

Living the Law



SABBATH—AUGUST 23

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Exodus 21:1–32; Exodus 22:16–23:9; Exodus 23:20–33; Matthew 5:38–48; Romans 12:19.

MEMORY VERSE: “Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Say this [message] to the people of Israel: “You have seen for yourselves that I have spoken to you from heaven. Do not make any gods other than Me. Do not make for yourselves gods of silver or gods of gold” ’ ” (Exodus 20:22, 23, NLV).



The law protects us from dangers and disasters.

GOD WANTED HIS PEOPLE to be different from the other people around them. God wanted the Israelites to be a community of faith who lived under His leadership. Everyone would obey His law. Judges would punish people who broke the law. Priests or spiritual leaders would teach the law. Parents also had an important part in this work.

The laws of a country show us its beliefs. They also show us who the lawmaker is. When Pharaoh, king of Egypt, ordered the Egyptians to kill every newborn Hebrew boy, this law showed us the evil in his heart. Compare Pharaoh and his evil law with a king who makes a law that every 18-year-old person in his kingdom gets to go to school for free. Many people would think this law was proof that the king was kind, giving, and wanted his citizens to succeed.

God's law shows us who He is. He is loving, good, and holy. The law shows us how God punishes evil. The law is fair, and so is God. The law protects us from dangers and disasters. We must respect God and other people. We must love God's law. When we do these things, we live the law, just as God planned for His people, the Israelites, to do.

MORE LAWS FOR EVERYDAY LIFE (Exodus 21:1–32)

At Sinai, God gave Israel the Ten Commandments. The law taught God's people how to live holy lives. The people must stay connected to God for that to happen. So, God gave His people more laws for everyday life. The judges were responsible for protecting these laws and helping people to follow them correctly.

"Not long ago, the people were slaves. Their minds weren't ready to fully understand the Ten Commandments. So, God gave His people more laws for everyday life. These laws helped the people understand the Ten Commandments better. The leaders of Israel used these laws to judge problems in Israel. God gave Moses the Ten Commandments in front of the people. But God gave the laws for everyday life to Moses in private. Then Moses gave them to the people."
—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 310, adapted.

Read Exodus 21:1–32. What laws did God give the people about Hebrew slaves, killing, and body injuries?

We can read the laws that God gave His people for everyday life in Exodus 21:1–23:19. God gave these laws to His people to stop evil and to build a strong community.

The slavery laws were special. Slavery among the Israelites was different from slavery in the Middle Ages or in modern times. Hebrew slaves were protected. The Israelites cared about them. In the Middle Ages and in modern times, servants and slaves were property. They belonged to their owners who could do whatever they wished with their slaves. Bible laws about slavery were different from modern slave laws or slave laws in the Middle Ages. In the Bible, slavery was limited to six years (Exodus 21:1, 2; Jeremiah 34:8–22). In the seventh year, all slaves must be allowed to go free. A slave could choose to stay with his master at this time. Masters had to give their slaves or servants the Sabbath off (Exodus 20:9, 10). Masters also must take care of their servants' basic needs.

In most places today, slavery is not legal. Sad to say, slavery continues to be a problem. What are ways that we see slavery today? What can we do to fight against it?



God gave these laws to His people to stop evil and to build a strong community.

SOME MORE LAWS (Exodus 22:16–23:9)

God told the judges what to do if someone's bull attacked his neighbor's bull.

God in His mercy taught the judges of Israel how to solve problems about owning property. God told the judges what to do if someone's bull attacked his neighbor's bull. Or if a person stole an animal from someone's flock and sold it. Or if animals ate in a crop field or grape field that someone else owned. Or what to do when a person borrowed something from someone, and the borrowed thing got stolen. Or what to do if a rented animal was injured or died (Exodus 21:33–22:15).

Read about the laws in Exodus 22:16–23:9. What problems do these laws help to solve? How do they solve them?

God's laws talked about different problems. There were laws against shaming people or putting them down. God did not want His people to use anyone in any way at all. In His mercy, God corrects the evil things we want to do and controls the bad things we want to do. God wanted to keep communities safe, to remove evil, and for people to have good personal relationships with each other. So His people must be fair and loving in all their actions and decisions.

Read Exodus 23:10–19. What important topics and celebrations do these verses talk about?

The Sabbath and the festivals were about worship. These celebrations helped people remember special things that happened in Israel's history. Worship was the reason for everything the Israelites did. So, God gave the Israelites many important rules to help them understand how to worship Him. God made the Sabbath at Creation (Genesis 2:2, 3; Exodus 20:8–11). The Sabbath was connected to many important happenings in Israel's history: to the Exodus and to God's saving mercy (Deuteronomy 5:12–15). The Exodus was the time when God helped the Israelites escape from slavery in Egypt. In a powerful way, the Sabbath helps us remember that God made us. The Sabbath also helps us remember God as our Lord and Savior (Mark 2:27, 28).

The Israelites also celebrated three important festivals every year: (1) the Passover in the spring; (2) Pentecost seven weeks later; and (3) the Feast of Tabernacles in the fall.

GOD'S FIRST PLAN (Exodus 23:20–33)

How did God plan to get the Promised Land for His people? Read Exodus 23:20–33 for the answer.

God didn't plan for the Israelites to fight for their new land. God would give them the land. God promised the land to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God wanted to give Israel the land as a special gift.

The Lord showed Israel how He would give them the Promised Land. We can see for ourselves God's plan in the story about how God helped Israel cross the Red Sea: God fought for His people. God gave them a total win over the Egyptians, who planned to kill them (Exodus 14:13, 14). The Egyptians were destroyed because God helped Israel. In the same way, God later destroyed the Assyrian army of King Sennacherib. The Assyrian army was big and had better training and weapons than Israel's army. But God saved Israel without their needing to fight. God fought for Israel and won because King Hezekiah believed God's promise from Isaiah (2 Kings 19:35; Isaiah 37:36).

God told Abraham that He wouldn't give his future children the Promised Land right away. They must wait 400 years (Genesis 15:13–16). Why? Because God in His mercy wanted to save the people in the land of Canaan, who were very evil. So, God gave them time to confess their sins. But the people continued to fight against God and His law. So when the people in this land made their final decision to turn against God forever, God was ready to give their land to the Hebrews as their new home.

Also, God promised that He would cause the people in Canaan to leave in two special ways: (1) God would fill their hearts with fear, and (2) God would send hornets to drive them out. Before the Israelites arrived in the new land, their enemies would run away (Exodus 23:27, 28).

The Angel of God has an important part in winning the Promised Land for Israel. This Angel or Messenger was Jesus. Jesus led Israel, won land, and protected His people and their land. Jesus was in the tall cloud that led them during the day and the cloud of fire that led them during the night. Israel needed to pay careful attention and listen to Jesus because He was their Leader (Exodus 23:21). If the people didn't obey Jesus or believe in His leadership, they would have trouble succeeding.



Jesus was in the tall cloud that led them during the day and the cloud of fire that led them during the night.

AN EYE FOR AN EYE (Matthew 5:38–48)

Judges needed to examine the injury. Then they would decide how much money someone owed for the injury and told him to pay it.

Read Matthew 5:38–48. In these verses, Jesus discusses the Old Testament law about revenge and getting even. What does Jesus say this law means? How should we understand this law today in our own lives?

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus uses quotes from the Old Testament. The people who heard Jesus' sermon knew these verses well. But Jesus wasn't satisfied with how the Jewish leaders explained these verses. For hundreds of years, the teachings of the Jewish leaders hid the true meaning of the Bible more and more. The leaders made their own man-made rules more important than Bible truth. Worse, these leaders changed the real meaning of the verses. In His Sermon, Jesus helps the people understand the real meaning of these laws. Jesus wanted to correct some of the false teachings about these Old Testament laws.

The verse from Exodus 21:24 talks about "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth." Jesus uses this quote in Matthew 5:38. This rule is named the "lex talionis," or the law for getting even. This verse from Exodus 21:24 also is used in other places in the Bible (Leviticus 24:20; Deuteronomy 19:21).

God made this law to stop people from taking personal revenge against anyone. God wanted to stop people from getting even without first judging what happened. Judges needed to examine the injury. Then they would decide how much money someone owed for the injury and told him to pay it. The judges did this work to stop people from "taking the law into their own hands." The judges must be fair. Their decisions must honor God's law.

Jesus gave these special laws to Moses. Jesus understood the reason for this law. So, Jesus could use this law in the correct way. The reason for the law was to make sure that the judges' decisions were fair. The law, if followed, would repair broken relationships and bring peace.

In a way, a fair decision includes satisfying our need for revenge. That's because we must try to make things right at the same time that we try to be fair.

In the future, God will make everything right. How should this idea help you live with anything in life that isn't fair right now?

REVENGE (Romans 12:19, NlrV)

“ ‘My dear friends, don’t try to get even. Leave room for God to show his anger. It is written, “I am the God who judges people. I will pay them back,” (Deuteronomy 32:35) says the Lord’ ” (Romans 12:19, NlrV).

What promise and command do you find in the verse above? How are they both connected to each other?

Until God makes everything right, the judges of ancient Israel must decide how to punish someone who injured or hurt another person. But first the judges needed information about what happened. The problem in Jesus’ day was that the teachers of the law used the law in Deuteronomy 32:35 in a way that allowed people to get even. When that happened, the law was used in the wrong way. Then the whole reason for the law was no longer understood. Worse, the teachers of the law used the law to allow things that the law really said were forbidden!

Read Matthew 6:4, 6; Matthew 16:27; Luke 6:23; and 2 Timothy 4:8. What do these verses tell us about how Jesus understood the rules about reward and punishment?

Jesus wasn’t against the rules of reward and punishment. Fair decisions are an important part of life. But no person should make himself a judge over another person, decide his guilt, and then punish him! We must not get even. If someone has done us wrong, we must let a judge in court decide what should be done.

Jesus then tells us to be as perfect as our Father in heaven, who is perfect. How can we be as perfect as God Himself? We must not be selfish, and we must love other people. In doing so, we show people God’s love. God teaches His followers to pray for the people who hurt and attack them. Being perfect, then, is to love, to be forgiving, and to be kind (Luke 6:36), even to people who are not good to you. When we follow this important rule, our hearts will be changed. Then we will show everyone God’s love.

What are some ways, day by day, that we can learn to love as God commands us to love? Why does this love always include our dying to self?



God teaches His followers to pray for the people who hurt and attack them.



Jesus shows us the road to heaven. He walked this same road for us.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, “The Law Given to Israel,” pages 310–314, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

We live in the land of our enemy, Satan. So we may feel hurt in real life because of his evil plans and lies. Sad to say, pain and suffering are part of life now. But God helps us to stand strong in hard times.

“The precious Savior will send help just when we need it most. Jesus shows us the road to heaven. He walked this same road for us. Every pain that hurts us hurt Him first. Jesus carried before we did every heavy load we must carry. The Lord allows us to have troubles and hard times. Hard times get us ready for peace. The time of trouble will be a terrible time for God’s people. But during that time, we must look up. With faith, we will see the rainbow of promise that is around Jesus.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, page 633, adapted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Many Christians, now and in the past, try to understand why the Lord chased the non-Jewish people out of their countries. Sometimes God destroyed them completely. Yes, these stories are hard to understand. But God’s love is fair. How should we trust that God’s love was shown in these stories about people who were forced to leave their countries if they didn’t obey God?
- ② Jesus tells us to “ ‘be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect’ ” (Matthew 5:48, NKJV). Why would Jesus say this command right after His commands to love our enemies and the people who hate us? What was Jesus telling us here about what it means to be “perfect” as our Father in heaven?
- ③ What does Paul mean when he says that “you are not under law. You now live under God’s grace [mercy, forgiveness, and power over sin]”? (Romans 6:14, ERV). How can we use God’s law in the wrong way?
- ④ Compare being fair with getting even. Are these two ideas completely different? Or are they two different ways of talking about the same idea? How do we know if our wish for a fair decision is not really a wish for revenge?

ALL THINGS WORKING TOGETHER

Carl Casey was a helicopter pilot and a science teacher in Fairbanks, Alaska. Many years before Carl became a Seventh-day Adventist, he stopped eating meats that weren't clean. Carl studied what the Bible said about the topic. He also saw that science supported Bible truth about meats that weren't clean. So, Carl stopped eating them. But Carl continued to eat clean meat. At the age of 51, Carl had a stroke.

The stroke almost destroyed Carl's life. He couldn't walk or work.

Then Carl read Romans 8:28, which says: "We know that in everything God works for the good of those [people] who love him. These are the people God chose, because that was his plan" (ERV). Carl read that verse many times in the past. But now the verse had new meaning for him. Carl saw that the Bible didn't say, "Only good things happen for those people who love God." The verse said, "in everything God works for the good of those [people] who love him."

Carl stopped feeling sad or angry that the stroke happened. He started to ask God to use his stroke to win people to Jesus in Alaska. Carl wanted to say as Joseph said to his brothers, " 'You decided to hurt me. But God caused a good thing to happen because of that. God brought me here to save the lives of many people. You can see how that has really happened!' " (Genesis 50:20, EASY).

Carl started to share Jesus in Alaska. Alaska is a hard place to share the Good News about Jesus. The winters are cold and long. The roads are limited. The territory is very big. Only about 3,000 Seventh-day Adventists live in Alaska. The number of people who live in Alaska is 733,000. Carl understood real fast that his wheelchair was a wonderful tool for witnessing. People noticed him right away. As soon as they did, Carl talked to them about his love for God.

People were surprised. They asked Carl, "You're in a wheelchair, and you care about God?"

Carl answered, "You betcha!" Then Carl talked about God's amazing love. He shared Romans 3:23, which says everyone has sinned and no one is as good as God. He also shared John 3:16, which says that everyone who believes in Jesus has everlasting life. Carl encouraged people to read the Bible daily and grow close to God. When we have a personal relationship with God, we will want to follow Bible truth. Then we will understand the reasons for keeping the Sabbath and eating a healthful diet.

Carl says, "I'm blessed to be alive. Most people die after a stroke this big." Ten years later, he can say that many lives have been changed. After his stroke, God used him to win people to Jesus. So, God really does work for the good of His people.

INSIDE
Story
by ANDREW MCCHESENEY



**People asked Carl,
"You're in a wheelchair and
you care about God?"**



Carl Casey