

God *the* Lawgiver



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Heb. 12:21; Rom. 7:8–13; Job 24:14, 15; Exod. 16:4–30; Heb. 8:10; 10:16; Rom. 13:8–10.*

Memory Text: “For the LORD is our Judge, the LORD is our Lawgiver, the LORD is our King; He will save us” (*Isaiah 33:22, NKJV*).

Key Thought: God's law is an inseparable part of the Old and New Testaments. It is also an expression of His love.

As Seventh-day Adventists, we often hear the idea that the law is a transcript of God's character. (If so, then because God doesn't change, the law—which reveals His character—shouldn't change either.) What, though, does that mean?

Suppose you lived in a land with a king whose word was law. (“The state, that's me” one French king famously said.) Now, suppose the king issued laws that were repressive, nasty, hateful, unfair, discriminatory, and so forth. Would not those laws be a good representation of the kind of person the king was; would they not reveal his character?

Think through some of history's worst despots. How did the laws they passed reveal what kind of people they were?

In this sense, the law reveals the character of the lawgiver. What, then, does God's law reveal about God? When we understand God's law as a hedge, a protection, something created for us, for our own good, then we come to understand more about what God is like.

This week we'll take a look at the law and, by default, the Lawgiver.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 11.*

The Law at Sinai

Read Exodus 19:18, 19; 20:18; Deuteronomy 5:22; and Hebrews 12:21, descriptions of the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai. Why would it be something so terrifying?

“The people of Israel were overwhelmed with terror. The awful power of God’s utterances seemed more than their trembling hearts could bear. For as God’s great rule of right was presented before them, they realized as never before the offensive character of sin, and their own guilt in the sight of a holy God. They shrank away from the mountain in fear and awe.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 309, 310.

There’s something so powerful in the Ellen White quote above. As the law is presented to them, the people realize “as never before” just how bad sin is and their own guilt in the eyes of God.

So, right from the beginning of Israel’s covenantal relationship with God, we can see a revelation of the gospel in the law. The law was never meant to be a means of salvation, even at Sinai; rather, it was to show the people their need of salvation. It was right after the giving of the law that they were given instructions to build the sanctuary, which revealed to them the plan of salvation. The law was to point people to the Cross, to their need of atonement and Redemption. No wonder, then, that they trembled before the law, because the law showed them just how sinful and fallen they were.

Read Romans 7:8–13. How do these verses reveal this crucial truth? What is Paul saying that the law does? (See also Ps. 119:6.)

In a sense, Paul is saying here what Ellen White said happened at Sinai. The problem is not with God’s law; the problem is with sinners who have violated the law, as we all have done. Paul is showing how the law is inseparably tied to the gospel, that it is the law that shows us just how sinful and fallen we are.

Read Exodus 20:1–17. Do you find yourself trembling before the law? Do you find yourself convicted by it? What are your emotions as you read the law and compare yourself with it?

The Law Before Sinai

As soon as we talk about the law, the Ten Commandments, and Sinai, we hear the refrain that the Ten Commandments were first given to the Jews at Sinai; hence, the commandments are a Jewish or an Old Testament institution and not applicable to our day and time.

Of course, numerous problems exist with that theology, the biggest being that if this were true, then how could there have been sin before Sinai, “for sin is the transgression of the law” (*1 John 3:4*)? The truth is that the book of Genesis yields an amazing witness to the existence of God’s law long before Sinai.

Genesis 1 and 2 describe God’s perfect Creation. Genesis 3 records the fall of Adam and Eve. 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 define murder as sin?

Long before Sinai, God specifically denounced murder in the covenant He established with Noah after the Flood (*Gen. 9:6*).

In the oldest book in the Bible, the book of Job, we find God commending Job’s righteousness two times. What does He declare of Job’s character? (*Job 1:8, 2:3*). Obviously, a standard of right and wrong is operating. Job lived long before the Exodus, and he wasn’t even of the covenant line.

Read Job 24:14, 15. How do these verses help us to understand what the standard of right and wrong included?

When Abraham lied about Sarah to Abimelech, God rebuked Abraham for his falsehood. And even though Abimelech was king of Gerar and not of Israelite stock, God held him to the same standard of marital purity found in the Decalogue and demanded that Sarah be returned to Abraham (*see Gen. 20:9*).

What pointed testimony about Abraham does God give to Isaac about his father? *Gen. 26:4, 5*.

What’s fascinating about Genesis 26:5 is that the Hebrew uses four different words, *mshmr*, *mzvot*, *huqot*, and *torot* (from *Torah*, “the law”) to describe what Abraham obeyed. Certainly among all these were the Ten Commandments.

When Jacob, at God’s bidding, was returning to Bethel to build an altar to the Lord, he felt the need for revival in his household. What did he request his household to do? (*See Gen. 35:2, 3*.)

Clearly, the idea that there was no law until Sinai makes no sense in light of so much of what the Bible teaches about life before Sinai.

The Sabbath Before Sinai

God doesn't reveal how He communicated the eternal principles of His law to humanity before Mount Sinai, but the evidence is clear and substantial that the giving of the law on Sinai was not the world's initial exposure to its precepts.

Many people, forced to concede that point, argue, instead, that it was only the Sabbath commandment, not the others, that was first given at Sinai, and, therefore, it is exclusively Jewish and doesn't pertain to Christians today. How valid is that claim?

Read Genesis 2:1–3. What does this passage teach us about the Sabbath before Sinai?

Next, in Exodus 5:1–5, the Bible reveals Moses and Aaron struggling with Pharaoh in regard to the question of letting Israel go. Verse five is particularly enlightening.

Read Exodus 5:5. What indication is there of the Sabbath in this text?

Pharaoh's response, "You make them rest from their labor" (*NKJV*), seems clear enough. The original language reads even more pointedly. Although there are several words for *rest*, the verb Pharaoh uses is built on the word for "Sabbath." The striking language of Pharaoh to Moses and Aaron reads like this, "You make them sabbath from their labor!" a hint, if nothing else, to the reality of the Sabbath rest before Sinai.

Proof of the Sabbath before Sinai, though, appears in Exodus 16, when God miraculously provides manna for Israel in the wilderness. This 40-year miracle began before the Israelites reached Mount Sinai.

Read Exodus 16:4–30, focusing especially on verses 23–30. How do these verses prove the existence of the seventh-day Sabbath 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*), a clear indication that God's laws and commandments existed before the revelation at Sinai, and that among those commandments and laws was the seventh-day Sabbath. Thus, although something monumental happened with the giving of the law at Mount Sinai, the Ten Commandments themselves obviously weren't new.

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

The Law and the Prophets

Little controversy exists over the existence of the law in the period after Sinai. The Old Testament writings are filled with references to the law. And though, so often, those references deal with Israel's transgression of the law and the subsequent punishments, other texts reveal the great love and reverence many in Israel had for the law, which included not just the Ten Commandments but all of the rules and precepts that the Lord had given to His people.

In what ways do the following texts extoll the law? What attitudes do they reveal?

Isa. 48:17, 18 _____

Ps. 119:69–72 _____

Ps. 119:97–103 _____

Jer. 31:33 _____

Contrary to popular beliefs, although Israel (ideally) loved the law, those who understood the law's function never saw it as a means of salvation. The Hebrew religion had always been a religion of grace, even though the people went from one extreme to the other: from trampling the law openly and blatantly, as in the first-temple period, to extreme legalism, as seen so clearly in the time of Jesus.

Why, though, such a love of the law? Again, if one understands the word *law* to encompass not just the Ten Commandments but the whole body of Old Testament teachings, especially the first five books of Moses, then you understand that what was loved was the message of salvation, of grace, of redemption. They loved the "truth" as it was revealed to them and as they best grasped it. It wasn't a love of rules, per se, but a love of a set of guidelines and principles that, if kept, would have opened the way for many blessings and promises, because all that God had given them was for their own good and well-being.

Is it any different today?

Think about what God has given us as a people. How could we better live out the wonderful light with which we have been blessed?

The Law in the New Covenant

From the start, the principles of the Ten Commandments were given to humanity out of the Lord's love for people. The law has always been intended to be a blessing. You obey the law, and you are greatly protected from the ravages of sin; you disobey, and you face the inevitable consequences of transgression. Who needs theology to know, personally, just how painful sin and its consequences are? How often can you read the results of sin on the faces of those who have been ravaged by it?

Although sections of the New Testament—Paul's writing specifically—deal with those who have misunderstood the purpose of the law, the commandments of God have been presented in the New Testament in a positive, uplifting way.

Read Hebrews 8:10 and 10:16 in their contexts. How is God's law presented in these texts? As something still relevant, or as something negated by grace?

So often, we see people seeking to place the law in opposition to God's love or God's grace, the idea being that if you truly love, then God's law is negated. One could argue that love transcends the law, in the sense that one who truly loves God and others reveals the ultimate principles of the law. But this is no excuse for negating the law. On the contrary, love fulfills the law; love is the law expressed in its purest form.

It's like the parts of a car. The parts don't exist as ends in themselves; they are there so that the car will go from place to place. That's their purpose, so that the car can move. Yet, without each part, the car wouldn't function. The law is like that: it's not an end in itself but the means to an end, and that end is a deep expression of love, love for God and love for others.

Look up these texts. How do they help us to understand the link between love and law? *Rom. 13:8–10; Gal. 5:14; James 2:8; 1 John 5:2, 3.*

Dwell more on the links 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.

Further Study: “The ten holy precepts spoken by Christ upon Sinai’s mount were the revelation of the character of God, and made known to the world the fact that He had jurisdiction over the whole human heritage. That law of ten precepts of the greatest love that can be presented to man is the voice of God from heaven speaking to the soul in promise. ‘This do, and you will not come under the dominion and control of Satan.’ There is not a negative in that law, although it may appear thus. It is DO, and Live. . . . The Lord has given His holy commandments to be a wall of protection around His created beings.” —Ellen G. White, *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 53.

“In the work of redemption there is no compulsion. No external force is employed. Under the influence of the Spirit of God, man is left free to choose whom he 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 in our great need cry out for a power out of and above ourselves, the powers of the soul are imbued with the divine energy of the Holy Spirit, and they obey the dictates of the will in fulfilling the will of God.

“The only condition upon which the freedom of man is possible is that of becoming one with Christ. ‘The truth shall make you free;’ and Christ is the truth. . . . Subjection to God is restoration to one’s self,—to the true glory and dignity of man. The divine law, to which we are brought into subjection, is ‘the law of liberty.’ James 2:12.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 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 manifested? At the same time, what is love without law-keeping like? What kind of love is it, if love at all? Why do they need to be linked?
- 2 In what ways does the law reveal the character of the Lawgiver? How does God’s law reveal to us what God is like?
- 3 What does Ellen White mean when she talks above about the law being a “law of liberty”? How can the keeping of the law be equated with “liberty”?
- 4 What examples can we find in the world, and all around us, of what happens when people violate God’s law? How powerful a testimony are these examples of the value and continued validity of that law?

Summary: God’s law is an expression of His love, and when we love as God loves us, we will truly reveal the law in all its beauty and power.

Determined to Serve

by ENKHCHIMEG ENKHBAATAR

Eggie's family wasn't religious, but when a classmate in secondary school invited her to attend church with her, Eggie agreed to go. She knew that her parents didn't mind, for her mother had told her that worshipping God was a good thing.

Her friend's church was a small group of 20 or 30 people who met on Sabbaths. Most were young people, and Eggie loved the vibrant worship service these youth led out in. Eggie invited her younger sister to attend, and eventually both girls were baptized.

Eggie finished high school and looked forward to studying to become a teacher. But her older sister was already studying at a university, and her parents couldn't afford to support two girls in university at once. Disappointed, Eggie found work as a waitress and saved money to study.

Eggie helped start a small group Bible study in another family's home. Her church family saw her leadership abilities and helped Eggie get a scholarship to begin her studies. Joyfully Eggie journeyed to Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia's capital city, to begin her studies.

She found a vibrant church family where she can grow spiritually. She teaches the children's class in church and hopes that when Mongolia opens a Seventh-day Adventist elementary school, she can teach there. In the meantime, she encourages other Seventh-day Adventist young people to stay true to God and the beliefs they treasure.

In the dormitory where she lives, Eggie shares her faith with her schoolmates. "My friends want to know what I believe," she says. "I give them books about my faith and copies of my Sabbath School lessons. I invite them to church and share with them my joy in Jesus."

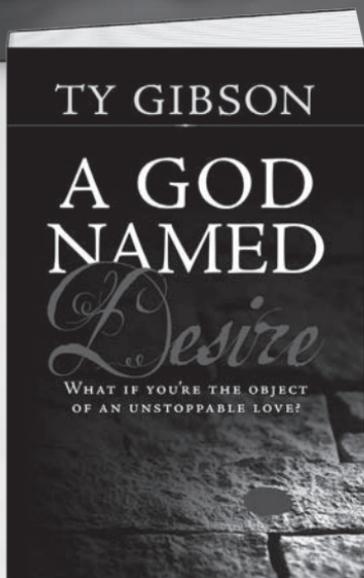
Eggie prays for her younger sister, who is working as a missionary volunteer while she awaits her turn to attend the university. "God is leading us, and we rejoice that we are working with Him to lead others to Jesus," Eggie says.

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ENKHCHIMEG ENKHBAATAR (left) works for the Mongolian Mission.

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Ty Gibson

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