



## SESSION 3 - THE TORAH (Part 2)

### GOAL OF CLASS

To understand how the Law of Moses points to Christ and how it is relevant to us today.

### Session 3 - Goal

Understanding the 3 major categories of law, how it fits into the continuing narrative of Israel's journey to the Promised Land, and God's covenant with them.

### Session 3 - Assignment Questions

- What are some similarities you noticed in the stories of the people's rebellions in Numbers 11, 14, & 16?
- How would it have felt to be Moses in these situations?
- What do you notice about this retelling of the story of Exodus in Deuteronomy 9-11? What repeated words, phrases or themes stand out to you?

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**STOP & PRAY: Pray Psalm 25:4-14**

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## CLASS ROADMAP

### Where we went

In our previous session, we saw the story of when God made a Covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai. However, they continuously broke His covenant and sinned, separating them from entering His holy presence, so God gave them instructions concerning the Tabernacle and the sacrificial system, by which they could be purified to enter into His presence. These symbols pointed to a perfect temple, priest, and sacrifice which was yet to come. Initially, at the end of Exodus, Moses was stuck outside the Tabernacle - unable to enter because of the glory of the Lord. Then Leviticus gave God's

people the instructions about His proper worship and the sacrificial system so that atonement could be made for their sins to enter His presence.

## Where we are

Today, we're at the beginning of the book of Numbers, where we find in verse 1 that God speaks to Moses within the Tabernacle - so Moses is now able to enter into the tent of meeting with God!

However, this book of Numbers deals with what happens next in the story of Israel on their journey to the Promised Land. You would think that now that they have the solution to enter into God's presence and worship Him that it would be smooth sailing from here until the land flowing with milk and honey... but it definitely was not! The book of Numbers, which is called "In the wilderness" in Hebrew - tells of Israel's repeated failure and sin as they wandered through the desert on their way to the Promised Land. It was a journey that should have only taken them 2 weeks, but because of their rebellion, it takes them 40 years!

## Where we're going

In this session, we'll look at a helpful and historic way of categorizing Biblical law so we can know how and why we obey some laws and not others. Then we'll look at the story of Israel as it unfolds through Numbers and Deuteronomy. Finally, we'll take a look at how Israel's story is actually our story as well.

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# CATEGORIES OF BIBLICAL LAW

In the previous sessions, we saw some of the categories of laws we find in the Bible. We saw some laws that pertained to how Israel was to worship God - involving the Tabernacle, the priests, sacrifices, feasts and purity. We also saw some of the moral laws of Israel - the most famous list being the Ten Commandments which were the basis for all of Israel's moral laws. Lastly, we will see some of Israel's civil laws.

Because Israel was a theocratic nation (led by God), they needed civil laws - just as nations today need civil laws. Examples of civil laws would be accounts of **case law** - where a particular incident of transgression was found out and then punishments were prescribed. These are scattered throughout the narratives of the Pentateuch. Israel's laws were enforced by their 'civil' government because they were a theocracy (a nation ruled by God). So, God's laws were the nation's laws - unlike today, where we have civil government, whose laws are not necessarily connected to God's laws directly.

Thus, today we might have unjust laws in the civil court that contradict God's laws. So, because of this context, there are differences between Israel and us today. We no longer

live under a civil theocracy. Therefore, the civil courts do not sentence you based on your violation to Biblical laws, but rather the civil laws of the nation that you live in.

## Are Christians Hypocrites for 'picking and choosing' laws?



### Video: The West Wing (3:00)

The short answer to the accusation that Christians 'pick and choose' which sections of the Biblical law they obey is "YES. We do." But, we're not hypocrites because we know why we do. In fact, everyone picks and chooses - the difference is, not everyone knows why they can legitimately do so.

**The main reason why Christians 'pick and choose' is because God's word itself teaches us how and why to do so.** It is explained in what is called "The Threefold Division of the Law."

## The Threefold Division of the Law

In the Protestant Reformation, Reformed theologians wrote historic confessions which systematized the Biblical teaching about many areas of theology. In Chapter 19 of both the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) and the Second London Baptist Confession (1689 SLBC) contain sections on the Law of God. These historic confessions are a great free resource for us to learn about biblical truth! We will look at what they say here since they give us historic and reliable summaries of the threefold division of the law:

1. Moral Law
2. Ceremonial Law
3. Civil Law

Let's take a look at what these Reformed confessions teach us about these 3 categories.

### 1. Moral Law

#### 1689 SLBC Chapter 19.2

"The same law that was first written in the heart of man continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness after the fall, and was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai, in the Ten Commandments, and written in two tables, the four first containing our duty towards God, and the other six, our duty to man."

(cf. Romans 2:14, 15; Deuteronomy 10:4)

Here, the confession teaches us that God wrote His moral law on man's heart, and delivered it in written form at Sinai in the 10 commandments which (as we explored in the first session) explain our duties to God and other people.

## 2. Ceremonial Law

### 1689 SLBC Chapter 19.3

"Besides this law, commonly called moral, God was pleased to give to the people of Israel ceremonial laws, containing several typical ordinances, partly of worship, prefiguring Christ, his graces, actions, sufferings, and benefits; and partly holding forth divers instructions of moral duties, all which ceremonial laws being appointed only to the time of reformation, are, by Jesus Christ the true Messiah and only law-giver, who was furnished with power from the Father for that end abrogated and taken away."

(cf. Hebrews 10:1; Colossians 2:17; 1 Corinthians 5:7; Colossians 2:14, 16, 17; Ephesians 2:14, 16 )

Here, the confession teaches us that God gave Israel ceremonial laws to order their worship in the Old Testament covenant. They included laws about rituals and sacrifices, ceremonial uncleanness, feasts and festivals, and regulations meant to distinguish them from the surrounding pagan cultures (eg. dietary and clothing laws). Because they had to slaughter their meat in a certain way, and not eat or mix certain foods, **this served as a weapon against the danger of the Jews assimilating into surrounding pagan cultures. It set them apart from the other nations.** They also contained signs that pointed to the coming Messiah - Sabbath, circumcision, Passover and the redemption of the firstborn.

However, when Jesus Christ came - he abrogated or took away these laws from effect. Thus, we no longer offer animal sacrifices or follow the other ceremonial laws because Christ has fulfilled the purpose to which these laws pointed. So, **Christ does not 'break the law' - rather he fulfills what its original purpose was.** Since its purpose is completed now in Christ, these laws are no longer needed to be observed by us - however, they do still teach us principles about worship of God.

So, for example, one might look at the ceremonial purity laws (which were part of the ceremonial laws) and learn that God requires His people to be 'set apart' from uncleanness. In the OT they were to disassociate from things connected to the curse of sin and death. In the NT we see it expressed as abstaining from every form of evil (1 Thes. 5:22), avoiding doing things which might make a brother stumble (1 Cor. 8:9-13), not putting an obstacle in anyone's way (2 Cor. 6:3) and living honorably in the sight of all people (Rom. 12:17 & 2 Cor. 8:20-21). We see that even though the ceremonial laws themselves are no longer in effect on us - the principles they teach us are still valuable to Christian living - and many of the NT writers use them like that (which we will see in later sessions).

### 3. Civil Law

#### 1689 SLBC Chapter 19.4

"To them also he gave various judicial laws, which expired together with the state of that people (not obliging any now by virtue of that institution) their general equity only being of moral use."  
(cf. 1 Corinthians 9:8-10 )

Here, the confession is basically saying that God also gave Israel national/civil/judicial laws which expired with the State of Israel as a nation in the OT. This includes everything from murder to restitution for a man gored by an ox and the responsibility of the man who dug a pit to rescue his neighbor's trapped donkey (Exodus 21:12-36). Many of the death penalty laws fall under this category.

**They are no longer in effect today because unlike the OT, God's people are no longer defined by national or ethnic boundaries.** Rather, Christ has called to himself people from every tribe, language and nation. Even though the state of Israel was re-established in 1948, they are no longer a 'theocratic state' like that of the OT - but rather a secular state. So, **the laws pertaining to OT Israel's civil governance no longer are in effect - because through Christ, God's people are those who believe in His Son.**

**God's people are no longer a civil nation, but rather the Church - a people of common faith in Christ.** (see Rom. 4:16; 8:14-16; 9:8; Gal 3:29; 4:28; 6:16; Eph. 3:6)

This is why we are not obligated to give the death penalty to a Sabbath breaker today (cf. Numbers 15:32-36). **Christ also fulfills what Israel was supposed to be.** Israel was commanded to be God's servant and keep the statutes of His covenant. Yet they failed miserably. Christ however, is born a Jew, under the law. He completely fulfills the law perfectly. He perfectly images the type of servant Israel was supposed to be. **Christ is the True Israel, and we are in Christ - grafted in to God's people** (see Eph. 2:19; 3:6 & Rom. 11:17-24). So we see even these laws are abrogated because of Christ's fulfillment of them. *(We will explore this more in our session on the Gospels.)*

**These laws though do have some value in shaping how we think about civil laws today and what values are useful in forming a just society.** For example, in the OT, the civil law required the testimony of 2 or 3 witnesses to substantiate an accusation - this is also useful in courts of law today to corroborate accusations in legal proceedings. Another example is the law concerning using just scales for commerce in Leviticus 19:35 - today we should also not 'cheat the scales' in the way we do business.

### Why the Moral law still stands

#### 1689 SLBC Chapter 19.5

"The moral law is forever binding to all, both to justified persons (Christians) as well as others, to the obedience thereof, and that not only in regard of the matter contained in it, but also in respect of the authority of God the Creator, who gave it;

neither does Christ in the Gospel any way dissolve, but much strengthen this obligation.”

(cf. Romans 13:8-10; James 2:8, 10-12; James 2:10, 11; Matthew 5:17-19; Romans 3:31 )

Here the confession simply states that **the Moral law is forever binding on all people - Christians and non-Christians. The moral law is never abrogated because its origin is in the character and nature of God Himself - who never changes.** Murder is wrong because God is life. Lying is wrong because God is truth... etc. Christ also obeyed the Moral Law of God - however, nowhere does he speak of doing away with it. In fact, in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5 - **Christ heightens our understanding of the law and clarifies that it's not just the outward actions that matter to God, but also the inward attitude of the heart!** Thus, God's moral law still remains in effect, even though the Ceremonial and Civil laws have been fulfilled in Christ.

## The usefulness of the law to the Christian

### 1689 SLBC Chapter 19.6 & 7

The last section of chapter 19 of the confession states that although Christians are not under the law as a covenant of works by which they are justified, it is still of great use to them. **It informs them of the will of God and their duties to Him. It shows us our sinful condition as lawbreakers because of our corrupt heart,** and by examining ourselves according to God's law, we come to **conviction of sin**, humility, hatred of sin, and clearer view of **our need of Christ to save us** through His perfect obedience to the law and death to pay the penalty of the law on our behalf. (cf. Romans 6:14; Galatians 2:16; Romans 8:1; Romans 10:4; Romans 3:20; Romans 7:7, etc; Romans 6:12-14; 1 Peter 3:8-13 )

These uses of the law are not contrary to the grace of the Gospel, but rather go hand-in-hand with it - because by the Holy Spirit, our wills and desires are subdued and enabled to freely and joyfully do that which pleases God as revealed in the law. (cf. Galatians 3:21; Ezekiel 36:27 )

**So - the reason why Christians pick and choose is because the Bible tells us why and how to do so.** We are not bound to the Ceremonial and Civil laws because Christ has fulfilled their purpose and so they are completed and no longer necessary. However, the moral law, being rooted in God's character - are forever binding on us.

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## Q&A ON WHAT WE'VE COVERED SO FAR

We'll take 15 minutes to field some questions you may have on what we've covered so far from Genesis to Leviticus.

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# NUMBERS: REBELLION & WANDERING



## Video: Overview: Numbers (6:50)

So, the book of Numbers is basically divided in two. The first part tells the story of the first generation (from Sinai) who sinned and doubted God, and were sentenced to die in the wilderness. The second part begins the story of the second generation - the descendents of the first - as they prepare to enter the Promised Land. It asks the question - **will they be faithful and enter the Land or rebel and fail like their forefathers?** It also shows us that **God's ultimate plan of redemption are not tied to a particular generation.** Here and in other places, God makes promises to one generation that they don't end up living to see fulfilled. God's timeline is different to ours. He is eternal.

Before we continue, I'd like to point out 3 quick observations of patterns in Numbers.

## 1. Pattern of Organization

The Tabernacle, where God's presence dwelt, was to be at their centre, then surrounded by the Priests and Levites (who were God's servants in the Tabernacle), then all the tribes arranged with Judah at their head. We find this same arrangement even in the instructions about how they were to travel together - with the Ark of the Covenant leading them (symbolizing God's presence leading them out), followed by the priests and levites, Judah then the rest of the 12 tribes.

However, as the story of the book of Numbers unfolds, we see that this pattern of organization - where they were to follow the Lord through the wilderness into the Promised Land - is disrupted by the people's constant and repeated rebellion.

## 2. Pattern of Rebellion

In the rebellion section, there is this repeated downward spiral of the people's rebellion. Here we find, almost after each story of rebellion, a pattern developed.

First, there is the stories of the people's rebellion. Then God's judgment on them for their rebellion. Then Moses' intercession and atonement for the people - calling on God to remember His covenant and not totally destroy them. The people's relentless complaining and rebellion is a pattern we're meant to see in the narrative.

"In fact, apart from the future blessing that God speaks through a pagan prophet, there is hardly a good word about them in the entire narrative." (Gordon Fee)

**Each rebellion incident involves the death and/or threat of death on a portion of the first generation.**

**Then a few times we get some laws between the stories of rebellion.**

These laws at first seem oddly inserted between the stories of rebellion, judgment and intercession. But when you look at them closely, we realize they are connected. Most of them provide some clarification about laws they may have transgressed, or put in place something to help prevent the people's transgressions again.

**Also, note that some of the laws in these sections in-between the narrative have to do with 'when you enter the land' - because even amidst the people's stubborn and repeated rebellion - God is still going to be faithful to His promise!**

### **3. Pattern of God's Salvation**

At the end of the rebellion sections, after the people have complained against God multiple times, challenged Moses's authority, desired to go back to Egypt and spurned the Promised Land, and even Moses rebelled - we find the three foreshadows that point us to Christ!

I can't help but observe that at the point when the people's sinfulness seems to have totally overtaken, God gives His promise of a Redeemer. Isn't that so often the case with us? Isn't that how many are brought to salvation - they persist in their rebellion, and then even in the midst of their rebellion, God's promise of gracious salvation is extended to them!

#### **A. The Rock**

The first is the incident of Moses striking the rock in the wilderness. Moses disobeys God's instructions (he was supposed to speak to it) and even puts himself on par with God saying "shall WE bring water for you out of this rock?" (20:10) For this Moses is barred from entrance to the Promised Land. But note how Paul uses this incident in Numbers as an example to encourage NT believers in 1 Corinthians 10:1-6,

"For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and **the Rock was Christ**. Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

**Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did."**

Christ was the Rock that was struck, and out of him flowed water that gave them life - so it is with us, that Christ is our fountain of living water. And this story in Numbers is given as an example to us - not to be rebellious and stubborn as the Israelites were.



## B. The Serpent

The next foreshadow of God's salvation is seen in chapter 21 where, again, the Israelites speak against God and Moses. They are judged with poisonous serpents that bite them. So then repent and call out for Moses to do something to save them. God tells him to put a bronze serpent on a pole and tell the people to look to it. We'll take a closer look at this strange story that points to Christ in our breakout session shortly.

## C. The Conquering King

The last Christ foreshadow in Numbers is really surprising. Firstly, it comes from the lips of a pagan prophet (Balaam) who is hired to curse Israel by their enemy! Yet we see throughout the story of Balaam trying to curse Israel, God's sovereignty over all things so that Balaam repeatedly cannot say anything but what God puts in his mouth (cf. Num. 22:38; 23:12; 24:13). This is God being faithful to His promise to Abraham in Genesis 12 to bless him and his offspring. What's more amazing is that at the same time this drama is going on, the people are down in the camp - complaining and speaking against God again!

In Balaam's third oracle, he says that he sees this kingly figure - "a star shall come out of Jacob, a scepter shall rise out of Israel" who will crush the enemy of God's people (cf. Num 24:17). This is directly connected to Jacob's blessing of Judah in Genesis 49, that the scepter shall never depart from Judah - and one day, the Lion from the tribe of Judah would come.

How amazing that while Israel is in the camp complaining and murmuring about God, He is in the hills protecting from and blessing them through a pagan prophet - Balaam!? How often is that the case for us? When we are too busy complaining, we don't see God's protection and blessing over us?

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## READ & DISCUSS - Numbers 21:4-9 and John 3:5-15

We'll spend 15 minutes in our groups reading and discussing Numbers 21:4-9 and John 3:14-15

- What do you notice caused the people to rebel in the incident in Numbers 21:4-9? What do the people accuse God and Moses with?
- What is odd about God's provision to cure His judgement against the people's sin?
- How does Jesus use this story from Numbers in his discussion with Nicodemus in John 3? What is the connection?

## NUMBERS: TAKEAWAY

"Numbers illustrates one of the main themes of the whole Bible. The sin of the first generation could have led to the end of the story of redemption and the destruction

of the people of God. But God does not abandon His people even in their rebellion and sin... The principle actor in Numbers is Yahweh. Even under extreme provocation, He keeps His covenant with Israel, guides them through the wilderness and provides for their needs...

Each generation of Christians should place themselves in the position of the new generation of the book of Numbers. God has acted redemptively in our midst, and by so doing, he has given our lives meaning and hope. Just like the Numbers generation, we are called upon to respond to God's grace with obedience."  
(Longman & Dillard, An Introduction to the Old Testament, pg. 100)

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## DEUTERONOMY: LISTEN & LOVE

Remember the context of Deuteronomy. The generation from Sinai had wandered the desert for 40 years until they died out because of their rebellion and distrust of God. So Deuteronomy is given to their children - the ones who would go on to inherit the land. This is why it starts off with Moses reminding them of the story of the forefathers before them and their unfaithfulness, and the covenant that God made with them. Moses was discipling the next generation. **The tone of Deuteronomy was more hortatory than legal - that is, it is more exhortation than legislation.**

"...its provisions tend to be less technical or specific than other codes. Deuteronomy is more interested in the 'spirit' than in the 'letter' of the law."  
(Longman & Dillard, An Introduction to the Old Testament, pg. 114)

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## Importance of Context for understanding Law

Perhaps you still are reading the OT law and finding it strange. Well, consider this...

Have you ever heard of a strange law? Perhaps something outdated that at one time served a purpose, but when we read it today, it just seems really odd and out of place? Or perhaps you've encountered a law that you didn't understand why it was necessary because you didn't understand the context it was written in. Here are a few examples:

- In London, England, it is illegal to wear armour when visiting Parliament. Equally strange, it is illegal to die in the House of Parliament. Due to the fact that the building is considered royal, the deceased would be entitled to a state funeral.
- In the UK, nineteenth-century English law made it illegal for women to eat chocolate on public transport. (I'm not sure why, but it's humorous)
- According to 'The Outer Space Act 1986', the secretary of state is permitted to use 'reasonable force' to prevent an alien invasion of the UK. (I guess alien invasion was a real concern at the time?)

- Three settlements in southern France have prohibited death. The mayor of Le Lavandou outlawed death in 2000, after planning permission for a new cemetery was turned down due to environmental concerns. He described the new bylaw as "an absurd law to counter an absurd situation".
- There's an old law in Scotland that you are not allowed to wear any underwear under your kilt or else be fined two beers.
- In York, (Scotland) it is legal to murder a Scotsman within the ancient city walls, but only if he is carrying a bow and arrow.
- In Washington State, there is a law making it illegal to kill Big Foot.
- In Alberta it's illegal to set fire to the leg of a wooden-legged man.
- In St. Johns, Newfoundland, it's illegal to keep cows in your house.
- Under Canada's Criminal Code's Sec. 71, it is illegal to challenge or be challenged by someone to a duel.
- In Toronto, it's illegal to drag a dead horse down Yonge Street on a Sunday. (Why on earth would this be a necessary law unless some guy did it already?)

As we can see from these examples, if we don't understand the circumstances in which laws are enacted, or if we try to understand them from our own context and not the context they were written in, they seem ridiculous and pretty strange. It is the same with Biblical law. We must understand the cultural context of Israel to properly appreciate its laws.

## Contrasting Israel's law to the rest of the ANE

Israel was not the first people to invent law codes or treatises. We can learn a lot about Israel's law when we read it in comparison to the ones from their surrounding culture. While we will not be able to go over all the details of these other ANE cultures and their laws, we will point out a few relevant details for us using Hammurabi (an ancient Babylonian King) as an example.

### ANE law documents

Many of the 'law' documents from the ANE we read are not actually 'law codes' or legislative documents as we understand laws today. Instead, what we find is that they are written as exemplary verdicts by the ancient kings that **offered a model of the king's justice**. In our day, we think of laws as a code of absolute rules and penalties to which courts look in order to process legal cases. However, in the ANE, 'law' served a slightly different purpose.

Instead, these 'law codices' of the ANE contained accounts of how the various kings dealt with **example cases and verdicts in order to justify and legitimize the king as the chosen representative of the gods**. For the pagan ANE, the king's demonstration of wisdom in ruling was the basis for his divine sponsorship from the gods.

"This is explicitly stated in the epilogue to Hammurabi's [a Babylonian king] collection of laws where he indicates that in his wisdom he has administered justice

for the vulnerable by inscribing his verdicts.”

(John Walton, Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament, pg. 294)

**They almost functioned similarly to a party platform before political elections** - they demonstrated the king’s capability and history of just rule to gain the approval (vote) of the gods. So, these kings were not considered ‘lawgivers’ but rather expounded their judicial wisdom by compiling samples of their verdicts. In fact, neither the deity (Shamash in the case of Hammurabi) or the king could be considered a lawgiver. Humumurabi’s record of verdicts does not impose obligations on society or courts, it doesn’t lay down a ‘law of the land’, and it was not referenced in their judicial system.

## Law in the Pentateuch

So, in comparison to Hummurabi and others which shows that their juridical lists were for the purpose of legitimating their king’s rule, the Pentateuch is different because the laws in it are within the context of covenant stipulations. Yahweh is the one giving the stipulations in His role as the Great King entering into a covenant relationship with Israel. Here is where pointing out some of the differences between Israel’s law and other ANE laws will be helpful to us to understand and appreciate.

Below are some further contrasts between the Pentateuch law and the ANE.

PENTATEUCH	ANCIENT NEAR EAST
Self-revelation of God	Self-glorification of the king
Describes a vision of the right exercise of what it means to be a holy nation	Describes a vision of the right exercise of justice to legitimize the king
Portrays the ideal covenant keeper	Portrays the ideal king
Prime purpose is the people’s sanctification	Prime purpose is showing the king’s justice
Showed the perfect standard of justice by the Holy King of Israel	Many examples of partiality and ignorance by fallible human kings

In the ANE, the gods were far off - not personally invested in the law of the people. They had to be appeased. Even the king had to prove himself to the gods to legitimize his rule.

**We take it for granted today that ‘God is near’ - not so in the ANE.** The gods were far off and didn’t care personally for people other than when it is related to their own selfish concerns. It is in this context that Israel’s God and His law stands apart. **Israel’s God is intimately concerned with His people and directly gives them His laws to rule. Instead of being oppressive - they are the expression of a loving God who is their caring King telling them how He designed them to flourish and live.**

While many ANE kings would make decrees, issue commands, and impose stipulations upon vassals, the gods never involved themselves with something so programmatic. Ancient Near Eastern scholar, John Walton comments:

“Nothing in the ancient Near East compares to the extent of revelation that Yahweh gives to His people and the depth of relationship that He desires with them.”  
(Walton, 298)

This is why Deuteronomy 4:6-8 says,

“Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’ For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?”

Israel's keeping of the law of the Covenant that God gave to them was to stand as a witness to the surrounding pagan cultures - they were to be a light to the nations - so that they would see and realize that Israel's Lawgiver was the perfectly Holy One - the only True God. **These laws were to produce a type of nation and society that would make the pagan nations jealous and envious of them because of their beautiful perfection and justice.** However, as we know, Israel failed at this. But this was none-the-less one of the purposes of the law God gave them.



### Video: The Book of Deuteronomy (6:00)

**Deuteronomy's emphasis is on God's sovereign initiative as Israel's covenant Lord who chose them out of His own mysterious love (7:7-8).** They owe their existence to Him, and thus **this grace calls for their response of loving obedience.** We can see the emphasis on God's grace towards them in that **of the 167 time that the verb "give" is used in the book, 131 times it is Yahweh who is giving to them** out of His gracious love.

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## BIG GROUP DISCUSSION - Deuteronomy 4

Deuteronomy 4 follows the retelling of Israel's history to the children of the generation who died in the wilderness wanderings of Numbers. It starts off the section where Moses is

going to remind these people who are the kids of those who were at Sinai and who are about to enter the Promised Land of God's covenant with them. So it is important to note what Moses says to them and what he emphasizes for them to remember.

We'll spend 15-20 minutes as a big group reading and discussing Deuteronomy 4.

## DEUTERONOMY: TAKEAWAYS

- Remember that Israel is about to possess the Land - and God, in His love, is about to fulfill the oath He made with Abraham so many generations ago! The anticipation is building...
- Deuteronomy is the re-telling of God's gracious covenant relationship with His people to a new generation through Moses. It shows us what discipleship of the next generation looks like. The emphasis of Deuteronomy is God's gracious love to His people and their reasonable response of loving obedience.
- The commands of God for Israel to not only avoid idolatry, but to completely destroy the places of pagan worship and the Canaanite people is because if Israel compromises with paganism, they will not be a blessing to the nations. It's a vivid imagery to us of how we are to be 'killing sin' in our own lives and getting rid of our idols as a 'holy nation' set apart to be a light to the nations.
- The 'law code' section of Deuteronomy follows the pattern of the Ten Commandments, beginning with requirements pertaining to loving God (Chapters 12-13) and loving neighbour (chapters 14-26) - with various laws about sacred days as well.
- Deuteronomy has foreshadows of Christ. It speaks of a day when God would raise up a prophet like Moses (see 8:14-22). He is the prophet who does signs and wonders like Moses (cf. Deut. 34:11-12 & John 6:14).
- Because of the people's fear at God's direct speech to them, God institutes Moses as a prophet to deliver God's word to them (5:22-33). This model is continued through the succession of OT prophets (18:14-22). Thus, it contains how to distinguish the prophets God sends from false prophets - by their adherence to the covenant (13:1-5) and the fulfillment of their prophecies (18:21-22).
- Deuteronomy gives Israel the *Shema* (Deut. 6:4) which would be the central confession of Israel's faith - memorized and repeated by every faithful Jew. It says that the Lord, the God of Israel is one. Jesus claims to be one with the Father (cf. Jhn 10:30; 17:21-23).
- Just as Israel was chosen as the least of all the nations (Deut. 7:6-7), so the church is chosen from the weak, foolish and lowly (1 Cor. 1:26-30). Israel (God's OT people) were God's treasured possession (Deut. 7:6; 14:2; 26:18), so too we (God's NT people) are the 'new Israel' and treasured possession (Eph. 1:14; Tit. 2:14; 1 Pet. 2:9).
- Just as God gives graciously to Israel in the OT, He likewise gives to us lavish grace and blessings though we too are often stubborn, undeserving and rebellious.

## FINAL COMMENTS

"Deuteronomy brings the Pentateuch to a conclusion with its constant reminders of God's love and faithfulness despite His people's constant rebellion, but the final word is one of hope that God will ultimately prevail with His people."  
(Fee & Stuart, How to read the Bible book by book, pg 62)

### Law and Wisdom

This concludes our sessions on the Torah (law or instructions) of the Old Testament found in the first five books (Pentateuch). Next session, we will be looking at how the Prophets use the law and also how the section of the OT called 'The Writings' spoke of the law. The Writings includes books like the Psalms as well as the Wisdom literature - Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, etc. In the ANE, wisdom literature was also a big part of their culture and was connected to law:

"Courts operated by wisdom, a sense of fairness, a knowledge of the traditions, a knowledge of the king's decrees, and experience in the administration of justice. Citizens understood their obligations by means of living in society and being taught customs and traditions in the home. This being the case, numerous other literary sources contributed to the understanding of how one ought to conduct oneself in society." (John Walton)

This is where we find ourselves next. The wisdom literature of the Bible plays a similar role for God's people - giving them a knowledge of their obligations, customs, and what proper conduct for wise living looked like - beyond mere rule keeping.

### Covenant and Lordship

Lastly, remember that these documents were Israel's covenant documents. In the ancient world, this was common between a conquering king and his subject people to define the relationship between them. This shows us that Yahweh was to be Israel's beneficent and gracious covenant Lord - demanding exclusive allegiance and total submission to Him. This was an important aspect of God's relationship to His people in the OT.

This has not changed for us - as we'll see in the NT - Jesus himself comes as the Conquering King of kings and Lord of lords announcing "the Kingdom of God" and demanding repentance and belief. The citizens of His Kingdom are still required to show exclusive loyalty and obedience to His rule.

God's Kingdom is not a democracy. In our modern age where we're so used to democracies and have no experience of living under a monarchy, this concept can get lost on us and we see concepts such as living in subjection to an absolute sovereign as harsh and unintelligible. However, we don't serve an exalted version of an elected politician. We serve

a risen King. And the true citizens of His Kingdom are marked by their submission in all areas of their life to His loving and gracious rule. His law is the expression of His loving rule over us.

**STOP & PRAY: Pray Numbers 6:24-26**

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## ASSIGNMENTS FOR SESSION 4

### READ

For next week's session, please read:

- Nehemiah 9

### WATCH

- [The Prophets](#)
- Optional: [How would you describe Wisdom in relation to Law and Gospel?](#)

### ASK

For next week's session, ask yourself this question and write down your answer for us to discuss:

- Read Nehemiah 9 and circle/highlight every reference to the law, commandments or disobedience. Do these references keep coming up? If so, why do you think these references keep coming up?