

The Old Testament Laws

Why read them, how to understand them, and apply them today

Your Notes

Why not bail out, why not skip these outdated laws and odd ceremonies?

- We're all very busy today. We know reading the Bible is good for us, but this section of Bible reading about building the Tabernacle and all the laws and regulations, what does it have to do with us?
- Why are we taking time to read them in the first 5 books of the Bible?
- These are valid questions and the answers are important to understand. Following are some reasons why....

First, our eternity depends on it

- The Christian faith and how the Bible defines it, is the most important topic we can study because...
- It is about life or death, heaven or hell in this life and the next—though you wouldn't know that from much Christian messaging today.
- Christianity is not simply an alternative philosophical system to help you live your best life now.
- It's more than tips on how to have happy relationships, spend your money wisely, and be kind to others (though it does talk about those things).
- ***Ultimately, the Christian faith is about salvation from eternal separation from God by the means of the death and resurrection of Jesus and NOTHING is more important than a correct understanding of it.***

Second, anything you want to learn of value takes time and effort to understand and master it

- Whether it is learning a sport, how to play an instrument, mastering a topic of study or career, or learning to cook or sew.
- Learning the Bible, getting to know our God, our Savior and learning to live a life pleasing to Him requires similar, if not even more effort because what you learn influences not only your life now but how you will spend eternity.
- And part of that is taking the time to read and learn about the challenging parts of the Bible—God put them there for a reason and to understand the entire Bible you need to understand these parts.
- But they are difficult! And the lessons on them will help you understand and apply them.

What we will cover in this lesson about the laws of the Old Testament

- **What was the purpose of these laws?** And then based on that...
- **What is valid and what isn't** for us to follow today and what do we primarily learn from.
- **The Historical context of the laws**—why the specifics of many of them which will make more sense when you understand the contemporary cultural setting of them.
- **We will also talk about Typology of the Old Testament.** This is about the foreshadowing of what was coming in the New Testament and was

physically illustrated in the Tabernacle, festivals, and sacrifices. Typology is an important theological concept that will help you understand how the Old and New Testaments fit together.

- **We'll also look at APPLICATION**—suggestions for how God wants us to live today based on these passages.

Purpose of the Old Testament Laws

- The Apostle Paul in the New Testament clarifies it in the book of Galatians:
- ***So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. Gal.3:24, ESV***
- ***The Jewish laws were our teacher and guide until Christ came to give us right standing with God through our faith. Gal.3:24, TLB***
- The law was a guardian, a teacher, guide, other translations call it a tutor.
- Because we honestly don't know what is wrong at times until God points it out to us.

Why it was needed, what it needed to teach people

- God called Israel out of Egypt to be His people, his representatives on earth, as God said:
- ***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, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Exodus 19:5-6***
- The challenge is, ***How to do that?***
- They wouldn't learn it from Egypt, its customs or religions, or any of the surrounding nations.
- And following God, knowing what He wants, doesn't come naturally to us in our day either.

They needed detailed instructions

- In every part of life for how to live because God both cares about every part and wants us to acknowledge Him in every part.
- They were like young children learning how to live as God wanted.
- They had been slaves in a pagan society with no worship of Jehovah God and very different morality.
- That is a reason why the laws are as detailed as they are and the punishments as strict as they are—God was teaching His people an entirely different way to live.

Does that mean we need to follow all the laws today?

Short answer, "no"—here's why.....

- The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646) and many other organizing documents of various churches divides the Mosaic laws into ***three categories: moral, civil, and ceremonial***. Though there is some discussion of the exact division and application of each category, overall, here is the breakdown of what we need to specifically obey today.
- **We only need to completely obey the Moral Laws** of the Mosaic Law, which include the Ten Commandments and the commands repeated in the New Testament.
- **We do not need to obey the Ceremonial Laws**, these were the laws governing how to worship, sacrifice, and also many of the dietary rules.

Many of which pointed to the coming Messiah were fulfilled with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

- **Our obedience to government and the courts is based, in large measure on The Civil Laws**, which had to do with how the nation of Israel conducted itself in its daily life and formed into a nation. ***Most of them (including a theocratic government model) are no longer applicable today, though many of their underlying principles are still useful and many modern law codes are based on them.***
- For example, expectation of equality before the law, foundation of truth in courts, in addition to lesser things like laws of redemption all have their foundation in the Old Testament Laws of Moses.

How understanding the Historical Context helps

- OK, but still, why were some of the odd laws that we no longer apply given?
- When you understand the historical setting, the actions people take in it make much more sense.
- When you understand the historical context, and we will only give a few examples, you will be able to answer critics of the Bible—because quite a bit of the misunderstanding of these books is because they are often pulled out of their historical setting. Let's look at some examples.

Historical context

First example: Misunderstanding of an "Eye for an Eye"

- Many of the laws seem extremely harsh—until you look at this historical context of them.
- For example, "Eye for an eye" from Exodus 21:23–27 though reflective of some current laws of the time, it was also revolutionary:
- Hammurabi's Code illustrates this point: *"If a man has destroyed the eye of a man of the gentleman class, they shall destroy his eye If he has destroyed the eye of a commoner ... he shall pay one mina of silver. If he has destroyed the eye of a gentleman's slave ... he shall pay half the slave's price."* *The Babylonians [and other ancient people] clearly did not live under a social system that treated all people equally.*
<http://www.ushistory.org/civ/4c.asp>
- Do you see the difference of justice in this law code? It must have sounded astonishing to this group of former slaves that their justice or punishment would be the same no matter what their social status. And it was a limitation only an "eye for an eye."
- As God's people, wealth and status has no meaning in justice—equal punishment and protection are for all.

Second Historical context example

- There are many laws on sexual purity in these books. Just as we need God's standards on sexuality in how to conduct our lives today in a world with very different standards.
- In Egypt marriage between brothers and sisters and between other family members was common. God clearly shows in His laws that this was not acceptable for His people.
- Also, during that time and into New Testament times, pagan worship often involved sexual rites.

- Common sexual practices of the times in the temple included the use of sexual prostitutes and the exploitation of both young men and women.
- God forbid these practices and clearly defined how, when, and where His people were to worship Him.

Why sacrifices of any kind?

- Animal sacrifices foreshadowed the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus on the cross for our sins.
- Hebrews tells us that “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” ([Hebrews 9:22](#)).
- Why that is, why a blood sacrifice is needed to achieve forgiveness of sins, we don’t know any more than we know why God separates our time into day and night, why there are four seasons, or why all people worship—it has simply been that way from the earliest days of earth as we see....
- When Adam and Eve sinned, God killed an animal, shed its blood for the skins that covered them.
- When Cain and Abel made a sacrifice to God, only the animal sacrifice was acceptable.
- After Noah left the ark, he made an animal sacrifice.
- Job sacrificed for the sins of his children.
- It also seems to be a universal religious practice throughout the earth, HOWEVER.....

Israel’s sacrifices were unique

- In the surrounding pagan societies, there was widespread sacrifice of children.
- The worship of Molech required a live child be placed in the arms of a huge idol and burned as a sacrifice. God repeatedly forbids this.
- ***Only animals were sacrificed by the Jews.***
- And there was a specific way to sacrifice animals, a very humane way of killing them where the jugular vein of the animal was quickly severed and they would not feel pain (the blood is immediately cut off to the brain).
- We’ll talk more about the meaning of sacrifices later and in coming lessons, but the important thing now is that in the historical context, the sacrifices of the Jewish people were very different and much more tightly regulated than those of the surrounding peoples.

The sacrifices are also a primary example of Typology, a key to understanding the relationship between the Old & New Testament

- It’s incredibly important to keep in mind that God is the author of the entire Bible. Like any good author, He doesn’t tell the whole story at once.
- As you study the Bible, always keep God’s view of time in mind. God is outside our timeline and sees all and so He can give us a Bible based on future events accurately.
- *“Typology [that we’ll discuss more following] is based on the assumption that there is a pattern in God’s work throughout salvation history.”*
- Henry A. Virkler, *Hermeneutics*

A short definition of Typology, a key tool for Biblical understanding

- *God prefigured his redemptive work in the Old Testament and fulfilled it in the New; in the Old Testament are shadows of things to be more fully revealed in the New.*

- *The ceremonial laws of the Old Testament, for example, demonstrated to Old Testament believers the necessity of atonement for their sins; these ceremonies pointed forward to the perfect atonement to be made in Christ.*
- [here is his summary statement, listen carefully and I'll explain more fully] ***The prefigurement is called the type; the corresponding figure is called the antitype.***
Virkler, *Hermeneutics*

This terminology is confusing!

- When you read many Biblical commentaries, they will talk about something being a **"type"** in the Old Testament, for example, the sacrificial lamb in the Old Testament was a **"type" of Christ's future death on the cross.**
- So far, that makes sense, but then many commentaries go on to say that Christ's death was ***the antitype.***
- *What??? Doesn't antitype mean something that is the total opposite?*
- Using the prefix, "anti" to mean opposite is what it means in common usage, but the Greek definition, (and I don't know who started using this first, because it is really confusing) of the word "antitype" in this usage is actually the word ***"Antitupos" which means "corresponding as an impression to the die."***
- When I read that, it made sense to me! (bear with me).....

One of the many jobs I've had in my long work life is that of a publication designer

- Part of being a publication designer is an understanding of typography.
- The term *antitupos* "corresponding as an impression to the die." makes perfect sense, when you think of it in terms of setting type as it was in the past.....
- When **type** is set, to the typesetter, the type is placed upside down and backwards, it is all there, but the **type** not easy to read.
- But when the impression, the print is made of the type, the ***antitupos***, the meaning is clear. Two illustrations of this follow.

Another example

- When printed the plate says –
"The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog and feels as if he were in the seventh heaven of typography together with Hermann Zapf,"
- Again, the original **type** is hard to read, though the content is there. Once printed (**the impression, the antitype**) the words become clear.

Now some specific examples of how typology relates to the passages we are reading now

- The Jewish Tabernacle and all associated with it is commonly seen as a series of types of Jesus Christ. In other words, images that He will later specifically fulfill.
- Jesus describes himself as "the door" and the only "way" to God and the type prefiguring that was that there was only one door to get into the Tabernacle court.
- Many other parts of the Tabernacle represent other aspects of the coming Messiah, e.g. the bread set out each day in the Tabernacle and then

Jesus as later describing himself as “bread of life.”

- When His Jewish audience heard Him describe Himself in these ways, they would have thought of their heritage of worship.

The sacrificial lambs were the most significant

- Because they were the type, the illustration of the coming sacrifice of Jesus.
- In the New Testament, when John sees Jesus coming to be baptized, he says, “Behold the lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world”
- If you were a Jew, constantly experiencing the death of innocent lambs, the power of their meaning will come was a huge shock and revelation to them.
- If you are a modern-day Bible reader, you’ll miss the impact entirely if you haven’t read the story of the sacrificial lamb in the Old Testament.

One more example

- In the Tabernacle, there was a large veil that blocked the Holy of Holies so no one could see the Ark of the Covenant, and enter the Most Holy Place.
- Only the High Priest was allowed behind it once a year to make the sacrifice for sins.
- In Jesus day, the veil in the Temple in Jerusalem was **60 feet long, 30 feet high and 4 inches thick**—massive, impressive, intimidating, blocking man from God until...
- ***Jesus, again crying out loudly, breathed his last. At that moment, the Temple curtain was ripped in two, top to bottom. There was an earthquake, and rocks were split in pieces. Matt. 27:50-53***
- Access to God was now free and open.
- What had been a symbol, a type of separation, now became one of free access.

Expansion of the importance of Types

- *. . . biblical typology, as evidenced in the writings of the New Testament, always involves a heightening of the type in the antitype.*
- *It is not simply that Jesus replaces the temple as a new but otherwise equal substitute. No, Jesus is far greater than the temple! It is not as though Jesus is simply another in the line of prophets with Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, and Jeremiah. No, Jesus is much greater than the prophets!*
- **https://www.equip.org/bible_answers/what-is-the-significance-of-biblical-typology/**
- ***NOTE: this “heightening of the type” is also known as progressive revelation—God doesn’t tell us the whole salvation story at once, but part by part reveals it through Biblical history.***
- To clarify that, the article above continues.....

On the future Purpose of Types

- *Finally, it is important to point out that antitypes (what is fulfilled in the New Testament from the Old Testament type) themselves may also function as types of future realities. Communion, for example, is the antitype (future fulfillment) of the Passover meal. (see Luke 22; cf. Exodus 11-12).*
- *Jesus’ celebration of the Passover meal with his disciples on the night of his arrest symbolically points to the fact that he is the ultimate Passover*

Lamb “who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). . . .

- Though the Last Supper and the corresponding sacrament of communion serve as the antitype [NT fulfillment] of the Passover meal, they also point forward to their ultimate fulfillment in “the wedding supper of the Lamb” (Revelation 19:9; cf. Luke 22:15-18).
- On that glorious day [in heaven] the purified bride—true Israel—will be united with her Bridegroom in the new heaven and the new earth. (Revelation 21:1-2).
- https://www.equip.org/bible_answers/what-is-the-significance-of-biblical-typology/
- **In other words, there were examples in the Old Testament that would point to fulfillment in the New Testament and in the New Testament are examples that point to our eternal future.**

You may be asking, why all this complexity? Why take so long to tell the Biblical story of salvation?

- In some ways, this goes along with the question of why does it take so long for God to work out everything because He always seems to take longer than we want.
- Ultimately, only our God knows why He tells us what He does, as He does in the Order and way He does and how long it takes.
- I suspect there is much more going on in the spiritual realms than we are aware of and it takes as long as it does for God to tell His story as is needed to tell it well.
- In response to that, we simply trust.
- But also, I’ve wondered if God telling us things bit by bit throughout Biblical history, is a test to see if we are paying attention, and do we take the time, work and study to truly understand?
- In response to that—determine to study, read, and learn all the Lord has for you when you get into His Word consistently and deeply.

Some practical reading suggestions

- Though I trust this explanation of the purpose of the Laws, Historical Context, and Typology is useful, here is some additional advice on reading these books of the Law:
- Don’t get bogged down or overwhelmed by them—read even if you don’t understand as you go along.
- Fully understanding them is a LONG-TERM project and much of the Bible will make more and more sense as you read and get to know ALL the Bible and as you read through it again and again.
- Again, never read or learn these details just for knowledge, but for application as **WE are to be living sacrifices and a people of priests to represent our God in our world today—in many ways, YOU are the fulfillment of these OT pictures, as we are told....**

In the New Testament, as God’s people today, the Apostle Paul says—

- *Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. ² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. Rom. 12:1,2...and an even clearer way to say it.....*

- *¹⁻² So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.*
Rom. 12: 1,2, MSG

As you do that, who you are...

- *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. I Peter 2:9-10*
- *To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, ⁶ and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen. Rev. 1:5b-6*
- ***YOU are the walking fulfillment and current example of what you are reading about.***

Encouragements as you read these books

- They are not fun to read and we live in a world where fun is seen as the highest value.
- To read these books to learn God's expectations is hard to get through and as part of that, reading about infectious diseases and "spreading mildew" isn't easy.
- But just because something is hard doesn't mean we should avoid it.
- As we said before, many things worth learning take time and effort.
- And we are working to build our eternal souls.
- Do the work, the results are worth it.

Final application for us

- God has a purpose in including these books in our Bible – they are not simply odd, outdated laws and ceremonies commanded for no reason.
- They had very practical purposes at the time, but many things mentioned in them are also TYPES that point to future realities.
- To understand all the Bible better, we need to read all of it.
- Don't get bogged down on the details when you first read books like these—you won't understand them all, especially the first time you read them.
- Be patient, read and re-read them.
- They will give you a foundation of clarity and depth as you get to know God's Word as a whole and learn to trust Him to work out the story of your life according to His perfect and loving plan.

For additional materials to help you know, trust, apply, and teach the Bible, go to:
www.Bible805.com