

LAW

Exodus 20 - Deuteronomy 32

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- In the Old Testament law, God spoke in a particularly direct way about his standards for the lives of his people in ancient Israel.
 - The implications of the Old Testament law extend through the New Testament and into modern church ministry and Christian life.
 - While some of the Old Testament laws seem applicable for all time (Exodus 20:13 - “you shall not murder”), others are difficult to comprehend or apply in our modern context (Exodus 21:28-32 - “If an ox gores a man or a woman to death, the ox shall surely be stoned and its flesh shall not be eaten; but the owner of the ox shall go unpunished... *(continued)*)
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Law

... If, however, an ox was previously in the habit of goring and its owner has been warned, yet he does not confine it and it kills a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned and its owner also shall be put to death. If a ransom is demanded of him, then he shall give for the redemption of his life whatever is demanded of him. Whether it gores a son or a daughter, it shall be done to him according to the same rule. If the ox gores a male or female slave, the owner shall give his or her master thirty shekels of silver, and the ox shall be stoned.”)

- So it is essential to understand the Old Testament law from the perspective of its original context and purpose, with due attention to its goodness, its weakness, and its ancient cultural and historical context.
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Law

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- Law is fundamental to all societies, but different societies in different times and places often have different legislative needs.
 - When this comes to the Old Testament law, this means a careful reader will be sensitive to these cultural and historical factors which lie behind and within the text.
 - The Old Testament laws themselves need to be studied in regard to their own characteristics.
 - In Exodus-Deuteronomy, three subgenres of legal literature are common: **covenant**, **law**, and **ritual legislation**.
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What do we mean when we refer to the Old Testament Law?

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- The four other major covenants in the Bible between God and humanity are the Abrahamic covenant, the Mosaic covenant, the Davidic covenant, and the New covenant.
 - A covenant is best defined as a means of expressing and or a method of establishing and defining a relationship.
 - Covenants were not the same as legal contracts: a contract was a business transaction; a covenant was about two parties relating to one another on a long-term basis (cf. Gen 31:44-54; Josh 24:25-28).
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How a Covenant Functions

- Therefore, the Mosaic covenant is not simply a legal contract, **it is a relational bond.**

- A biblical covenant is a personal union pledged by symbol and/or oath, with the two basic ideas of a covenant being its stipulations and the oath to follow those stipulations, establishing a meaningful relationship.

How a Covenant Functions

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- The Bible itself does not conceive of a law code without a covenant as its base.
 - As the frame for the law, the Mosaic covenant defines the limits of the law's content and primary application.
 - The spirit of the law is basically that God expects redeemed people to take their covenant commitment to him seriously because he takes his covenant commitment to them seriously.
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How Law Functions

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- The Old Testament law is basically a combination of two types of law: **divine decrees** and **divinely determined judicial ordinances or precedents**.
 - There is distinction drawn in the Old Testament between laws that **unconditionally and categorically assert right and wrong** (apodictic law) and laws that **define specific cases and prescribed legal consequences** (case or casuistic law).
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How Law Functions

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- The law is a unified whole, yet the ritual legislation within it are a subgenre of legal literature because of the distinctive concerns and content (*if law is for the judges, ritual legislation was for the priests*).
 - While Exodus 25-Leviticus 9 explain and initiate the tabernacle and the priestly ritual system, the literary and theological center of ritual legislation is Leviticus 10-16. Leviticus 17-25 then works out the social, religious, and nationalistic implications of this legislation.
 - Animals, people, and things that are clean and unclean are all dealt with at a basic level and are shown to be the foundation of the entire ritual system.
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How Ritual Legislation Functions

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- Three levels of uncleanness: regular, irregular, and severe.
 - The point is that sometimes clean and unclean conditions and purification procedures are associated not only with limited access to the tabernacle, but also to the community which surrounded the tabernacle.
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How Ritual Legislation Functions

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- The critical issue of the law's relevance today hinges partially on the answer to one question: **Within the Mosaic covenant is there a valid distinction between law that is universal and timeless, and civil or ceremonial law that is culture-bound?**
 - The law continues to demonstrate God's expectations, though Christians live under the new covenant and have a different relationship to the Mosaic law (cf. Acts 15).
 - The law is applicable to Christians because we are to live it from our hearts (Jer 31:33).
 - The ceremonial law is also applicable, since it defines the expectations of the Christian faith (e.g., Rom 12:1).
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How Old Testament Law applies to Christians

Exodus 21:28-32 - “If an ox gores a man or a woman to death, the ox shall surely be stoned and its flesh shall not be eaten; but the owner of the ox shall go unpunished. If, however, an ox was previously in the habit of goring and its owner has been warned, yet he does not confine it and it kills a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned and its owner also shall be put to death. If a ransom is demanded of him, then he shall give for the redemption of his life whatever is demanded of him. Whether it gores a son or a daughter, it shall be done to him according to the same rule. If the ox gores a male or female slave, the owner shall give his or her master thirty shekels of silver, and the ox shall be stoned.”

How to Interpret the Law

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- Christians are bound to study all the Old Testament law, in particular the reason for the law.
 - From the Old Testament law comes a wealth of imagery that underscores the values that affirm the Christian's relationship with God under the new covenant.
 - Covenant is a bond – not a bond of glue or nails, but a relational bond. And a relational bond is strengthened by tangible expressions of that bond.
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Conclusion