



PART 5 – MOSES: GOD'S LAW DISCUSS AND APPLY

Discuss – questions to help understanding

1. What principles of right and wrong guide your life? Do you think any of these should be universally binding on everyone and, if so, why?

Read Exodus 3:1-22

2. What does this passage teach us about who God is?

Read Exodus 19:1-6, 20:1-21

3. Why is it important to realise that God's Law (instruction) was given to Israel **after** He had rescued them from Egypt and carried them to Himself (19:4)?
4. Why does God make Israel His special nation (19:5-6)? What task will He give them?
5. What does the content and ordering of the 'Ten Commandments' in Chapter 20 tell us about God's expectations for human beings? Do these seem reasonable and good to you?

Read Deuteronomy 4:1-9; 6:1-19

6. What is the heart of Old Testament religion according to these verses?
7. What does God say will happen if the people do not obey His commands and what will happen if they do?

Apply – questions to help personal application

- Why do you think it was so important for Israel to know that God's rescue of them came before His call to them to obey? What does this say about God?
- Reflecting on how Moses' experiences over his first 80 years prepared him to serve God as leader in Israel, how might your experiences so far in life be used by God if you give your life to His leadership?
- Are there any of the Ten Commandments you struggle with accepting? What does that tell you about yourself and can you see why this commandment would be good for you?
- How does what you know about the Law of Moses show you what God is like, reveal your own sin and need of forgiveness, and guide you as to how to live? What response do you need to make to God?
- What does Israel's complaining in the desert after God rescued them from Egypt tell us about human sinful nature? Why do people so often complain against God and not recognise His good gifts to them?

UNDERSTANDING PART 5 – MOSES: GOD'S LAW CHRISTIANITY QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

What exactly is the significance of the name 'Yahweh'?

Yahweh is the personal name God told Moses to refer to Him by (Exodus 3:13-15). It derives from the Hebrew phrase translated 'I AM' introduced by God in the same passage. This title expresses the fact that God has always existed, without beginning or end, and that His existence does not depend on anything outside Himself – unlike every other living thing, which receives life as a gift from God, He is utterly self-sufficient. The name Yahweh was not new in Moses' time – people began to use it much earlier according to Genesis 4:26 – but its recovery was important. God is not impersonal and vague, but relational and knowable.

In English translations of the Old Testament, the name Yahweh is expressed with the word Lord in capitals: 'the LORD'. The reason for this is that Jewish people, taking the commandment against misusing God's name (Exodus 20:7) substituted Yahweh for the Hebrew word Adonai, which means 'Lord', so that they would not read the divine name aloud. One result of this approach was that there is some uncertainty over how to pronounce the name. Biblical Hebrew is written without vowels, so the name really consists of four consonants: YHWH (יהוה in Hebrew script). The lack of verbalisation of the word meant that the memory of which vowel sounds belong between the consonants was lost. In older English writings the name is written as Jehovah, whereas most scholars now think the correct pronunciation would be Yahweh.

Can we really believe the accounts about miracles in Exodus?

Modern people who live with confidence in science may struggle with accounts of miracles in the Bible. Exodus is the first time we read of many miracles being performed through people (in contrast to the smaller number of unusual events in Genesis, which are all done by God without a human agent). The category of 'miracle' is a modern one, indicating an event that seems to transcend the normal, regular laws of science. People who believe nothing exists beyond the natural world will reject the possibility of the 'supernatural', although we should recognise that the frontiers of science in quantum physics are less certain about what is possible than older science. When we accept the existence of God and other spiritual powers that cannot be measured or simply defined using scientific methods, events that we call 'miracles' or 'supernatural' become possible.

The Bible does not contain miracles on every page. Throughout most of the history it records people live lives that we would recognise as 'normal' today, although they were often more aware of the actions of God and other spiritual powers than modern people. There are only three periods when miracles become common: firstly here with Moses and Aaron; secondly in the time of the prophets Elijah and Elisha; and thirdly in the time of Jesus and the apostles. Each of these marked points when God was doing something new and authenticating it through these powerful acts. They are usually called 'signs' in the Bible as a result, since they point beyond themselves to God. Miracles can also be counterfeited by evil spirits (as in the case of Pharaoh's 'magicians') and the real test is whether the words that accompany them correspond to God's revealed truth. For Christians, miracles point to the existence of God, but so does the fact that we recognise them as unusual. If there is no creator, why is the world orderly, and where do scientific laws come from if there is no lawgiver?

Does the Law of Moses still apply today?

The Law of Moses was given to Israel as a nation in its entirety to guide their lives in faithfulness to God. The New Testament teaches clearly that it was fulfilled in Jesus and that Christians no longer serve God through adherence to it but through the leading of the Holy Spirit (Romans 7:4-6). The ultimate purpose of the Law was to prepare people for Jesus and having fulfilled that purpose it is no longer binding on God's people (Galatians 3:23-25). This is not to say that God's standard of right and wrong has changed – in fact, the Spirit always leads us to act in ways that are in keeping with the Law and many of the commands of the Law about personal behaviour, including nine of the Ten Commandments (the exception being Sabbath) are repeated in the New Testament. Many people find it helpful to distinguish three aspects of the Law that are not separated in the Old Testament but help guide Christian behaviour: moral laws, reflecting God's unchanging standards for human behaviour (repeated in the New Testament); civil laws, guiding the nation on its collective life and no binding after Christ since God's people are no longer called to be a theocratic nation; and ceremonial laws (the Temple and sacrificial system) which have passed away because Jesus offered one sacrifice for sins forever.