

## God the Lawgiver



### SABBATH—FEBRUARY 4

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** Hebrews 12:21; Romans 7:8–13; Job 24:14, 15; Exodus 16:4–30; Hebrews 8:10; Hebrews 10:16; Romans 13:8–10.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “That’s [that is] because the Lord is our judge. The Lord gives us our law. The Lord is our king. He will save us” (Isaiah 33:22, NlrV).

**KEY (IMPORTANT) THOUGHT:** God’s law is a very important part of the whole Bible, Old and New Testaments together. It also shows His love. And so, when we love, we show the fullness and beauty of God’s law.

**AS SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS, WE ARE TAUGHT THE IDEA THAT THE LAW IS A PERFECT EXAMPLE OF GOD’S CHARACTER (WHO GOD IS).**

This means that because God does not change, the law should not change either. But what does it mean that the law is an example of God’s character?

Suppose that you lived in a land with a king whose word was law. (“The state [government]—that’s [that is] me,” one French king famously said.) Now, suppose that the king passed laws that were nasty, hateful, and unfair. Would not those laws be a good example of the kind of person the king was? Would they not show his character?

Think through some of history’s worst rulers. How did the laws that they passed show what kind of people they were?

The law shows the character of the lawgiver. So then, what does God’s law show about God? When we understand God’s law as something that protects us for our own good, we come to understand more about what God is like.

This week we will learn more about the law and the Lawgiver too.

**SUNDAY—FEBRUARY 5****THE LAW AT SINAI  
(Exodus 19:18, 19)**

**Read Exodus 19:18, 19; Exodus 20:18; Deuteronomy 5:22; and Hebrews 12:21. Why were the Israelites at Mount Sinai filled with fear when the Law was given?**

“The people of Israel were filled with fear. The awful power of God’s voice seemed more than their trembling hearts could take. For as God’s great rule of right was shown to them, they understood as never before how terrible sin was to God. And they felt so guilty before God that they ran away from the mountain in fear.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs [Forefathers and Leaders] and Prophets [Special Messengers]*, pages 309, 310.

There is something so powerful in the Ellen G. White quote above. As the law is given to them, the people understand “as never before” just how bad sin is and how guilty they are before God.

So, right from the start of Israel’s relationship with God, we can find an example of the gospel in the law. God never planned to use the law for saving people, even at Sinai. Instead, the law was to show the people their need of salvation. It was right after the law was given that the people were told to build the sanctuary (house of God). The purpose of the sanctuary was to show the people God’s plan of salvation. The law was to point people to the Cross and to their need for sal-

vation and forgiveness. No wonder the people trembled before the law. It was because the law showed the people just how sinful they were.

**How does Romans 7:8–13 show this important truth? What is Paul saying that the law does? Read also Psalm 119:6.**

Paul is saying in this verse what Ellen G. White said happened at Sinai. (Read the early part of today’s lesson study.) The problem is not with God’s law. The problem is with sinners who have broken the law, as we all have done. Paul is showing how the law is closely tied to the gospel. Paul’s point is that the law shows us just how sinful we are.

**Do you find yourself trembling before the law? Does it make you feel guilty? What are your emotions as you read the giving of the law in Exodus 20:1–17 and compare your actions with the laws about them?**



**The people trembled before the giving of the law.**

**MONDAY—FEBRUARY 6****THE LAW BEFORE SINAI  
(Job 24:14, 15)**

Every Seventh-day Adventist knows that when we talk about the law, the Ten Commandments, and Sinai, many people say that the Ten Commandments were first given to the Jews at Sinai. They argue that God's law belongs to the Jews and to Old Testament times. So, the law is no longer valid (true; binding) for our time.

Of course, there are many problems with this argument. If this argument were true, then how could there have been sin before Sinai? After all, it says in the book of John that "breaking the law is sin" (1 John 3:4, NIV). The truth is that the book of Genesis shows proof that God's law was given long before Sinai.

Genesis 1 and 2 describe God's perfect Creation. Genesis 3 shows the fall of Adam and Eve. Then in the next chapter, Genesis 4, we have the first murder. How did Cain know he was guilty for murdering his brother if there were no law to call murder a sin?

Long before Sinai, God condemned (judged against) murder in the covenant (promise; agreement) that He had with Noah after the Flood (Genesis 9:6).

And in Job, the oldest book in the Bible, we find God praising Job's righteousness (holy life) two times. What does God say of Job's character? (Job 1:8; Job 2:3). Clearly there is a law here showing right and wrong. This is important because Job lived long

before the Exodus, and he was not part of the covenant line.

**How does Job 24:14, 15 help us to understand that there was right and wrong before Sinai?**

When Abraham lied about Sarah to Abimelech, God scolded Abraham for telling a lie. Abimelech was king of Gerar and not a Jew. But God held Abimelech to the same standard (important rule) for keeping marriage pure as required by the Ten Commandments, even though the Ten Commandments had not been given yet. So, God demanded that Sarah be returned to Abraham (read Genesis 20:9).

**According to Genesis 26:4, 5, what does God say to Isaac about his father?**

What is interesting about Genesis 26:5 is that the Hebrew uses four different words for law. The four words are *mshmt*, *mzvot*, *hugot*, and *torot* (from *Torah*, "the law"). They are used to describe what Abraham obeyed. Certainly among all these were the Ten Commandments.

Years later, God ordered Jacob to return to Bethel to build an altar to the Lord. Jacob felt the need for revival (change; renewal) in his household. What did Jacob ask his household to do? Read Genesis 35:2, 3.

Clearly, the idea that there was no law until Sinai makes no sense at all. This is because of what the Bible teaches about life—and the law—before Sinai.



If there were no law to call murder a sin, then how did Cain know he was guilty of murdering his brother?

## TUESDAY—FEBRUARY 7

### THE SABBATH BEFORE SINAI (Genesis 2:1–3)

God does not show how He communicated His law to people before Mount Sinai. But the proof is clear that the giving of the law on Sinai was not the world's first experience with receiving the law.

Many people have to admit that that point is true. But they argue that it was only the Sabbath commandment, not the others, that was first given at Sinai. They say that means the Sabbath is Jewish, and Christians today do not have to obey it.

How valid (true) is that claim?

**What does Genesis 2:1–3 teach us about the Sabbath before Sinai?**

Next, in Exodus 5:1–5, the Bible shows Moses and Aaron struggling

with Pharaoh over the question of letting Israel go. Verse 5 is very interesting.

**What hint is there of the Sabbath in Exodus 5:5?**

Pharaoh's answer, " 'You make them rest from their labor!' " (NKJV), seems clear enough. The original language reads even more clearly. There are several words for "rest," but the verb that Pharaoh uses is built on the word for "Sabbath." The original language of Pharaoh to Moses and Aaron reads like this: "You make them *sabbath* from their labor!" This is a hint of the truth of the Sabbath rest before Sinai.

Strong proof of the Sabbath before Sinai also appears in Exodus 16. Through a miracle, God gives manna<sup>1</sup> to Israel in the wilderness. This 40-year miracle begins before the children of Israel reach Mount Sinai.

**How does Exodus 16:4–30 prove that the seventh-day Sabbath began before the Mount Sinai experience?**

Notice the words of the Lord to Moses in verse 28: " 'How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My laws?' " (NKJV). This is a clear example that God's laws and commandments were there before the law was given at Sinai. And among those commandments and laws was the seventh-day Sabbath.

1. manna—food that God sent down from heaven for the people of Israel to eat while they wandered in the wilderness.

Something big happened with the giving of the law at Mount Sinai. But the Ten Commandments themselves clearly were not new.

**How is your Sabbath experience? Do you love the Sabbath, dread it, or do you feel so-so about it? What can you do to have a deeper and richer experience with the Lord through the gift of His Sabbath day?**



Pharaoh blamed Moses for causing the people to rest on the Sabbath from their work.

## WEDNESDAY—FEBRUARY 8

### THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS (Isaiah 48:17, 18)

There are very few arguments against the fact that there was a law in the period after Sinai. The Old Testament writings are filled with examples of the Law. So often those examples speak about Israel's breaking of the Law and the punishments

that followed. But other verses show the great love and respect many in Israel had for the Law. This Law included the Ten Commandments as well as all the rules and laws that the Lord had given His people.

**In what ways do Isaiah 48:17, 18; Psalm 119:69–72; Psalm 119:97–103; and Jeremiah 31:33 praise the Law? What attitudes (feelings) do they show?**

Israel loved the Law. But those who understood the Law's purpose never thought of it as a way of salvation. The Hebrew religion had always been a religion of grace.<sup>2</sup> But the people went from abusing the Law openly during King Solomon's time to legalism<sup>3</sup> in the time of Jesus.

But why did Israel have such a love of the Law? Again, to an Israelite, the word *law* meant both the Ten Commandments and the whole group of Old Testament teachings, especially the first five books of Moses. This fact helps to make clear that what Israel loved was the message of salvation, of grace. They loved the truth as it was shown to them and as they best understood it. It was not a love of the rules. Instead, it was a love of a set of guidelines and principles (important truths) that, if followed, would have opened the way for many blessings and promises. This is because all that God had given them was for their own good and wellness.

Is it any different today?

2. grace—God's gift of forgiveness and mercy that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

3. legalism—believing that you can earn your salvation by keeping the Law.



**Think through all that the Lord has given us as a people. How could we do better in living out the wonderful truth with which we have been blessed?**

### **THURSDAY—FEBRUARY 9**

#### **THE LAW IN THE NEW COVENANT<sup>4</sup> (Hebrews 8:10)**

From the start, the principles of the Ten Commandments were given to the people out of the Lord's love for them. This means that the law always has been meant to be a blessing. You obey the law, and you are greatly protected from sin. You disobey, and you face the unavoidable results for breaking the law. Whoever knows the Bible knows just how painful sin and its results are. How often can you read the results of sin on the faces of those who have suffered because of it?

Parts of the New Testament (mostly Paul's writings) deal with those who have misunderstood the purpose of the law. The purpose of the commandments of God is that they have been given in the New Testament in a helpful, uplifting way.

**How is God's law given in Hebrews 8:10 and Hebrews 10:16? Is His law something still useful to us today? Or has it been "removed" by grace?**

So often today, there are people who try to put God's love or God's

grace above the law. The popular idea is that if you truly love, then God's law is "removed," and you no longer need to obey it. But really, those who truly love God and others show the true principles (important rules) of the law. So, there is no excuse for removing the law. Love fulfills the law. Love shows the law in its purest form.

To think about it in another way: it is much the same as the parts of a car. The parts are not made for themselves. They are there so that the car will go from place to place. Their purpose is to make the car move. But, without each part, the car would not work. The law is like that: it is not made for itself. It is made for a purpose. And that purpose is to show a perfect example of love, love for God and love for others.

**How do Romans 13:8–10; Galatians 5:14; James 2:8; and 1 John 5:2, 3 help us to understand the connection (relationship) between love and law?**



**Love fulfills the law.**

4. covenant—promise or agreement between God and His people.

**Think more deeply about the connection between God’s law and love. Law-keeping without love leads to what? Love without law-keeping leads to what? Write out your thoughts and bring them to class on Sabbath.**

### FRIDAY—FEBRUARY 10

**ADDITIONAL STUDY:** “The holy Ten Commandments spoken by Christ upon Sinai’s mount were the perfect example of the character of God. They made known to the world the fact that He had authority over all people. That law of the Ten Commandments shows the greatest love for humans. It is the voice of God from heaven speaking to the soul in promise: ‘This do, and you will not come under the control of Satan.’ There is not a negative in that law, even though it may look that way. It is DO, and Live. . . . The Lord has given His holy commandments to be a wall of protection around the people whom He created.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Sons and Daughters of God*, page 53.

“In the work of salvation there is no force. No force is used at all. Under the influence of the Spirit of God, people are left free to choose whom they will serve. In the change that takes place when the soul surrenders to Christ, there is the highest sense of freedom. . . . True, we have no power to free ourselves from Satan’s control. But when we desire to be set free from sin, and cry out for a power out of and above ourselves, the powers of the soul are filled with the energy of the Holy Spirit. And these powers obey the control of the will in

doing the will of God.

“The only way humans can be truly free is by becoming one with Christ. ‘The truth shall make you free,’ and Christ is the truth. . . . Surrender to God means being restored [made new] to one’s self. It also means being restored to the true glory [beauty] and noble standing that God meant for us. God’s law, “the law of liberty,” is the law of true freedom.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 466.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Discuss your answer to Thursday’s questions about law and love. What is law-keeping without love like? How is it often shown? At the same time, what is love without law-keeping like? What kind of love is it? Why do love and law-keeping need to be connected?
- ② In what ways does the law show the character of the Lawgiver? How does God’s law show us what God is like?
- ③ What does Ellen G. White mean when she talks above about the law being a “law of liberty”? How can the keeping of the law mean “liberty”?
- ④ What examples can we find in the world to show what happens when people break God’s law? How powerful a witness are these examples in showing how important and good that law is?

**SUMMARY:** God’s law shows His love. When we love as God loves us, we will truly show the law in all its beauty and power.