

MOSES AND THE LAW

Message #5
BIBLE SURVEY

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In our last message, we looked at the unique life of the man Joseph. Joseph who was sold by his brothers as a slave into Egypt and Joseph who was exalted by God to a place of leadership and honor in the country to preserve those people through the years of famine and also to take care of his own people who came from Palestine. You remember as the book of Genesis closes, we find Jacob, his father, in Egypt and his brethren there. We also find that Joseph lived long after the death of Jacob and was exalted and honored in that foreign land.

In time there arose other leaders in Egypt who did not know of Joseph or his contribution to that country. After his death his fame soon died out and the children of Israel who were now in great numbers in the land found themselves, instead of an honored people, an oppressed people. The Egyptian pharaohs made them slaves, made them work harder and harder, killed their sons, and persecuted them until the situation seemed almost hopeless.

Into this hopeless and desperate situation, God came. The book of Exodus opens with the announcement of the deliverer, and the call of the deliverer in the form of Moses. You probably know something of the story of Moses' early life and how God sent him to Pharaoh to ask that His people should be allowed to leave the land of Egypt. They belonged in Palestine and God did not want them any longer in this foreign land. Now Pharaoh made certain compromises to Moses with regard to his proposition of taking the people out of the land of Egypt. You will find this first proposition, this first compromise, in the eighth chapter of Exodus. The request was, "Let my people go and let them do sacrifice as they were commanded to do." Moses desired that the children of Israel should have the privilege of worshipping God in the wilderness but Pharaoh refused this request. So he said to Moses in chapter eight of the book of Exodus, verse twenty-five, "Go ye, sacrifice to your god in the land." Now the request was that they might sacrifice out of the land, and Moses requested that they be allowed to make a three days' journey into the wilderness in order to sacrifice to the Lord their God.

Pharaoh wanted to keep them in the land, and this was the compromise of serving God in the world--not being separated from the world. This compromise is still brought to the heart of God's child today. God wants us to be separate people, holy people, people who are apart and who belong to Him and who live like that. Satan and the world want a people who are willing to serve God and serve the world at the same time.

When Pharaoh did not succeed in this particular compromise, he proposed a second thing to Moses. You will find this recorded in vs. 28 of Exodus 8. Pharaoh said, "I will let you go that ye may sacrifice to the Lord your God in the wilderness, only ye shall not go very far away." Moses had said, "three days journey." Pharaoh said, "Not so far." In other words, "It's all right if you want to serve your God, but do not serve Him very wholeheartedly, just serve Him partially. Don't go too far with this business of serving God."

This is a compromise, of course, which the Devil is still bringing to the heart of God's children today. It's all right if you must be religious. But if you must be a Christian, don't be too good a Christian, don't go very far with it.

Now this compromise was not accepted by Moses and so a little later the proposal was made for a third compromise on the part of the children of Israel. Pharaoh said that he would let them go. You'll find this recorded in chapter 10 of the book of Exodus. He would let them go but he did not want to allow the children to go with them; "Ye that are men go and serve the Lord." (Exodus 10:11) "Don't let the children of the families go; leave them in Egypt." This is a compromise which Satan is still bringing to the heart of God's people. He says, "It's all right for you to serve God, but don't try to pawn off this religion on your family or on your children."

This did not succeed either, so after some more plagues had been poured out on the land of Egypt, Pharaoh called for Moses again (Exodus 10:24). He said, "Go, serve the Lord, only let your flocks and your herds stay. Your little ones can go with you. It's all right now to take your family and it's all right to go the three days' journey but just leave your things, your flocks and your herds in Egypt with me." This is the compromise that "it's all right to serve God only by all means don't be too 'other worldly' about it. Let's keep one foot in the world, especially in the matter of the things and possessions that we can accumulate in this world."

In the meantime God had been pouring out plagues upon the land in trying to soften Pharaoh's heart. In contrast Pharaoh was hardening his heart all of the time against the people of Israel and their God. Finally, the last plague was poured out on Egypt--the plague of the slaying of the first born and this resulted in the deliverance of the people out of the land of Egypt. There was the miracle of the crossing of the Red Sea (chapter 13, 14, 15 of the book of Exodus) and then the journey from the Red Sea to Mount Sinai. God fed them with the manna during this time and then they came to Sinai where a very important event in the life of the children occurred. This was the giving of what we call the Law of Moses. The record begins in the twentieth chapter of the book of Exodus and continues all through the book of Leviticus with a repetition or restatement of the law in the book of Deuteronomy. And so much of the first five books of the Old Testament are taken up with the record of the Mosaic Law.

The Law contained, according to Jewish account, about six hundred and thirteen commandments. Most of us are acquainted with the first ten of these six hundred and thirteen. The first ten which we call the Ten Commandments are very important. God, Himself, wrote these in stone with His own finger, so these stand out by God's own action. But the Law not only contained these ten commandments; it also contained a number of other regulations and requirements concerning the life of the children of Israel that they should follow in order to be happy and blest. There were laws concerning their social life. There were laws concerning their religious life; there were laws that concerned the building of the tabernacle in order that they might rightly worship God. There were laws concerning the sacrifices that would be offered in the tabernacle, laws concerning the priesthood that should serve in the tabernacle. There were laws concerning animals--those that were per-

mitted to be eaten and those that were not. There were laws concerning the matter of childbirth; there were laws concerning various diseases like leprosy. There were all kinds of laws that were part of this Mosaic code which God gave to the children of Israel on Mt. Sinai.

I think the Mosaic Law teaches us several things. For one thing, the Law teaches us that God is interested in every part of our life. He was interested in all the aspect of the lives of the children of Israel. The giving of the law in its many details shows His detailed interest. The New Testament does the same thing for the Christian. God gives us many laws, many details concerning our life. By obedience, and by obedience only, can that life be a happy and blessed one. When the children of Israel deviated from many of the Mosaic Laws, they lost the blessing and the fellowship that they should have had with God. The path of blessing is the path of obedience--obedience in detail to the revealed will of God--in this case, as revealed through the Mosaic Law. This was the way of happiness, the way to be properly governed and thus rightly related with the God who had delivered His people from the land of Egypt.

We also find that there was another purpose for the law, a purpose that particularly applies to people today. In the third chapter of Galatians, Paul writes these words (Gal. 3:24), "Wherefore the law was a schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith." A second purpose of the law then was in order that people might be brought to Christ. Though the law could provide a happy life for those who obeyed, the law could not guarantee by itself eternal salvation even for those who obeyed it. The law is to lead us to Christ because the law would show us our inadequacies; the law would show us our sin. The law would show the deficiency that man has in his own nature; the law would show how far man was from God. And when one comes under the schoolmastership of the law, then he realizes that he, in himself, has nothing to present to God by way of righteousness in order to please Him. So the law, Paul writes, should be our schoolmaster to bring us to the end of ourself and bring us to someone else who can do something for us, namely Jesus Christ. Will you notice Paul wrote that when we come to Christ we are justified by faith, not by keeping some standard or code, but by believing in a Person.

So many people today when asked if they are a Christian will say, "Oh yes, I do my best to keep the ten commandments." Galatians 3:24 says that the ten commandments will only tell you that you need a Savior, that you need to be justified by faith. "By the letter of the law shall no flesh be justified in His sight." If you are trusting in the ten commandments, may I remind you that this is not the way of salvation. The New Testament clearly says that salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ not through the works of the law. Where is your faith today? Is it in something you are doing or in someone who by His death on Calvary has done everything for you?