.

Deut 14:21 “Do not eat anything you find already dead. You may give it to an alien living in any of your towns, and he may eat it, or you may sell it to a foreigner. But you are a people holy to the LORD your God.

Do not cook a young goat in its mother's milk.”

Virtually all of these unusual laws were given “to forbid the Israelites from engaging in the fertility cult practices of the surrounding Canaanites.”

The Canaanites believed in “sympathetic magic.” If you did certain things you could influence nature and gods to do what you wanted.

They thought that boiling a baby goat in it’s mother’s milk would magically insure the continued fertility of the herd.

They thought that mixing seeds in planting was like “inter-marrying” them, magically insuring fertility and abundant harvest. They “manipulated” spirits and natural forces.

These and similar laws were designed to keep Israel from pagan practices, from drifting into syncretism and idolatry.

Such laws against “mixing” were also always meant to reinforce Israel’s status as a holy people, called out, called into covenant, and “set-apart” to the One True God.

They were not to mix their marriages, cultures, economy, or society, or WORSHIP with other peoples.

Similarly, ...

Leviticus 19:26-28

26 " 'Do not eat any meat with the blood still in it.

" 'Do not practice divination or sorcery.

27 " 'Do not cut the hair at the sides of your head or clip off the edges of your beard.

28 " 'Do not cut your bodies for the dead or put tattoo marks on yourselves.

I am the LORD.”

Leviticus 19:26-28

26 " 'Do not eat any meat with the blood still in it.

(not renewed permanently in the N.T.; all food is clean.)

" 'Do not practice divination or sorcery.

(renewed by implication several times in the N.T.)

27 " 'Do not cut the hair at the sides of your head or clip off the edges of your beard.

(a pagan religious practice; not renewed in the N.T.; would be wrong in areas where that practice definitely communicates an ungodly meaning.)

28 " 'Do not cut your bodies for the dead ...

(a pagan religious practice; would still be applicable to any self-mutilation practice of pagan religions, or any self-mutilation communicating an ungodly meaning)

or put tattoo marks on yourselves.

(a pagan religious practice; would still be applicable to any pagan/ungodly tattoos.) I am the LORD.”

B. Other unusual laws may at first appear arbitrary, ignorant, prejudicial, or superstitious ...

The laws about bodily emissions making one ceremonially unclean may *seem* ignorant or superstitious.

In reality, they were probably designed to quarantine infections, promote high standards of morality and cleanliness, protect young, unmarried women, and keep peace among Israelite families. ***NOTE: The theological/symbolic meaning is always primary, NOT the medical/scientific. Some of these might be biologically “unclean” but others are not.***

And, primarily, all bodily emissions that were **directly associated with fertility / life as such were holy**, but *relatively* unholy (unclean) **compared to God**.

For example, the laws decreeing that a woman's *normal* monthly cycle makes her and everything she touches unclean (Leviticus 15:19-30).

But, in Israelite society ...

1. Married women tended to have large families (Psalm 127:4-5).
2. Mothers did not wean their children for two or three years.
3. Women married young.
4. The women most affected by this law were young, unmarried women.
5. Therefore, the law appears to be designed to “regulate teenage passions and discourage sexual relations between young, unmarried Israelites,” acknowledging the holiness of God’s gift of sexuality and life.

The timeless principles are protection of the vulnerable, high moral standards, and peaceful community relationships. These principles are taught explicitly in both testaments.

SOME DO's AND DON'Ts FOR INTERPRETING THE LAW

1. DO see the Old Testament law as a covenant between Israel, the servant, and Yahweh, her Lord and God.
2. DO see that the Old Covenant is not our covenant, but we do learn about God, Christ, and redemption.
3. DO see that some stipulations of the Old Covenant have definitely not been renewed in the New Covenant.
4. DO see that only those aspects of the Old Covenant which are renewed in the New Covenant are now the “law of Christ” applicable to Christians.
5. DO see that the Old Testament Law is still the Word of God for us even though it is not God’s command directly to us. ***We SHOULD study the Old Testament!***

6. Do NOT see the Old Testament law as complete or comprehensive.

DO see it as paradigmatic – it contains examples of situations, teaching Israel how they were always to live in *all similar* situations.

7. Do NOT expect the Old Testament law to be cited frequently by the prophets, the writings, or by the New Testament.

DO see that the essence of the law (the Ten Commandments and the two great commandments) ARE repeated by the prophets, the writings, and renewed in the New Testament.

8. DO see the Old Testament law as God's meaning-filled, gracious gift to Israel, bringing much blessing when obeyed.

DO NOT see the Old Testament law as a collection of arbitrary, aggravating regulations limiting the freedom of the people.

9. DO NOT see the Old Testament law – including its sacrifices and temple – as ever saving Israel or anyone, now or in the future – ever! **Only God saves!**

DO see the Old Testament law as teaching God's people, then and now, about the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, and the impossibility of our ever being good enough for heaven on our own, leading us to Jesus Christ alone as the only hope of salvation for ALL of humanity.

10. DO see the Law – as renewed and interpreted by the New Covenant – as intended by God to be *a model of timeless moral, ethical, and theological principles*.
11. DO see that *all* of the Old Testament applies to Christians, *but none of it applies apart from its fulfillment in Christ*.
12. DO look at the immediate context of a law – the surrounding scriptures and laws – to find interpretive clues that help determine its core meaning.
13. DO find this category (food, sacrifice, civil, ritual, etc.) elsewhere and compare this law to laws there to find interpretive clues to help determine its core meaning.

A NOTE ABOUT THE PROPHETS ... The prophets were Yahweh's ambassadors, His covenant enforcers. They were sent by the King to remind the vassal (Israel) of the Law Treaty terms and warn the vassal people about the stipulated punishments for the laws they were breaking (*disease, destruction, defeat, death, deportation*). And, the rewards for repenting and keeping the law. ***The prophets had no new word or revelation: They were sent to remind God's People about the Law.***

Galatians 3:24-25 “24 So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.”

Romans 10:4 “*Christ is the end* of the law so that there may be **righteousness** for everyone who believes.”

(Christ fulfills the law, does what God intended the law to do, perfectly satisfies perfect righteousness before God.

Therefore, when we truly repent, truly believe (trust) in Christ’s person and work alone to save us, God credits our sin to Christ, whose payment has been fully accepted, and credits Christ’s perfect righteousness to us.

God places his Spirit within us, and writes his law upon our hearts, empowering us to obey because we love him.

WE OBEY THE LAW OF CHRIST NOT TO BE RIGHT, BUT BECAUSE GOD ENABLES US TO LOVE AND OBEY HIM.)

We only know all of these things about the Law because of the hard work of Christian scholars for many centuries.

Many discoveries just in the past 100 years have revealed the meaning of previously mysterious verses and concepts.

The discoveries of archaeology, including many ANE (Ancient Near Eastern) cultures and writings, have enabled us to understand the Bible better.

***WE NEED THE WORK OF SCHOLARS AND TEACHERS
IF WE ARE TO READ AND UNDERSTAND GOD'S WORD CORRECTLY.***

*And we ourselves must never stop studying!
New information is always being found that helps us to better understand, teach, and preach God's Word.*

THE PENTATEUCH

NUMBERS

ORGANIZATION of THE BOOK OF NUMBERS

NUMBERS 1:1-10:10 – PREPARING FOR THE JOURNEY

NUMBERS 10:11-25:18 – TRIALS ON THE JOURNEY

NUMBERS 26-36 – THE NEW GENERATION PREPARES TO ENTER THE LAND

AND REMEMBER: Ancient Israelites – intentionally – did NOT always count or write as we do today. They rounded numbers up or down, they thought first of symbolic meanings, they used numbers stylistically, symmetrically, and so forth. **Do NOT** always look for mathematical precision in any use of numbers in Hebrew texts.

Mathematical precision is a MODERN concern, NOT an ANCIENT concern.

EMPHASES in THE BOOK OF NUMBERS

1. Preparation for military conquest of the Promised Land
2. God's covenant loyalty towards Israel with regard to the Land
3. Israel's repeated failure to keep covenant with Yahweh
4. God's leadership of His People and His affirmation of Moses' leadership
5. Preparations for entering into and worshipping in the Promised Land
6. Conquest and settlement of the land east of the Jordan River

GUIDE FOR READING THE BOOK OF NUMBERS ...

1. The driving force for the narrative is God's covenant with Abraham that his descendants would inherit the land of Canaan (Promised Land). God will faithfully bring this about despite Israel's unfaithfulness.
2. The conquest of the Land is the second stage of God's Holy War. Yahweh the Divine Warrior won the first stage in the defeat of Pharaoh and deliverance of Israel. God will now assist His People to win the second phase in the conquest of Canaan. This accounts for the two censuses of the first and second generations, the 12 spies, the preparations at the end, etc.

GUIDE FOR READING THE BOOK OF NUMBERS ...

3. Abraham's worship (Gen 12) following the Land promise is mirrored in the Law portions scattered through Numbers. They continue the focus in Exodus and Leviticus of **how God's People properly live in His restored Presence, and how they properly worship Him in the Land.**
4. **God's People repeatedly complain against God and His leader Moses, and they repeatedly disobey, sin, and fail.** Later in the Old and New Testaments, it is this failure and God's great compassion that are remembered.
5. **FINALLY**, all of this is **DESIGNED** to tell the reader that **this is really GOD'S STORY OF REDEMPTION**, and **not** primarily the story of Israel.

THE PENTATEUCH

DEUTERONOMY

EMPHASES in THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY

1. The oneness and uniqueness of Yahweh, the God of Israel, over against all other gods.
2. Yahweh's covenant love for Israel in making them His People.
3. Yahweh's universal sovereignty over all peoples.
4. Israel as Yahweh's model for the nations.
5. The significance of the central sanctuary where Yahweh is to be worshipped.
6. Yahweh's concern for justice – that His People reflect His character.
7. The blessings of obedience and dangers of disobedience.

STRUCTURE of THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY ...

Two kinds of structure are evident:

1. A chiastic structure
2. An ancient ANE suzerainty treaty

1. THE CHIASTIC STRUCTURE

A The Outer Frame: A Look Backward (1-3)

B The Inner Frame: The Great Exhortation (4-11)

C The Inner Core: The Stipulations of the Covenant (12-26)

B' The Inner Frame: The Covenant Ceremony (27-30)

A' The Outer Frame: A Look Forward (31-34)

2. THE SUZERAINTY TREATY STRUCTURE

Format of the Suzerainty Treaty (and Deuteronomy)

1. **Preamble** – identifies the Suzerain and vassal (Deut 1:1-5)
2. **Historical prologue** – reviews the good deeds already done by the Suzerain for the vassal (Deut 1:6-4:43)
3. **Stipulations** – obligations of loyalty, obedience, and service laid upon the vassal by the Suzerain for the duration of the covenant (Deut 4:44-26:19)
4. **Witnesses** – deities of Suzerain and vassal called upon to witness the treaty (Deut 30:19, 31:19; 32)
5. **Blessings and cursings** – laid upon the vassal for keeping or breaking the treaty (Deut 27-28)
6. **Sacrificial meal and covenant renewal** (Deut 31:10-12)

Israel was familiar with the ANE literary genres of

1. Law Code

2. Suzerainty Treaty (or Covenant)

God inspired his authors to write the OT Law in these literary forms for this reason.

There were many similarities and some foundational differences between the Law God gave Moses, and the law codes of the ANE cultures around Israel.

The law codes **in the OT Law were given within the overall context of a Suzerainty Treaty**.

SUZERAINTY TREATY

A covenant or treaty between a powerful overlord / suzerain, and a weaker kingdom. It spelled out the historical background, the relationship, responsibilities, rewards, and punishments. God gave the OT Law in this format because Israel was familiar with this genre.



The Aleppo Covenant between the Hittites (suzerain) and Aleppo (vassal), circa 1,300 BC.

Format of the Suzerainty Treaty (and Deuteronomy)

1. **Preamble** – identifies the Suzerain and vassal (Deut 1:1-5)
2. **Historical prologue** – reviews the good deeds already done by the Suzerain for the vassal (Deut 1:6-4:43)
3. **Stipulations** – obligations of loyalty, obedience, and service laid upon the vassal by the Suzerain for the duration of the covenant (Deut 4:44-26:19)
4. **Witnesses** – deities of Suzerain and vassal called upon to witness the treaty (Deut 30:19, 31:19; 32)
5. **Blessings and cursings** – laid upon the vassal for keeping or breaking the treaty (Deut 27-28)
6. **Sacrificial meal and covenant renewal** (Deut 31:10-12)

When God wanted to give Israel the Law, he did so in a literary form with which they were familiar – the ANE suzerainty covenant or treaty.

(Exodus 20-24, Joshua 24 and other parts of the Pentateuch are written in this literary form.)

This was not a letter, not a narrative, not poetry, even though snippets of those and other forms might be found within it.

This was an ANE suzerainty treaty. Israel was the subject vassal nation, and Yahweh was the Sovereign Overlord, the True Shepherd King of Israel.

To correctly read and understand the Law, you must understand its genre, and the ANE cultures surrounding Israel.

FURTHERMORE ...

Israel's prophets and their writings were directly and immediately related to the Law covenant. You CANNOT read or understand the Prophets outside of **that context**: Yahweh's Law Covenant With Israel IN the Land.

THE PROPHETS – Enforcing the Covenant in Israel

The Prophets were God's Treaty Enforcement Messengers. When the Suzerain heard his vassal state had broken the treaty, he sent his ambassadors to proclaim the Law Treaty portions which had been broken, proclaim the penalties for breaking the Law Treaty, and call the rulers and people to repent, make restitution, or else the Suzerain would execute judgment and punishment.

THE NATURE OF PROPHECY

The prophetic books can be difficult to correctly interpret and understand if you misunderstand two things:

1. The God-intended FUNCTION of prophecy – what God intended prophets and prophecy to do; it's reason for being.
2. The God-inspired FORM of prophecy – the manner in which it was delivered: context, language, word-pictures, figures of speech, metaphors, poetry, and so forth.

1. First Problem – Prophecy is NOT Primarily *Foretelling*

Most people misunderstand the meaning of the word “prophecy.”

They think it primarily means “foretelling” the future, especially the coming of Jesus or the end of the age.

That is wrong!

Less than 5% specifically describes the New Testament age.

Less than 2% of Old Testament prophecy is messianic.

Less than 1% refers to events still to come (the end of the age).

The prophets did foretell the future, *but it was almost always the immediate future of Israel, Judah, and the surrounding nations, and NOT our future.*

2. Second Problem – Prophetic Books are Collections of Spoken “Forthtelling” Oracles from Specific Historic Contexts

The primary function of the prophets was “forthtelling” – they spoke for God to their contemporaries, as God’s ambassadors to enforce the covenant.

This fact of prophecy as “spoken” words or oracles (prophecies, warnings, promises) that were later written down accounts for most of our difficulty.

There were *hundreds* of prophets in Israel’s history, but only a few are mentioned:

- those mentioned in the narrative books have a lot of their historical context and actions mentioned, but not much of their spoken prophecies;
- those whose oracles / prophecies were written in the prophetic books have very little of their context and history mentioned.

For example, **Elijah and Elisha** in Kings and Chronicles were very important prophetic messengers, but we know more about their context and lives and very little about most of their prophecies.

What we DO know about their prophecies is placed very specifically in the context of their time and place in Israel's history.

For some prophets we have a combination of their prophecy and their historical context:

- Gad (1 Sam 22, 2 Sam 24, etc.);
- Nathan (2 Sam 7, 12, 1 Kings 1, etc.);
- Huldah (2 Kings 22);
- Jonah;
- Daniel.

However, in the prophetic books themselves we hear **FROM** God through the prophets, but we hear very little about the prophets themselves and their historical context.

*THEREFORE, we have difficulty in seeing clearly that the prophecy really relates very directly to the immediate past, the present, and the near future of **Israel** and surrounding nations.*

It requires a lot of exhaustive study of 1) all relevant OT books, and 2) the history of the surrounding nations, to put the whole picture together and understand the prophets and much of the narrative books.

Furthermore, no prophetic book was given as one long continuous prophecy.

They are collections of different oracles ...

- given at different times and places,
- sometimes written down in non-chronological order,
- usually with no clue in the text as to when one oracle ends and another begins,
- usually without indicating their specific historical setting,
- and usually written in poetry.

That is why it is often difficult to sit down and read a prophetic book all the way through as if they were one long continuous prophecy ... *they were not originally given that way, and not intended to be read that way.*

The Jews knew this, and Jesus and his disciples knew this.

3. Third Problem – Misunderstanding Historical Distance

The original audiences understood the language, culture, and message of the prophets much better than us. They were intimately involved in the very situation the prophets were addressing. *This was God's word TO them.*

We are from 2,400 to 3,500 years distant from the prophets and their prophecies.

We are widely separated by our radically different cultures, worldviews, thought patterns, and languages.

Therefore, it is often hard for us to correctly interpret and clearly understand what they are referring to and why.

We must pay very close attention and work hard, **using all of our study helps**, to correctly understand *God's word FOR us* through the prophets.

No books are more badly twisted and misinterpreted than the prophetic and apocalyptic books, especially by Pentecostals / charismatics.

THE FUNCTION OF PROPHECY

1. The Prophets were covenant enforcement mediators.

The Law was God's covenant treaty with his vassal nation, Israel.

The Law was mediated (given) through Moses.

God sent the Prophets to subsequent generations to remind Israel (and Judah) of the Law's requirements, and of the punishments and rewards for breaking or keeping the Law.

The Prophets mediated God's word to God's people. They were God's spokespersons for the covenant.

The Prophets came to God's people, **held up the Treaty (Law), pointed out where Israel / Judah had broken the Treaty (Law/Covenant)**, urged them with a message from the Great King (Yahweh) to repent and obey, and reminded and warned them of the sure punishment spelled out for continued rebellion / disobedience.

The Prophets prophesied in the context of the Law – they warned God’s people by reminding them of the Covenant to which they had agreed.

The Covenant (Law) listed the blessings for obedience – Leviticus 1-13, Deuteronomy 4:32-40, 28:1-14.

These are **corporate** blessings (***NOT individual blessings!***) that can be grouped in six general categories:

- Life,
- Health,
- Prosperity,
- Agricultural Abundance,
- Respect, and
- Safety.

The Covenant (Law) listed the punishments for disobedience – Leviticus 26:14-39, Deuteronomy 4:15-28, 28:15 - 32:42.

These are corporate punishments (curses) can be grouped in 10 categories: death, disease, drought, dearth, danger, destruction, defeat, deportation, destitution, and disgrace.

2. The Prophets' message was not their own, but *God's*.

Exodus 3:1f – God calls Moses.

Isaiah 6

Jeremiah 1

Exekiel 1

Hosea 1

Amos 7:14

Jonah 1

The Hebrew word for prophet – *nabi* – comes from the Semitic word meaning “to call” – *nabu*.

The Prophets repeatedly emphasize that God called them, and that it is God's word and not their own.

Jeremiah 27 – The Prophet repeatedly emphasizes this word of punishment is from God. Jeremiah knew how unpopular this message was.

The Prophets were ambassadors from Gods heavenly court delivering the decision of Israel's Divine King – blessing for Israel's faithfulness to the Covenant, curses for unfaithfulness.

The Prophets delivered popular and unpopular messages, to every kind of audience – common, corporate, individual, royal (Hosea 1:4), priests (Hosea 4:4), everyone.

3. The Prophets' word is unoriginal.

The Prophets do NOT have a new and original word from God. They are delivering what God has already said in his Covenant, the Law of Moses.

The Law is not cited verbatim, but is restated in clear and arresting ways.

Consider Hosea 4, where the prophet announces God's judgment for breaking the Law – murder, adultery, lying, etc., etc., are listed.

Not all of the commandments are listed, but the hearers *would have been thinking of all the ways they had broken the Law.*

IN SUMMARY,

Recognize the potential problems in understanding prophecy:

1. First Problem – Prophecy is NOT Primarily Foretelling
2. Second Problem – Prophetic Books are Collections of Spoken “Forthtelling” Oracles from Specific Historic Contexts
3. Third Problem – Misunderstanding Historical Distance

Recognize the Function of Prophecy:

1. The Prophets were covenant enforcement mediators. Yahweh’s ambassadors.
2. The Prophets’ message was not their own, but God’s.
3. The Prophets’ word is unoriginal. They repeat and elaborate on the Law.

CONCLUSION

- Do not read ancient texts through modern eyes, with modern values, modern thoughts, and modern meanings. *Don't put your words in God's mouth.*
- Use good hermeneutical principles to read the ancient text with ancient eyes, ancient concepts, ancient context. THEN bridge the gap to apply it today.
- Always read the OT through the lens of the NT: Christ is the fulfillment of all things, all of the old was pointing toward the new.
- Don't get caught up in ridiculous, sectarian wars about creation, Bible translations, end-times speculations. *Avoid extremists and exclusivists!*
- Just say NO to most TV preachers! Very few handle God's Word correctly.
- Use the gifts the Holy Spirit has given you...the Scholars & Teachers of the Church.
- Never stop studying,
- Continue your education!!
- Take a LONG-TERM view toward discipleship, ministry, and life.
- **Always remember "No Football Coaches Allowed."**



Pentateuch

