

Lecture Three

The Torah

The Bible... A Great source of History

The books of Genesis through to 2 Kings provide a time line of the history from the earliest of times until the fall of the temple in Jerusalem in 586 B.C.

The first division of the Bible consists of five books:

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

(Written around 1250-1200 B.C.)

(As early as the first decade in Second century B.C. called the TORAH.)

The word can be translated literally as “Law”, but has a much broader meaning.

The idea that the Law is meant for teaching and instruction is also a helpful and appropriate way of looking at the Torah.

- The origins of ancient laws predate Moses (ten commandment guy) by at least a thousand years.
- We have archaeological evidence of law codes from many ancient cultures. Many of these codes are connected to
 1. A religious understanding of what their God(s) expected (In Egypt Pharaoh WAS God!)
 2. Customs and legal precedents found in history of the societies.

Gaining an Understanding of the Development of the Law in Ancient Israel

Old Testament laws sometimes known as (Law Codes) are set mainly within Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy.

There is an understanding that the laws were passed down to Moses on Sinai, but we must understand that much of the material comes from a time before Israel occupied the land of Canaan.

*Through studies of sources other than the bible, we know that much of the thinking was similar to the cultures that surrounded the Hebrews.

Laws that developed later show a distinctive interest in the understanding of priestly ministry.

How tough were the laws?

Lex Talionis - Hebrew: עין תחת עין, *ayin tahat ayin*

Exodus 21: ²³If any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, ²⁴eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, ²⁵burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.

²⁶ When a slave-owner strikes the eye of a male or female slave, destroying it, the owner shall let the slave go, a free person, to compensate for the eye. ²⁷If the owner knocks out a tooth of a male or female slave, the slave shall be let go, a free person, to compensate for the tooth.

This was almost a duplicate of an Assyrian law. Israel's laws were less harsh than most ancient cultures, but were very severe all the same.

Connecting the Dots:

*Obviously the severity of the Law placed tremendous burdens upon people.

BUT

*The law was also seen as that which protected, nurtured and brought joy to people. The psalms for example we see a celebration of the giving of the Law to Israel as a priceless gift, for which there is unceasing gratitude.

Look at Psalm 1.

¹ Blessed is the man

 who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked
or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers.

² But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.

³ He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.

⁴ Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away.

⁵ Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.

⁶ For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.

Psalm 19: is worth a look too

⁸ The precepts of the LORD are right,
giving joy to the heart.

The commands of the LORD are radiant,
giving light to the eyes.

⁹ The fear of the LORD is pure,
enduring forever.
The ordinances of the LORD are sure
and altogether righteous.

¹⁰ They are more precious than gold,
than much pure gold;
they are sweeter than honey,
than honey from the comb.

Christianity was heavily influenced by understandings of the duties of the law.

Much later, as the Christian Church developed it was seen by many as a sect of Judaism

A clear example of how this was interpreted can be seen in the thrust of the teachings and traditions associated with James, the brother of Jesus . James famous passage 2:17 : “Faith without works is dead” clearly stresses the importance of human activity.

St. Paul viewed the law as a heavy burden that weighed down the believer. His teaching was essentially that Jesus offered deliverance from the bondage of the law that only offered Salvation, Love and protection through works.
We will say more of this later.

Being set free from Bondage

It is important to remember that the Laws of Sinai passed on through Moses comes after the liberation of the people of Israel.

The laws show the intent of God, for the society that he has rescued.

At the heart of the Torah lies the event of deliverance from bondage in Egypt to freedom in the promised land. Wherever there is oppression, this story brings hope. The message is that God hears the cries of hurting people.

The law came after deliverance as

1. A sign of the Continued Presence
2. the conditions upon which divine favour depended in the future

The liberation was much more than just a historical event. It represented the keeping of a promise (Covenant) that land would be given ,and families would be blessed with numbers.

For the people of Israel the Exodus is Sacred History through which God calls them to bless all of humanity.