

## *The Law: An Introduction*

### *Defining Events*

- There are 4 defining events in the formation of biblical Israel
  1. The patriarchal narratives found in Genesis
    - The stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, & Joseph
  2. Their miraculous deliverance by God from Egypt (Ex. 1-18)
    - The 10 plagues, the parting of the Red Sea, etc.
  3. The return of the presence of God (Ex. 33; 40)
    - Distinguishing His people from all others
  4. God's reconstituting them as a people for His name sake at the foot of Mt. Sinai (Ex. 19-Num. 10:10)
- For 400 years, the Israelites only knew slavery and Egyptian culture
  - Which means that they needed direction to be:
    - Distinctly God's people
    - A community defined by Him
- God did this in 2 ways:
  - By giving them a set of rules to live by
    - Which would set them apart from the world
  - Giving them a generation away from other cultures to establish a uniquely God-centered one
    - Including for the many non-Israelites that came with them when they left Egypt (Ex. 12:38)

### *The Law as a Gift*

- Thus, the Law was given to Israel as a gift from God in 3 ways:
  1. To establish the ways they were to live in community with one another
  2. To provide for their relationship with and worship of YHWH
  3. And to provide boundaries with regard to their relationships with the cultures around them

### *What is the Law?*

- The term 'law' is used in 5 ways throughout Scripture:
  1. In the plural ('laws'), to refer to the 600+ specific commandments that the Israelites were expected to keep as evidence of their loyalty to God (Ex. 18:20)
  2. In the singular ("The Law"), to refer to collection of these laws (Matt. 5:18)
  3. In the singular, to refer to the Pentateuch (Genesis-Deuteronomy) as 'the book of the Law' (Josh. 1:8)
  4. In the singular by NT authors, to refer theologically to the OT religious system as a whole (1 Cor. 9:20)
  5. In the singular by some NT people, to refer to the OT Law as it was interpreted by the rabbis of that era (ex. Peter in Acts 10:28)

### *Where is the Law?*

- The commandments themselves are found in 4 of the 5 books which are collectively called "the Law"
  - Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, & Deuteronomy

- These books also contain extensive narrative material
  - Especially Genesis
- The reason for this is that the covenantal law between YHWH and Israel cannot be understood apart from the narrative in which it is embedded
- Because of this, there is not a direct correspondence between all the 'laws' and the 'book of the Law'
  - This is especially true when one considers commands like Gen. 1:28; 9:6; 17:9 which are not specifically limited to God's special covenant with Israel

#### *Issues with the Law*

- The biggest issue with the Law for Christians is in their hermeneutics
- How do any of these specific legal formulations apply to us today?
  - Or do they apply at all?