

Christ and His Law

Christ and the Law of Moses

Lesson #2 for April 12, 2014

Scriptures: Luke 2:21-24,41-52; Exodus 13:2,12; Matthew 17:24-27; John 8:1-11; Deuteronomy 22:23-24.

1. This lesson describes how Jesus—the Giver of the laws in the Old Testament—through His prophets in Old Testament times warned of the dangers of disregarding those laws and then came as a human and observed those laws in the way they should be observed.
2. Because of the legalism of the Jews, and the Pharisees in particular, many Christians have taken Christ's opposition to their legalism as if it were an opposition to all Jewish laws. This has led to disregard for the Sabbath and has led to anti-Semitism and other atrocities down through the generations. Legalism means making law the all-important thing in your life.
3. But, there are many indications that Jesus Himself and His family when He was a child carefully and fully obeyed the moral and ceremonial laws. In our last lesson, we noted that Joseph and Mary and their family observed Roman law and Mosaic law.
4. In this lesson we will speak about how Jesus Himself related to local interpretations of law. To Christians in the 21st century, it might seem obvious that Jesus should have said: "I was the One who gave you those laws; and therefore, I am the one who can tell you how to interpret them!" But, even though He was the Giver of the laws and should have been exempt from certain of their provisions, He followed the provisions without complaining, even being circumcised.
5. Read Luke 2:21-24. It is interesting to attempt to trace back the rules that they were given and which the parents of Jesus observed. See *Patriarchs and Prophets* 363.1-364.2.
6. We do not know when circumcision first began. In very ancient times, there were two types of circumcision: 1) A simple slitting of the foreskin as observed by Egyptians and some others; and 2) A full circumcision as observed by some of the tribes in the area of Canaan as well as by Abraham and his descendants. Circumcision was regarded as a part of the covenant relationship between the Jews and their God. Jewish males were expected to be circumcised before marriage. It is interesting to note that Ishmael, Abraham's son not according to the promise, was born while Abraham was still uncircumcised. After Abraham was circumcised and his name was changed from Abram to Abraham, he gave birth to Isaac, the son of the promise. He was instructed that no male who was not properly circumcised should participate in any of the rites and rituals that God had given to him. Circumcision identified them as Jews even if they went to fertility cult rites.
7. Read Genesis 17:4. Circumcision was a part of the covenant agreement that Abraham had with God. Sons born to the Israelites, the descendants of Abraham, and even males born to their animals were considered to be the property of God. They could be bought back by going through the proper ceremonies and paying a ransom price. (Genesis 17:9-12)
8. What do we know about the families and parentage of Joseph and Mary? Truthfully, almost nothing. It is very interesting to compare the genealogy of Jesus as reported in Matthew 1 and that in Luke 3. The two lists are almost completely different back to the time of Solomon. Why is that? There are several possible answers. Probably the most likely answer is that Mary may have been the only child of her parents. In such cases, parents would often adopt a son-in-law as their "official" son so that their heritage could be passed down through him. If that was the case, then it would suggest that the genealogy in Matthew was traced back through Joseph's family while the genealogy in Luke was traced back through Mary's family. Of course, Joseph had no blood relationship whatsoever with Jesus. Jesus was a descendant of David only through Mary.
9. We are told that Joseph was "a righteous man." (Matthew 1:19) As we know, Mary "found favor in the sight of God." (Luke 1:30) These two individuals were chosen for two of the most important tasks ever assigned to human beings. Were they given ongoing instructions about the care of that special Child? Why would God choose a poor family to be the home of the King of the Universe?

How do we know that they were poor? If one could afford it, he was supposed to bring a lamb and a dove as an offering to dedicate a child. But, if one was poor, he could bring two doves which is what they brought. (Luke 2:21-24; Exodus 13:2,12)

10. Read Leviticus 12:1-8. Many people have questioned why the birth of a son required only half as much time for cleansing of the mother as did the birth of a daughter. One possible explanation is that blood is regarded as a contaminant. And when a woman gives birth to a girl, she is producing a child who will in turn bleed. Thus, ritually, she is adding to the uncleanness of the world.
11. According to Daniel 9 and the Gospels, the ministry of Jesus lasted 3 ½ years. It began in the autumn of A.D. 27, and it terminated with the crucifixion in the spring of A.D. 31. If we had only the Synoptic Gospels—that is, Matthew, Mark, and Luke—it would appear that Jesus’s only visit to Jerusalem during that time was at the end of His life just before His crucifixion. However, the Gospel of John clarifies that Jesus made several visits to Jerusalem. In fact, John focused on Jesus’s times in Jerusalem. It is also John who gave us the best chronology for the life of Jesus. The events of Jesus’s first Passover visit are recorded in John 2-3. Events associated with His second Passover are recorded in John 5. The third Passover occurred following the feeding of the 5000 in Galilee as recorded in Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17; and John 6:1-14. Jesus did not attend that Passover. Of course, the fourth Passover was the time when He was crucified. It is only the Gospel of John that helps us to construct the full and complete chronology of the ministry of Jesus.
12. It should be noted that there was one additional time when Jesus definitely attended the Passover festival. That was at the age of 12 when He probably experienced His *Bar Mitzvah*. It is likely that He attended the Passover festival with His parents many times after that while still living with them in Nazareth, but none of those are recorded for us.
13. Let us briefly review the three main annual ceremonies and festivities observed by the Jews. The first occurred in the springtime and included the Passover followed by the Feast of Unleavened Bread. It occurred in late March or early April. The second festival was known as *Shavuot* in Hebrew but was known more commonly by the Greek name *Pentecost*. It occurred in June, 50 days after Passover. The final festival of the year occurred in the autumn, beginning with the Day of Atonement or *Yom Kippur*; and it was followed by the Feast of Booths or Tabernacles. It signaled the end of the Jewish religious year and the beginning of a new religious year.
14. The Jews celebrated two other major festivals: 1) The festival of *Purim* which occurs in late February or early March, and 2) The festival of *Hanukkah* which occurs in December. *Purim* celebrates the work by Queen Esther in saving the Jews from genocide; *Hanukkah* celebrates the victory of the Maccabees over the Greeks in 164 B.C.
15. Having reviewed a considerable amount of history, what can we learn about God from these festivals which we no longer observe? Every Jewish male who could was to attend at least one of the major festivals each year. And even if he lived very far away, he needed to try to attend at least one festival in his lifetime. One estimate made a few years after the death of Jesus suggested that 2 million people went to Passover that year. If one lived in Galilee, it would take about a week to walk to Jerusalem and a week to walk back. Often, Jews would spend the week prior to a major festival in Jerusalem preparing for the event. Thus, a major festival could take up to one month to attend! Remember that it was only at the temple in Jerusalem that one could offer a sacrifice for one’s sins!
16. Read Luke 2:48-49. After three days of searching for Jesus at the age of 12 and being very worried about Him, Jesus’s parents discovered Him in the temple. As translated by the *King James Version*, this verse seems somewhat disrespectful from Jesus: “How was it that you sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my father’s business?” This sounds very disrespectful. What the Greek actually implies is: “Why did you have to look for me? Didn’t you know that I had to be in my father’s house?” (*GNB*) Luke 2:50 explains, “But they did not understand his answer.” Jesus had already begun to discover the truth of His parenthood.

17. What does it teach us about God to recognize that Jesus was willing to enter into the womb of a sinful woman—there was no immaculate conception—to be born in a stable, to live with a humble and poor human family, eat with them, sleep with them, obey them—as far as possible given His divine mandate—and put up with all their human eccentricities for years? By contrast, what was it that the Jews expected from their Messiah?

It was generally believed that Christ would be born at Bethlehem [Micah 5:2], but that after a time He would disappear, and at His second appearance none would know whence He came. There were not a few who held that the Messiah would have no natural relationship to humanity. And because the popular conception of the glory of the Messiah was not met by Jesus of Nazareth, many gave heed to the suggestion, “Howbeit we know this Man whence He is: but when Christ cometh, no man knoweth whence He is.” [John 7:27] (DA 457.2) [Content in brackets is added.]

18. Read Matthew 17:24-27. Every Jewish male over the age of 20 was expected to pay the annual temple tax of a half-shekel. (Exodus 30:13; 38:26) However, there was a special provision instituted by the Jews themselves saying that one did not have to pay the tax if he was a rabbi, a priest, a Levite, or a prophet. Thus, if Jesus paid the tax, they would hold that up as evidence that He did not regard Himself as a prophet or a teacher. (DA 432.1-433.2) Once again, Jesus’s response was a very clever one. By performing a miracle and getting the temple tax for Himself and for Peter from the mouth of a fish caught at the end of a line, He fulfilled the requirements of the law, and they could not claim He was disregarding the temple. However, at the same time, if they told the story of how it was paid, there was no way they could claim that He was not the miracle-working Son of God! (DA 434.1)
19. It is interesting to notice that Jesus paid this tax even though He predicted the destruction of Jerusalem to take place only a few years later. (Matthew 24:1-2)
20. So, how about it? Did Jesus seek to overthrow the laws as given by Moses and others in the Old Testament? Read John 7:1,25-26; 10:31; and Matthew 5:17-20. If, in fact, Jesus was here to establish the law, how do we explain John 8:1-11 and Matthew 19:1-9? Aren’t these a contradiction to Deuteronomy 22:23-24 and 24:1-4?
21. The story of the woman taken in adultery as recorded in John 8:1-11 is a very interesting one. Read the full details in DA 460.4-462.2. Notice that John 8:9 says that they all left beginning with the eldest down to the youngest. Was that proof that they were all guilty—none were “without sin”? There was no one left to accuse her! And, of course, Jesus did not accuse her either.
22. As described in Matthew 19:1-9 (See Deuteronomy 24:1-4.) when they tried to trap Him about the question of divorce, Jesus did them one better by going back to the days of Adam. He did not set aside the Mosaic law, but rather, He explained why it was given. In any case since none of us is perfect and none of us qualifies to be a judge, we had better leave that job to God. He is incredibly gracious. Shouldn’t we then be as gracious to other sinners like ourselves?
23. If we believe that the Mosaic laws were given by Jesus Himself to Moses, shouldn’t Jesus Himself have been exempt? Are lawgivers supposed to be above the law?
24. It was very important for Jesus as a human being to fully obey all the laws given in Scripture. Remember that Satan had claimed that it was impossible for a human being to fully obey God’s law. Jesus disproved that claim. (2SAT 194.3; GC 531.1; DA 239.3; 763.1)
25. If Jesus as the Giver of the laws thought it was necessary to fulfill them in every important detail, how should we regard the keeping of the law? Are there things we should learn even from those laws which no longer apply because they were fulfilled by the life and death of Jesus? In our daily lives as modern Christians, do we keep the spirit of the law? Or, just the letter of the law? Or, do we not keep the law at all?
26. Scan through Psalm 119. It is a long chapter, of course. The author described the law as a delight, something to make one happy, to avoid shame, and many other wonderful terms. Is that the way you feel about God’s law? Do we ever give our neighbors, our family, or our friends a

negative impression of God's law by our own behavior?

All too often the law—and the Lawgiver, for that matter—seems to receive bad press. Many people see the Jesus of the New Testament as kind and forgiving, while viewing the God of the Old Testament as a stern heavenly policeman with a list of laws that He tries vigorously to enforce. We forget that the entire Godhead—the Trinity—authored the whole system of law in the Old Testament. Jesus modeled a life based on the law. And it was only by the Holy Spirit's power that the first Christians could follow Jesus' example in applying God's law to their everyday lives. (*Adult Teacher's Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* p. 25)

27. Ellen White talked about that issue.

It is the sophistry of Satan that the death of Christ brought in grace to take the place of the law. The death of Jesus did not change or annul or lessen in the slightest degree the law of Ten Commandments. That precious grace offered to men through a Saviour's blood establishes the law of God. Since the fall of man, God's moral government and His grace are inseparable. They go hand in hand through all dispensations. "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other" (Psalm 85:10).—*Faith and Works*, p. 30.

28. It is a well-known phenomenon in our world that movie stars, famous singers, and other important personalities in the entertainment industry have large followings. Groups of young people try to look like them, act like them, talk like them, dress like them, etc. Why is it that the followers of Christ are not just as obviously following Him? What motivates the followers of celebrities? What should motivate the followers of Christ?
29. Many modern Christians including many Adventists have big problems with rituals. Is there anything inherently wrong with ritual? We still have ceremonies celebrating a coming-of-age, a marriage, even a death. Our nation celebrates the swearing in of a new president or new chief justice, etc. Rituals help us to remember and focus on things that really matter. Are we glad that the church has certain rituals?
30. Try to imagine yourself out there in the desert with the children of Israel on a day-by-day basis observing the sacrifice of animals, the daily tabernacle ceremonies, and especially the Day of Atonement. How would you feel? Would it change your attitude toward sin and God's plan of salvation?
31. We know that several prophets in the Old Testament decried the misunderstanding and misuse of God's commands. See 1 Samuel 15:22; Hosea 6:6; Amos 5:21-27; and Isaiah 1:15-18. Is there any point in going through ritual ceremonies if we do not understand their meaning? What about reading the Bible? Or, going to church? Are we supposed to get the meaning from those also? Does it seem right to you that Jesus, the Giver of all those laws and rituals, should inspire prophets to criticize them?
32. Did Jesus and His disciples actually celebrate the Passover with bitter herbs and roasted lamb? Or, did Jesus forget all of that and simply give them grape juice and unleavened bread? What happened in that transition from the old ceremony to the new?
33. Do baptism and the celebration of the Lord's Supper have special meaning for you? If not, why not?
34. As we study the Bible and seek to follow more closely God's instructions for us, how should we relate to those who do not? Does God really expect us to live lives like Jesus—as a witness to all around us? (Matthew 5:16) How can we do a better job at that?

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