

## The Beginning of All Things – Genesis through Deuteronomy Fall, 2015

*The Beginning of All Things – Genesis through Deuteronomy* Have you ever wondered what the scriptures teach about the origin of the universe? What about the patriarchs, who were they, and why are they important? What relevance does the account of the exodus of the Hebrews from the land of Egypt have for Christian growth? What can the seemingly tedious ceremonial laws of Leviticus as well as the long list of names in Numbers teach us about godly living? How should a believer read and reflect on the five books of Moses collectively called the Pentateuch (or Torah)? How do these five books “fit in” to the over-arching story of scripture? These questions and more will be explored as we seek to understand this section of God’s Word.

The objective of this class is: to gain an overview of the first five books of the Bible (otherwise known as the Pentateuch), and understand the relation between these foundational books to Christ and Christian living.

A People of the Presence: (Ex. 21-40) Last week we saw how the children of Israel, newly redeemed from Egyptian bondage, became the people of the covenant, not solely by virtue of their identification with Abraham, but also their “baptism” into Moses. We looked at the summation of the Mosaic Covenant, otherwise known as the Decalogue or the Ten Commandments. Today we will spend some time looking at the other laws mentioned throughout the book of Exodus (and repeated throughout the remainder of the Pentateuch) as well as the defining distinction that set the people of God apart from all other nations of the world: the presence of God.

Point One: *A Primer on Hebrew Law* – There has been much ink spilled over the role of the Mosaic Law in the life of God’s people – Old Testament and New Testament alike. In order to understand what we believe to be a biblical approach to the Law we must first identify the various categories of God’s Law identified in the book of Exodus as well as the remainder of the Pentateuch. There are three categories of Hebrew Law. They are as follows:

- 1) The Moral Law
- 2) The Ceremonial Law
- 3) The Civil Law

In addition to these three categories, there are two different features of Hebrew Law: 1) Apodictic, and 2) Casuistic. Apodictic (an adjective meaning, “clearly established or beyond dispute”) laws such as the commands of scripture, “Thou shalt not...” occur throughout the passage under consideration, but are mainly summarized in the Ten Commandments. Casuistic laws are case laws for which one of the Ten Commands or other apodictic laws are the cause or reason for prescribed behavior. Casuistic laws can be easily identified by preceding “if” and/or “when” statements. This distinction is important because it aids in creating perspective for the various commands and statutes we come across in the text. Last week we studied only apodictic laws – the Ten Commandments. Much of our reading this week dealt with case law or casuistic laws. For instance, chapter 21 begins by stating, “*When you buy a Hebrew slave...*” (**21:2**). All apodictic laws are not necessarily moral laws. For example, the command in **22:18**, “*You shall not permit a sorceress to live*”, is a civil law applicable to the O.T. community, but is no longer binding on the N.T. church. You can, however, make the case that this command reflects a moral principle that can be tied back to the first commandment. After all, those who practice sorcery worship a god other than YHVH. The point must be made that there are moral laws that are not explicitly stated in the Ten Commandments. For instance, the very commandment that Christ said was second in importance, “*...you shall love your neighbor as yourself*” (**Matthew 22:36-40**), is not mentioned in the

## The Beginning of All Things – Genesis through Deuteronomy Fall, 2015

Decalogue, but both the command to love the Lord with all one's heart soul and mind and one's neighbor as oneself are identified by Christ as the summation of all the Law and the Prophets. Much to the chagrin of modern man, the moral law, civil law and ceremonial law are all intertwined throughout the Pentateuch. The three categories of law set forth here in the book of Exodus are developed and exemplified by the rest of the Pentateuch. Willem A. Van Gemeren makes the following point in the book, *Five Views of Law and Gospel*:

*"The book of Leviticus further develops the law in three ways. First the priests taught and applied the ceremonial laws; offerings and sacrifices, ritual purity; feasts and festivals and laws of holiness. Second, the priests were models of holiness and purity to the people. Third, the Lord taught his people through the law that they were guilty and under condemnation."*<sup>1</sup>

The words of our own Confession (the Westminster Confession of Faith) says the following in relation to the three-fold breakdown of the law:

*"God gave to Adam a law, as a covenant of works, by which he bound him and all his posterity... this law, after his fall continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness; and as such, was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai in Ten Commandments. Beside this law, commonly called moral, God was pleased to give to the people of Israel, as a church under age, ceremonial laws containing several typical ordinances, partly of worship, prefiguring Christ...and partly holding forth divers instructions of moral duties. All of which ceremonial laws are not abrogated under the New Testament. To them also, as a body politic, he gave sundry judicial laws, which expired together with the state of that people...The moral law doth forever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof...neither doth Christ in the gospel, in any way dissolve, but much strengthens this obligation."*<sup>2</sup>

Is there benefit to studying the civil and ceremonial law today even though they are abrogated under the New Covenant? Two things to consider: 1) In **Psalms 1:1-2** David declares the following blessing: *"Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night."* He does not here distinguish between the three branches of the Law of the Lord, and we have every reason to believe that he was speaking expressly about the full counsel of God, not just the moral law. 2) Our reformed tradition considers a three-fold use of the law:

- 1) The Law reveals the holiness of God and the sinfulness of man.
- 2) The Law restrains evil allowing for a limited measure of justice (prior to the final judgment).
- 3) The Law reveals what is pleasing to God and is to be used (moral component) by the believer for growth in sanctification.

So, to summarize, there is much benefit in studying, and prayerfully meditating upon the Law of God even among members of the N.T. church.

Point Two: God's Presence Among his People – The remainder of the book of Exodus entails intricate details for the construction of the tabernacle, the place where God would dwell and where many of the ceremonial aspects of the law would be implemented. However, interspersed throughout the chapters in which the construction of the tabernacle is disclosed, there are promises made by God regarding his presence among his people. God tells Moses, *"Behold, I send an angel before you to guard you on the*

---

<sup>1</sup> Gundry, Stanley. *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, pgs. 31-32

<sup>2</sup> Westminster Confession of Faith Chapter 19:2-5

## The Beginning of All Things – Genesis through Deuteronomy Fall, 2015

*way and to bring you into the place I have prepared. Pay careful attention to him and obey his voice; do not rebel against him, for he will not pardon your transgression, for my name is in him. But if you carefully obey his voice and do all that I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries” (Ex. 23:20-22).* The Hebrew word here translated “angel” is *malach* and can also be translated, *messenger*. I suggest we have a foreshadowing of the trinity in the Old Testament in so much that the messenger here referenced has the name of God (YHWH) in him. The fact that obeying his voice (the voice of the messenger) equates to doing all that God says is indicative of a relationship between this agent and God himself. Furthermore, in verse 23, God states that the angel (messenger) will, “...go before you and bring you...” to the land of Promise. As mentioned last week, God accompanied Israel by means of the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night throughout the forty years of their wilderness wanderings.

After Israel’s sin with the golden calf, Moses returns to the top of Mount Sinai and makes the following petition: “*See, you say to me, ‘Bring up this people’ but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, ‘I know you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight.’ Now therefore, if I have found favor in your sight, please show me now your ways, that I may know you in order to find favor in your sight” (Ex. 33:12-13).* There are two important things that must be stated about Moses’s petition: 1) he was aware of his need for divine assistant; and 2) he was aware that he could not know God apart from knowing God’s ways (deeds and commands). It is not coincidental that the expressed need for the Holy Spirit and the need for divine revelation are mentioned in the same breath. After all, “...*these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God” (1 Corinthians 2:10-11).*

God replies to Moses accordingly: “*My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest” (33:15).* Moses’s reply to God is telling and reveals the means by which the people of God have always been distinguished from all other people, “*And he (Moses) said to him (God), ‘if your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?’” (Ex. 33:15-16)* In this vein, God’s instructions to Moses concerning the Tabernacle were, “*And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst” (25:8).* When the tabernacle was completed and erected, the book of Exodus concludes with an account of God’s presence being among his people and guiding them to the land of promise. **Ex. 40:33b-38** states, “...*so Moses finished the work. Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Throughout all their journeys, whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the people of Israel would set out. But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out until the day that it was taken up. For the cloud of the Lord was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel throughout all their journeys.”* The passages considered in this section establish well the premise that the people of the covenant were also a people of the presence.

Point Three: Feasts of the Lord – A survey of this section of Exodus would not be complete without a reference, even a fleeting one, to the three established feasts of the Lord in which all male descendants of the people of God were required to appear before the Lord annually. According to **23:14-17**, “*Three*

## The Beginning of All Things – Genesis through Deuteronomy Fall, 2015

*times in the year you shall keep a feast to me. You shall keep the feast of Unleavened Bread. As I commanded you, you shall eat unleavened bread for seven days at the appointed time in the month Abib, for in it, you came out of Egypt. None shall appear before me empty-handed. You shall keep the Feast of Harvest, of the firstfruits of your labor, of what you sow in the field the fruit of your labor. Three times in the year shall all your males appear before the Lord God.”* Although there were seven feasts established by God for Israel as we will explore in greater detail when studying the book of Leviticus, there are only three in which it was required for all male members of the covenant community to appear before the Lord. The selection of the male members of the community as opposed to the female members of the community is not a qualitative one, but a judicial one that is consistent with the complementarian view of gender in scripture.

The three feasts in which they were to appear before the Lord are also known as the Feast of Unleavened Bread (inaugurated by the night of Passover or Pesach); Feast of Shavuot (or Pentecost), and Feast of Tabernacles (or Sukkot). These three feasts are the spring feasts of Israel and were the actual days on which Christ was crucified (Passover), buried (feast of Unleavened Bread), and sent the Holy Spirit (the manifest presence of God within the N.T. covenant community) – Shavuot or Pentecost. These three feasts played a critical role in the life of the O.T. covenant community reminding God’s people of their redemption from Egyptian slavery and their journey in the wilderness, and helped shape the story of the N.T. covenant community by the events (of which they were foreshadows) which occurred during each season.

Conclusion: As we conclude our study of the book of Exodus, we have witnessed the unfolding of God’s redemptive plan from the slave pits of Egypt to the awe inspiring glory of Sinai. The descendants of the Patriarch Jacob, who after seeing God’s glory in a dream while sleeping at Bethel exclaimed, *“God is here and I knew it not...”*, have been graciously elected to behold the pillar of God’s presence accompanying his people on their way to the land promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Each step along the journey exalts the faithfulness of God. As we pause before Sinai. Let us remember the words of the writer of the book of Hebrews speaking expressly about the N.T. people of God, *“For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest and the sounds of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them...but you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God...and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant... therefore, let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken...”* (**Hebrews 12:18-24, 28**).

### Discussion Questions:

*How does God use the Law to bring us to Christ?*

*What might the N.T. church learn from the O.T. church’s sin with the golden calf?*

*What role does the Holy Spirit play in redemption from Egyptian slavery and the preservation of God’s people while wandering in the wilderness?*

*What role does the Holy Spirit play in the regeneration and conversion of the believer?*