

Abrahamic Faith: Studies & Principles In The Life of Abraham

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Monday: Abraham & The Covenant Promise

Tuesday: Abraham & The Faith

Wednesday: Abraham & The Law

Thursday: Abraham & The Seedline

Friday: Abraham & The Covenant of Righteousness

Outline:

1. How To Study The Bible #17: Understanding Law (This material is part of the summarization I did not classes/seminars that I teach on Biblical interpretation)
2. Overview of terms translated as law in the new testament
3. Galatians: Survey of The Law (*a classification/outline of every occurrence of νόμος in the text of Galatians*)
4. Abraham And The Law in Romans 4

How To Study The Bible (#17)

Understanding Law

This material is taken from my notes of *How To Read The Bible For All Its Worth* by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, Third Edition

Chapter Nine - The Law(s): Covenant Stipulations For Israel

Introduction

1. In addition to the patriarch narratives found in Genesis, the three defining narratives for Israel as a people are in Exodus.
 - a. Their deliverance (the actual exodus) from slavery in Egypt
 - b. The return of God's presence to distinguish Israel from every other nation
 - c. God's commission of Israel as a people for his name at Sinai
2. Israel, in order to be a people for God, had to learn how to become a community and a people in special relationship with God. They had to learn how to jettison any residual Egyptian and Canaanite culture, and learn to adopt God's ways.
3. The Mosaic law was God's gift to Israel to teach them how both of these were to occur:
 - a. How to be a community of God's people ...
 - b. Who were in special covenant relationship with God [Contrary to what many people think, grace and law are not mutually exclusive. The passage often cite to "prove" that they are is John 1:17: "For the law was given through Moses, *but* grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." This passage definitely allows law and grace distinctions, but distinction does not equal exclusion. We understand that Ephesians 2:8ff teaches that we are saved by grace through faith, but to assume that salvation by grace is in opposition to any principle of law is to be mistaken. New testament Christians have been under the perfect law of liberty since the time of the cross/establishment of the church (cf. James 1:25). We must understand and appreciate the integrated roles of grace and law. jla]

4. The law also set boundaries concerning their relationship/s with the nations around them.

5. To understand the law, we must understand its role in Israel's history.

What Is The Law?

1. The term "law" means many things:

- a. In plural, the term "laws" — 600+ specific commands—that Israel was to keep to show loyalty to God
- b. In singular, to refer to all of those laws collectively
- c. In singular, to refer to the "book" of the Law (Torah/Gen-Deut); part of TaNaKh
- d. In singular, to refer to the whole OT system (used by NT writers)
- e. In singular, to refer to the OT law as interpreted by rabbis (used by some NT writers)

2. The first two uses are the focal point here - helping Christians to read these two uses.

3. Additionally, that the books of Moses (Pentateuch) is called "the law" demands we understand:

- a. The commandments themselves are found in four of the five books called law (all but Genesis)
- b. These books contain much more than the lists of laws; most of the material that primarily narrative
- c. The covenantal law between God and Israel cannot be understood apart from the narrative in which it is found

4. Christians are often faced with this hermeneutical problem: How do any of these laws/legal formulations apply to us today ... Or do they?

Christians and The Old Testament Law

1. Christians do not need to show loyalty to God by keeping the OT law ... We are under a new covenant.

2. We could not do so anyway ... There is no temple for OT sacrifices.

3. If this is true, and it is, what did Jesus mean in Matthew 5:18? (nothing will disappear/be done away with until the law is accomplished/fulfilled)

4.

5. S/F suggest six guidelines for Christians to understand the OT law:

- a. The Old Testament law is a covenant
 - i. Covenant = binding contract between two parties
 - ii. Each has obligations to the covenant
 - iii. Suzerain-vassal covenant (overlord/servant) is the covenant style
 - iv. Vassal demonstrated loyalty via obedience to the stipulations of the covenant
 - v. Parts of suzerainty covenant: preamble, prologue, stipulations, witnesses, sanctions, document clause
 - vi. It is its covenant nature that makes the law so important to understanding the OT:
 1. It is essential to Israel's story
 2. It is central to (understanding) the message of the prophets
- b. The Old Testament is not our Testament.
 - i. No OT laws are binding today unless so stipulated/renewed in NT
 - ii. God still expects obedience of his people as demonstration of their loyalty, but not the same OT obedience - the "how" and "what" of obedience has changed
- c. Two kinds of old-covenant stipulations have clearly not been renewed in the new covenant.
 - i. Israelite civil laws - specify penalties for crimes to OT Jews
 - ii. Israelite ritual laws - found in Ex-Deut, the largest single block of OT laws, instructed Israel how to worship God acceptably (priestly commands, sacrifices, etc.)

- iii. In this regard note: Jesus did not say that we are still under the law (Lk 16:16-17) ... He said that that law could not be changed. When he came to fulfill that law, he also established a new covenant.
- d. Part of the old covenant is renewed in the new covenant.
 - i. Though civil and ritual laws of OT do not apply, ethical laws from the OT are often restated in NT.
 - ii. These laws apply because they support the two principles on which the law and the prophets hung:
 1. First great commandment - love God with all heart, soul, strength and mind
 2. Second great commandment - love neighbor as yourself
 - iii. Jesus excerpted some OT laws and gave them (via different aspects) new application (cf. Mt 5:21ff) in terms of love for neighbor
- e. All of the Old Testament law is still the word of God for us even though it is not still the command(ment) of God to us.
 - i. God's OT laws often protected Israel in ways that do not directly apply to us (Deut 22:8 re parapets).
 - ii. These laws demonstrate God's concern for Israel and show how the law is a part of Israel's story, thus giving us an inkling of our story under the new covenant.
- f. Only what is explicitly renewed from the OT law can be considered part of the NT law of Christ.
 - i. Note that S/F assume that all 10 commandments are repeated, thus included, in the NT covenant (jla - specific Sabbath laws?)
 - ii. They note that no other specific OT laws apply/are binding on Christians. [It is a common understanding of Reformed/Calvinist theology to assume that the 10 commandments still have some sense of continuity under the new covenant. The issue of continuity is a key theme for RT.]

The Role of The Law In Israel and in The Bible

1. Though the law does not apply to us directly, we must remember that it functioned in part to lead us to Christ (cf. Gal 3:24ff)
2. Without it we would not understand what it meant for Israel to be God's people.
3. Though the law could not save (cf. Rom 3:20; Gal 3, 5), it was a gift from God to Israel to set them apart from their pagan neighbors. It showed them how to love God and one another, one reason why OT writers often express delight for the law. [Romans tells us that one function of the law was to identify sin and to make sin more sinful.]
4. Israel's problem was not just that they could not keep the law, but also in that they chose not to do so.
5. They saw that nations became like the gods they worshiped, and they became like the idols they often worshiped - without eyes to see and without ears to hear. They became filled with greed, capriciousness, immorality, etc., like the Baals of the Canaanites.
6. The OT law showed Israel then (and us today) what God's character was like, and what God wanted their (Israel's) character to be like (and thus ours today).
7. The law, though it could not save, presented examples of what it was like to show loyalty to God.
8. Two kinds of law are worthy of note:
 - a. Apodictic Law - the "do" and "do not" laws of the OT; to set a standard by example; limited in wording, but comprehensive in spirit (def - demonstrative, clearly established; cf Lev 19:9-14); hermeneutic note: the law shows us how impossible it is to please God on our own

- b. Casuistic Law - case-by-case law; conditional law, what may or may not be the case and what ought to be done if it does; single out particular cases that apply only to some but not necessarily to all; constitutes a large portion of the 600+ commands in OT; none renewed in NT; principles of casuistic law show background for NT teaching on redemption (cf. Deut 15:12-17; cf. Discussion re slavery 174ff)

The Old Testament Law & Other Ancient Law Codes

1. OT law is not the earliest law known. There are others older. OT law shows higher standards, however.
 - a. Laws of Eshnunna (Akkadian law code, circa 1800 BC) - slaves are “less” than nobility
 - b. Law Code of Hammurabi (Babylonian, circa 1726 BC) - murderer’s daughter is put to death, but not murderer
2. OT law shows sins and punishment without deferential regard to sex, social status, etc.

The Old Testament Law As Benefit to Israel

1. Though the law could not provide eternal life and lead to complete righteousness before God ...
2. We must remember that it was not designed to do so.
3. When its own purposes are understood, there are numerous benefits to the law

The Food Laws

1. Food laws are not arbitrary.
2. They had a serious protective purpose.
3. Most of the food restrictions were due to:
 - a. Foods carrying disease in Sinai’s/Canaan’s climate
 - b. Foods not economical to raise in agrarian context of Sinai/Canaan
 - c. Food favored for religious sacrifice by peoples Israel was not to imitate
 - d. Foods that were rather low in allergens (cf. Lamb - least allergenic of major meats)

Laws About The Shedding of Blood

1. Sin demanded/deserved punishment.
2. But sinners could escape punishment via blood/animal sacrifice.
3. Substitutionary atonement prepared the way for the work of Christ.

Unusual Prohibitions

1. Often designed to keep Israel from following fertility cult practices among the Canaanites.
2. Protection against sympathetic magic: the idea that symbolic actions (and things - jla) can influence the gods and nature (cf. Similarity of shapes, colors, etc., as they applied to potions)
3. God’s prohibition of these practices was not arbitrary but graciously beneficial.

Laws Giving Blessings To Those Who Keep Them

1. All of Israel’s laws were designed to be a means of blessing for the people of God (jla - everything God does falls into this category)
2. Some laws specifically state blessings that would come from obedience to them:
 - a. Tithing
 - b. Caring for the needy

In Summary: Some Do’s And Don’ts

1. Do see the OT as inspired for you. Do not see it as God’s direct command for you.
2. Do see the OT law as the basis for the old covenant and Israel’s history. Don’t see it as binding without cause.
3. Do see God’s character revealed in the OT law. Don’t forget God’s mercy is equal to the severity of his law.

4. Do see the OT law as a paradigm. Don't see the OT law as complete or technically comprehensive.
5. Do remember the essence of the law (the 2 great and 10 commandments) are in NT (jla-not sabbath). Don't expect to find OT law cited by prophets or the NT.
6. Do see the law as a gift to Israel which, when obeyed, brought blessings. Don't view the OT law as arbitrary or as limiting anyone's freedom.

Terms For Law In The New Testament

1. Nomos: **νόμος*** (total words = 201; total verses = 161)

2. Forms of term (5):

νομοδιδάσκαλος; (νόμος, διδάσκω); teacher of the law = 3

νομοθεσία; (νόμος, τίθημι); giving of the law = 1

νομοθετέω; (νόμος, τίθημι); to give the law; to legislate = 2

νομοθέτης; (νόμος, τίθημι); lawgiver = 1

νόμος; law, principle = 194

3. Concordance listings of the term:

νομοδιδάσκαλος teacher of the law (3)

Luke 5:17 καθήμενοι Φαρισαῖοι καὶ νομοδιδάσκαλοι οἱ ἦσαν ἐληλυθότες

Acts 5:34 ὀνόματι Γαμαλιήλ, νομοδιδάσκαλος τίμιος παντὶ τῷ

1Tim. 1:7 θέλοντες εἶναι νομοδιδάσκαλοι, μὴ νοοῦντες μήτε

νομοθεσία giving of the law (1)

Rom. 9:4 διαθήκαι καὶ ἡ νομοθεσία καὶ ἡ λατρεία

νομοθετέω to give the law; to legislate (2)

Heb. 7:11 λαὸς γὰρ ἐπ' αὐτῆς **νενομοθέτηται**, τίς ἐτι χρεία κατὰ τὴν

Heb. 8:6 καὶ κρείττονός ἐστιν διαθήκης μεσίτης, ἥτις ἐπὶ κρείττοσιν ἐπαγγελίαις **νενομοθέτηται**.

νομοθέτης lawgiver (1)

James 4:12 ὁ **νομοθέτης** καὶ κριτὴς ὁ

νόμος law, principle (194)

Matt 5:17–18; 7:12; 11:13; 12:5; 22:36, 40; 23:23; Luke 2:22–24, 27, 39; 10:26; 16:16–17; 24:44; John 1:17, 45; 7:19, 23, 49, 51; 8:5, 17; 10:34; 12:34; 15:25; 18:31; 19:7; Acts 6:13; 7:53; 13:15, 38; 15:5; 18:13, 15; 21:20, 24, 28; 22:3, 12; 23:3, 29; 24:14; 25:8; 28:23; Rom 2:12–15, 17–18, 20, 23, 25–27; 3:19–21, 27–28, 31; 4:13–16; 5:13, 20; 6:14–15; 7:1–9, 12, 14, 16, 21–23, 25; 8:2–4, 7; 9:31; 10:4–5; 13:8, 10; 1 Cor 9:8–9, 20; 14:21, 34; 15:56; Gal 2:16, 19, 21; 3:2, 5, 10–13, 17–19, 21, 23–24; 4:4–5, 21; 5:3–4, 14, 18, 23; 6:2, 13; Eph 2:15; Phil 3:5–6, 9; 1 Tim 1:8–9; Heb 7:5, 12, 16, 19, 28; 8:4, 10; 9:19, 22; 10:1, 8, 16, 28; James 1:25; 2:8–12; 4:11

4. Frequency in NT text:

Book	Total Hits	Hits per 1000
Matthew	8	0.44

Book	Total Hits	Hits per 1000
Mark	0	0
Luke	10	0.51
John	15	0.96
Acts	18	0.97
Romans	75	10.54
1 Corinthians	9	1.32
2 Corinthians	0	0
Galatians	32	14.33
Ephesians	1	0.41
Philippians	3	1.84
Col. - 2 Thess	0	0
1 Tim	3	1.89
2 Tim - Phil	0	0
Hebrews	16	3.23
James	11	6.3
1 Peter - Revelation	0	0

Galatians: Survey of The Law (*a classification/outline of every occurrence of νόμος in the text of Galatians*)

1. Salvation and the Law

- a. Justified by faith, not by law - 2:16 (3x)
- b. No one is justified by law - 3:11 (but rather by faith; cf. Rom 3:20)
- c. Righteousness does not come by the law - 2:21
- d. If righteousness came by the law, then Christ died in vain - 2:21
- e. If any law could bring righteousness, it would have been the law - 3:21
- f. To attempt salvation by law means you have fallen from grace - 5:4

2. The Spirit and the Law

- a. The Spirit is given, not by the law, but by faith - 3:2
- b. The working of NT miracles came by faith, not by law - 3:5
- c. If led by the Spirit, you are not under the law - 5:18

3. The Law could not be kept

- a. It cursed those who were under it - 3:10
- b. It cursed those who could not “continue” in it - 3:10
- c. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law - 3:13
- d. Those who seek to obey the law (e.g., circumcision) are obliged to keep it all - 5:3
- e. Those who enjoin circumcision don’t/can’t keep the law - 6:13

4. The Law and faith

- a. The law is not of faith - 3:12
 - b. Faith justifies, not law - 2:16
 - c. Before faith came, we (Israel/mankind) were guarded by law - 3:23
 - d. Faith has no limits on the amount of good we are allowed to do - 5:23
5. The Law and the covenant
- a. The law cannot annul the covenant - 3:17
 - b. The covenant came first - 3:17ff
 - c. The law came second - 3:17ff
 - d. The law was taken away - 3:17ff
 - e. The covenant remains - 3:17ff
6. The Law and inheritance
- a. If inheritance (spiritual) comes by law, it can not be by promise - 3:18
 - b. But God gave it (inheritance) to Abraham by promise - 3:18
7. The purpose of The Law
- a. The law demanded that we die to the law so that we might live for God - 2:19
 - b. It was added because of sin - 3:19
 - c. To identify sin - Rom 5:13, 20; 7:7ff, 13
 - d. To make sin more sinful - Rom 5:13, 20; 7:7ff, 13
 - e. The law was a tutor/schoolmaster to bring us to Christ - 3:24
 - f. So that we could be justified by faith, not by the law - 3:24
 - g. Those under the law were to “hear the law” (i.e., understand its purpose) - 4:21
 - h. The law was fulfilled in love of neighbor - 5:14
8. Christ and The Law
- a. Christ was born under the law - 4:4
 - b. So that he might redeem those under the law - 4:5
9. The Law of Christ
- a. When we bear each other’s burdens, we fulfill the law of Christ - 6:2
 - b. Christ’s birth and death under the law (and implicit within the context, his perfection in keeping that law), freed us from it’s constraints - 4:4-5

Abraham And The Law in Romans 4

1. What is the basis of Abraham’s salvation? - 1
2. If by works, he can boast, but not before God - 2
3. What does the Scripture say - 3 (Gen 15:6):
 - a. Abraham believed God
 - b. It (i.e., his faith) was what counted for righteousness
4. Principle: For those who work (at anything, physical labor or spiritual exercise), wages are .. - 4
 - a. not given by grace
 - b. but rather by debt
5. Principle: God does not justify on the basis of work =’s justification - 5
 - a. God ascribes justification to the ungodly on the basis of faith
 - b. God accounts faith for righteousness
6. Proof of this principle: David said ... - 6-8
 - a. that man can be blessed by God apart from works
 - b. that man can be blessed by God when he (God) imputes righteousness
 - c. those whose lawless deeds/sin are forgiven/covered ...

- d. are covered because God did not impute their sin to their account
7. Question: Does this principle apply to the Jew (the circumcised) only, or also to the non-Jew (the uncircumcised)? - 9
 - a. Answer: It applied to Abraham - 9
 - b. Answer: It applied to Abraham before the covenant sign of circumcision - 10
 - c. Answer: He received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of his faith, prior to circumcision - 11
 8. What is so critical about the timing of Abraham's justification? - 11-12
 - a. Answer: He received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of his faith, prior to circumcision, so that he would be "the father of all those who believe" (regardless of whether they were Jews/non-Jews)
 - b. Answer: The principle of justification by faith antedates circumcision, the Jewish "work" that they relied on so heavily as proof of their salvation
 9. Abraham, then, becomes a paradigm (pattern) for the salvation of all nations because the promise that he would be the heir of the world came through ... 13
 - a. the righteousness of faith
 - b. and not through the law of Moses
 10. If Abraham's salvation were based on the law, then faith is futile and the promise is worthless - 14
 - a. the law brought wrath - 15
 - b. but faith accesses grace - 16
 - c. thus Abraham's exemplar (pattern) applies to all humanity ... - 16
 - d. to those under the law - 16
 - e. and to those who are of the faith of Abraham - 16
 - f. this is why Abraham is called the father of many nations -17
 - g. this is why his example of faith (his trust that God would keep his promises) is so powerful - 16-21
 11. Why are all of these things written here (Paul's letter to the Romans)? - 23
 - a. Abraham can not read these things - 23
 - b. But you (Roman Christians) can - 24
 - c. And the same principles of salvation (by grace through faith - see vs. 16) that applied in Abraham's day to Abraham, apply today to you (Roman Christians) - 14-15

That God providentially recorded and protected this message, and transmitted it to succeeding generations over the course of 2000 years without any intervening amendments to it as his divine constitution, demonstrates that the same principles of salvation, apart from the law of Moses, and based on grace through faith, apply with equal force to us just as it did to Roman Christians who first read the epistle.

And if it applies to us as it did to them, then our salvation, like their's is also based on the same principle/s that applied to Abraham. Our faith leads to righteousness through obedience, just as Abraham's did ... and just as Christ's did (cf. Romans 5:18-19.)

Romans open and closes with a succinct statement of that principle: "Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name," (Romans 1:5); "but now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith-- 27 to God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen. (Roman 16:26-27)