

Old Testament Genre: Law

By Joshua Williams

Pre-Session Assignments

One week before the session, participants will take the following assignments.

Assignment One

Read Numbers 25:1–9 and then read the comments related to Deuteronomy 4:3 in the section **It's in the Book**. Prepare to share your answers to the following questions: What did Israel do wrong? What happened to those who did what was wrong? Why do you think this event is important?

Assignment Two

Read Leviticus 18:1–5. Prepare to share your answers to the following questions: Who receives the laws? What do the verses say about other nations? What happens if the laws are obeyed?

Assignment Three

Read Galatians 3:1–18 and then read the comments related to Galatians 3:19 in the section **It's in the Book**. Prepare to share your answer to the following question: What makes somebody right before God; faith or law?

Scripture to Memorize

"This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success." Joshua 1:8

Session Goal

Consistent with God's Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit—by the end of this session, disciples will read, interpret, and apply Old Testament law according to God's purposes for giving it.

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It's in the Book

30 minutes

Real-Life Scenario

Matt's basketball team just won State. To celebrate, many of the guys decided everybody on the team should get a tattoo, but Matt wasn't sure about getting a tattoo. He had heard that there was a law in the Bible that forbids anybody from getting a tattoo. Later, Matt read over that law in Leviticus 19:28: "You shall not make any cuts on your body for the dead or tattoo yourselves: I am the LORD." It seemed clear, but Matt thought of other Christians who have tattoos, even pastors. What should Matt do?

Law as an Essential Guide for Israel to Prosper as a Nation

Read Deuteronomy 4:1–8 out loud.

Studying the Passage

Verse 1. Israel. Moses was speaking here to the nation of Israel. God had a special relationship with this nation because of His promises to their forefathers and because He led the nation out of slavery in Egypt. **the statutes and the rules.** These are the laws God gave them at Mount Sinai (see Exodus 19 and Numbers 9). Moses explained and expounded these same laws to all Israel before they entered the promised land.

Verse 3. Baal-peor. The Israelites committed sexual sins with pagan women and sacrificed to their gods, in particular to the Baal of Peor. This activity angered the Lord so that those who committed this false worship were put to death (see Numbers 25).

Verse 5. in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. Moses told the people the laws that would govern their lives in the land of Israel, the land God had promised to Abraham and his descendants (see Genesis 12:1-7).

Assignment One Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment One** during the week can now report on what happened with Baal-peor and why it is important.

Discussion Question

Why was it important that Moses clearly proclaimed the law to Israel right before they took possession of the promised land and started living in it?

On Your Own

In the space below make two headings. Under one heading, write Israel's consequences for obeying the law. Under the other heading, write Israel's consequences for disobeying the law.

Obeying the Law Leads to . . .

Disobeying the Law Leads to . . .

Studying the Passage

Verse 6. wisdom and your understanding. These Hebrew words are associated with skill and competence. Having this kind of skill means saying or doing what is most appropriate in light of the circumstances. The skill means knowing the right thing to say or do at the right time.

Verse 8. So righteous as all this law. Moses indicated that all the law God gave Israel was a picture of God's justice; that is, what God views as right. When Israel obeyed the law, other nations would see a picture of that justice.

Discussion Question

What is the significance of describing the law both as wisdom, on the one hand, and a picture of what is right, on the other?

Assignment Two Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Two** during the week can now report on what Leviticus 18:1–5 says about who received the laws, what it says about other nations and what happens if the laws are obeyed.

On Your Own

Compare Leviticus 18:1–5 to Deuteronomy 4:1–8. In the space below, answer the following questions:

1. Who received the laws?
2. How do the laws relate to other nations?
3. What are the consequences of obeying the law?

Law as a Tutor to Drive People to Christ

Read Galatians 3:19–25 out loud.

Assignment Three Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Three** during the week can now report on what makes somebody right before God.

Studying the Passage

Verse 19. Why the Law then? The apostle Paul asked this question after he had shown in Galatians 3:1–18 that righteousness is based on faith and not on works of the law. The law does not make anybody right before God. Disobeying the law leads to death, and everyone has disobeyed some part of it. Paul addressed this question: If the law cannot make a person right before God, why does the law even exist? **because of transgressions.** A transgression is a violation of a rule. Israel's history is the prime example of such transgressions because they consistently failed to follow the Lord. **Intermediary.** Moses stood between God and the people

so that they did not speak to each other directly. **the offspring.** Here the seed is Christ, who receives the promises made to Abraham.

Verse 21. Give life. Because of the nature of law, it can only bring death upon disobedience.

Verse 22. Imprisoned everything under sin. The law has exposed everybody's sins; therefore, every person is put in the category of sinner.

Discussion Question

Who has the responsibility to fulfill a promise or a law: the one who makes it or the one who receives it? Why do you think Paul puts so much hope in God's promises but not in God's laws?

Studying the Passage

Verse 23. before faith came. Paul is speaking of the Christian faith here, not someone's personal faith. That is, he means before Christianity started. **captive under the law.** Just as a prisoner is locked up so that he does not commit more crimes, so the law was intended to restrain people. **the coming faith.** This means until the arrival of the Christian faith, which would be revealed after the giving of the law.

Verse 24. Guardian. The word translated *guardian* refers to someone who had the job of watching over children. Their job was not to teach children knowledge but to prevent them from bringing dishonor to their parents by behaving inappropriately. In a similar way, the law was intended to prevent Israel from acting in ways that dishonored the Lord their God.

Discussion Question

As Deuteronomy shows, the law is a picture of what is right for a particular people under certain circumstances even though, as Galatians shows, it no longer serves as a "tutor." How might the law concerning tattoos be a picture of what is right for Israel? (Hint: look at the first half of the law.)

Heart and Hands

8 minutes

Read again the **Real-Life Scenario** near the beginning of the lesson. Consider whether your answers have changed during the session.

Be silent for two or three minutes. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice and for the gospel. Adore Him for His glorious reign on the throne of heaven. Then ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you:

1. A way the Scriptures you studied today will change your heart for the glory of Christ.
2. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to stop doing something for the glory of Christ.
3. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to do something for the glory of Christ.

Write what the Spirit reveals to you below and then be ready to share what you have written with the group.

Since Last Week

5 minutes

Grace-Filled Accountability

5 minutes

Planning for Evangelism, Missions, and Service

5 minutes

Prayer

7 minutes

Every disciple will pray aloud, offering praise to Jesus, thanking Him specifically for His gracious acts, making heartfelt confession, committing to actions flowing from the Bible study, praying toward evangelism locally and globally, and interceding for others as prompted by the Holy Spirit.

At Home: Nail It Down

Although the first five books of the Bible are classified as law, all 39 books of the Old Testament have elements that pertain to the law. In order to interpret Old Testament law properly, one has to understand its purposes.

1. The law was given to restrain Israel's sin. Galatians 3:19–25 indicates that God gave the law to Israel in order to restrain them from dishonoring God by doing what is evil (see also Leviticus 19:2: "You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.") The Galatians passage also states that since Christ has come, the law no longer serves that purpose.
2. The law exposes sin. As Galatians 3:19–22 shows, it exposes sin for what it is.
3. The law presents a picture of justice. Deuteronomy 4:1–8 shows that the law presented a picture of what was right for Israel as a nation under their circumstances.

The laws are detailed applications of underlying principles of justice and goodness. The principles remain the same regardless of who, when, or where. The disciple's job today is to find out how the law presents a principle in Israel's circumstances and how that same principle can be addressed in present circumstances.

Follow up Question

What are the purposes for Old Testament law?

The Making Disciples curriculum is a gift from Southwestern Seminary to those who, for the glory of the Father and in the power of the Spirit, will spend a lifetime embracing the full supremacy of the Son, responding to His kingly reign in all of life, inviting Christ to live His life through them, and joining Him in making disciples among all peoples.