

INTERPRETING THE OLD TESTAMENT IN LIGHT OF THE NEW EXODUS 34:27-28

“Then the LORD said to Moses, “Write these words, for according to the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.” So he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he neither ate bread nor drank water. And He wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.”

For the last eight weeks we’ve studied the covenants God made with mankind. God has always had room in His heart for people. In fact, God created us out of a desire to have meaningful fellowship with us.

Every time throughout history people have rebelled against God’s authority, He’s been there with a covenant - an agreement to *mend the breach, make amends* for sin, and *bend* sinful hearts back to Him.

God is love, **yet God is more than love...**

He also cares about justice, righteousness, purity, fidelity, retribution, and judgment. And to satisfy these other concerns, *along with love*, God offers a covenant.

Following the global flood, God called on the survivors to scatter and multiply, but instead the family of man sinned again. The people gathered in the city of Babylon, under the influence of a man named Nimrod.

In defiance to God they built a tower to the heavens.

God struck down their monument to hubris, and confused their languages driving men apart. Since they refused to scatter on their own, God did it for them.

The rebellion at Babel was a work of Satan.

The devil had chosen **a man** named **Nimrod**, **a place** called **Babel**, and **a means** which was **fear**. But God counterpunched by choosing **a man** named **Abram**, **a place** called **Canaan**, and **a means** known as **faith**.

God had tried to work with mankind as a whole, *to no avail*. He now makes a covenant with a specific family through which He plans to bring salvation to the world.

God makes three promises to Abram. Here's the shorthand version: **sod, seed, salvation**... A piece of **land** to possess - a great **nation** of descendants - and a **blessing** upon the world. God promises through Abram's descendant salvation will come to all mankind.

On the one hand God's new strategy was brilliant.

In choosing Israel as His special people God was not abandoning the rest of humanity. At times in their history God dealt harshly with Israel's enemies, *but it was the judgment their own behavior deserved, or the result of a callousness shown toward God's people*.

Ultimately, God preferred Israel for the benefit of the world. They were a revelation of God's ways and will.

God's plans for Israel were unique. His blueprints for the Hebrews didn't completely apply to other nations, yet through

God's dealings with Israel He revealed His character, and His values, and His morals and ethics.

The Hebrew people and their Scripture became a lens through which the rest of the world could see and learn about the one, true God. This is why Christians are obligated to study the Hebrew Bible (*What has come to be known as **The Old Testament.***)

On the one hand, God's plan to pick out a people for Himself was brilliant, but on the other hand it was risky.

What if the Hebrew people were wiped out by their enemies? Or what if they imploded from within?

They could fraternize with their pagan neighbors and be assimilated culturally, racially, spiritually, so much so, they could disappear as a distinct ethnic group.

And this was especially true in their beginning stages, *before becoming a large nation.* In Canaan Abraham's tiny family was surrounded by vile, corrupt, immoral cultures - who's people were violent idolators.

God established two safeguards to protect Israel from this kind of assimilation. **First, was Egypt.**

In Genesis 15 God said to Abraham, "Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions. Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. But in the fourth generation they

shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.”

For the next 400 years God will protect His people from their evil Canaanite neighbors by sequestering them in Egypt. Then in the fourth generation they'll emerge from slavery as God's instrument of judgment.

Unlike the Canaanites and Amorites who liked to mingle socially, the Egyptians were strict separatists.

The Egyptians felt racially superior. They believed they had descended from the gods. They were certain to keep segregated from the Israelites among them.

Eventually Egypt took the Hebrews into slavery. This was actually a blessing in disguise. Though painful in many ways, it insured the purity of the promised Seed.

But the **second** safeguard God established to preserve the unique identity of His people was **the Law**.

In His time, God heard and answered the prayers of the slaves in Egypt. He sent the Hebrews a deliverer named Moses. And no sooner had Moses brought God's people through the Red Sea, he led them to the mountain where he had first met with God. On Mount Sinai God gave Moses and Israel His divine Law.

The traditional site of Mount Sinai is an outcropping of rock that rises 1100 feet above its surroundings. It looks like a giant pulpit. And that was fitting, for it was there that God taught them His will and ways. **For the next year** Israel camped at the base of God's pulpit.

Their obedience and loyalty to the Law of God would distinguish the children of Abraham as God's people. Israel's destiny was to return to the land God had promised them, to be *a holy nation in an unholy world*.

And it was from Mount Sinai that **"The LORD said to Moses, 'Write these words, for according to the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.'**" God's covenant was with Abraham's heirs, not with other nations - or with the later spiritual people of God, the Church - it was with the Hebrews... and it wasn't a covenant defined merely by words. Yahweh said specifically, ***"according to the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel."***

Not just ***"these words,"*** but God was making a covenant according to ***"the tenor of these words."***

The Hebrew word translated **"tenor"** means **"the puff, or the air, or the essence behind the word."** The tenor of a word or phrase is its original meaning, its intent.

God was making a covenant with His people not according to the words alone, but His covenant was based on **"the intent behind the words."** Here's Exodus 34:27 in The Amplified Bible, **"Write these words, for after the purpose and character of these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel."**

And this needs to be our guide when we interpret Scripture. Our pursuit is to grasp not just the words per se, but **"the purpose and character of these words..."**

Every biblical **text** has a **context**. The *circumstances* and *folks involved* and *covenants at play* all contribute to how it should be understood. **The key to discerning the intent of any passage is noting its proper context.**

Remember, what matters in a **contract** are *the words*, *the legalize*. It's all about exact wording. Whereas what matters in a **covenant** is the commitment the words express. It involves the **purpose behind the words**.

Recently I watched a documentary on the personal residence of the US President, the White House. The commentator observed, **"The White House is the most public of any private residence in America. And it's the most private of any public building in America."**

In a sense the same can be said for the Mosaic Law. It's the *most universal* of any national code of Law. Yet it's the *most personally specific* of any universal truth.

It's a document meant for the Hebrews, yet it still applies to all mankind. And though it's indispensable to man, it can't be understood apart from Hebrew culture.

Think about it this way, biblical Israel who lived the Old Testament was a **theocratic monarchy** operating in an **agrarian culture** during a **period of antiquity**. That meant Hebrews lived under a dynasty of human kings, and under a religious Law decreed by God.

Predominantly farmers, who lived off the land, they lived in a pre-industrial period of world history.

In contrast, Americans who read the Old Testament live in a **secular democracy** operating in **capitalistic culture** at a

time of **high-tech ingenuity**. That means we live under a government chosen by the people, and are governed by man-made laws. We work in commercial enterprise fueled by advanced technology.

For ancient Hebrews and modern Americans our environments and context couldn't be more diverse.

Here's a classic passage where this context is vital...

Three times in the Law it instructs, "**You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk.**" *We read that and think what's the big deal?* In fact, later Jews turned it into a huge deal! This was the basis of an intricate set of kosher or dietary rules - separating milk and meat products. *Yet that also took the passage out of context.*

Remember the Law protected God's people in an idolatrous, hedonistic culture. Boiling a goat in its mother's milk was tied to a Canaanite fertility ritual that God didn't want His people, Israel, to participate in.

Today, a person might read that passage and think "*Okay, I'm obeying God, I've never boiled a goat - let alone in its mother's milk.*" But the literal words of the text have very little to do any longer with its intent.

What the passage means to us, is not to make a god out of sex and pleasure. Don't be part of a hedonistic culture. **The correct interpretation depends on context.**

Another feature of the Law that alters its context has to do with its *complexity*. God gave Moses different types of Laws - **moral laws** established God's standard for sexuality - **civil**

laws governed life and society as it related to the land of Canaan - and **ceremonial laws** were given by God to foreshadow the work of the coming Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth.

Through the **moral laws** we see how God wants us to treat each other, and express our sexuality. These laws haven't changed throughout the centuries. Many of these laws are repeated in the New Testament.

Through **civil laws** God gave governance over the life the Hebrews would live in the land of Canaan. Many of these laws are irrelevant to cultures today.

And through the **ceremonial laws** God established how He wanted to be worshipped - it all ultimately pointed to Jesus. These laws are still vital symbolically.

So I read a **moral law** and note if it was God's desire for people then, it's surely His desire for folks today.

I read a **civil law** about helping my neighbor get his ox out of a ditch, and though my neighbors don't own any oxen, the intent of the law might also apply to me giving my neighbor a ride if his car breaks down.

And then I read a **ceremonial law** that speaks of sacrificing a lamb, and I realize Jesus has become my spotless lamb, and I look for a way in that Law to better appreciate the work Jesus has accomplished for me.

There's meaning for us in the Law of Moses, as long as we pay attention to the passage's proper context.

And as Christians, another aspect of all this that alters *our* context is that *we* are now living under a different covenant. Jesus came to fulfill the demands of the Law. He *lived up* to its standard of righteousness, and *laid down* His perfect life as the ultimate sacrifice.

Now for the believer in Jesus, the Law's **moral requirements** have been satisfied by *the purity of Christ...* its **civil requirements** have been satisfied by *the love of Christ...* and its **ceremonial requirements** have been satisfied by *the cross of Christ*. This is how according to the Law Christians are now blameless.

In Christ, though I'm no longer required to keep the Law, I can study it and learn of God's character, I can see what love for God and for my brother looks like, and I can gain a greater appreciation of His sacrifice.

Yet today, modern skeptics and atheists love to read the Old Testament and take passages **out of context**.

They love to cherrypick the Hebrews Scriptures and find literal words and thoughts that are problematic in light of modern values. They claim contradiction or hypocrisy. Their problem though is they approach the Old Testament unfairly. They lack an informed, New Testament perspective for understanding the Old.

For example, several years ago a letter appeared on the internet addressed to Dr. Laura Schlessinger.

Perhaps you've heard Dr. Laura's call-in show on the radio. She was on WSB here in Atlanta for many years.

Dr. Laura is Jewish, and had taken a strong stance against homosexuality. The internet letter was intended to show how archaic and out-dated the Bible is, and thus, how wrong it is in its teachings on homosexuality.

In fact, television writer, Aaron Sorkin, played off this letter to Dr. Laura in an episode of his series, **The West Wing**. He had his fictional president, Jed Bartlett, attack a female radio personality, Jenna Jacobs.

The president uses his clever wit to embarrass her and cast doubt on the reliability of the Old Testament.

Here's an excerpt from the episode, "**The Midterms.**"

That was the TV show. I want to take you back to the satirical letter that prompted it, and work through its eleven points. *I think you'll see **it's all about context.***

The letter opened sarcastically, "Dear Dr. Laura, Thank you for educating people regarding God's Law. I have learned a great deal from your show, and I try to share that knowledge with as many people as I can.

When someone tries to defend a homosexual lifestyle, for example, I remind him that Leviticus 18:22 declares it to be an abomination. End of debate.

I do need some advice from you, however, regarding some of the specific laws and how to best follow them.

Now here's where he tries to embarrass the Bible...

1) When I burn a bull on the altar as a sacrifice, I know it creates a pleasing odor for the Lord (Leviticus 1:9). The

problem is my neighbors. They claim the odor is not pleasing to them. Should I smite them?

First of all the skeptic writing this was obviously not a Southerner; for no Southerner complains about the smell of barbecue beef - especially on Memorial Day.

Actually, this is the easiest of His points to answer.

The Old Testament sacrifices all foreshadowed Jesus. Thus, when Jesus died on the cross, *once and for all for the sins of the world*, there was no longer a need for another sacrifice... Our skeptic should shut down his sacrificial altar; for the odor is no longer needed or pleasing to God. He should leave his barbecuing to Mark Lawson and the boys at CCSM.

2) I would like to sell my daughter into slavery, as sanctioned in Exodus 21:7. In this day and age, what do you think would be a fair price for her?

Once again when we see the word “slavery” context takes over. Americans think of slavery based on racial prejudice or sexual exploitation. Whereas, slavery in ancient Israel had nothing to do with either. The ancient Hebrews had no bankruptcy and slavery became a means to escape economic desperation.

To insure his daughter would be fed, clothed, and sheltered a father in the poorhouse might sell her to a man who wanted to make her his wife. Read Exodus 21:7 and it's clear his purpose in buying her is to marry or betroth the daughter. The Law protected her against mistreatment. God's Law never sanctioned slavery, it only conceded it existed and sought to bring reform.

In fact, it's the Bible's teaching *that man was made in God's image - that we all have the same standing at the foot of the cross - that in Christ we're brothers* - that eventually led to the belief that all men are created equal. This led to the condemnation of all slavery by future generations. The love of Christ is the only power proven strong enough to break the chains of hatred and bigotry that cause slavery to this very day.

3) I know that I am allowed no contact with a woman while she is in her period of menstrual uncleanness (Leviticus 15:19-24). The problem is, how do I tell? I have tried asking, but most women take offense. Obviously, the writer of this letter is mocking a principle that was important to Hebrews at the time.

Remember, when Israel left Mount Sinai they were headed for a pagan hotspot. Canaan was full of tribes that were lewd and immoral. All kinds of perverse acts were done in the name of their fertility gods. Occult practices were commonplace. The Canaanites merged religion and sex, *and God wanted His people to be different*. This is why for both men and women any bodily emission, *either semen or menstrual bleeding*, caused the person to be unclean and unfit for worship.

It wasn't that God disapproved of marital intimacy, He just didn't want sex formalized into Hebrew worship, *as it had been in the worship of false gods*.

The pagans believed these emissions prompted the gods to water the earth with rain. God wanted His people to have no part of these perverse superstitions.

And God also wanted His people to have an ethos of sexual restraint. Pagan culture lived by an “*anything goes*” ethic. God didn’t want His people adopting this lifestyle; thus a person’s sexual life was interrupted at times by certain conditions that deserved their respect.

And while we’re on the subject of religion and sex, though it’s not mentioned in this letter, many skeptics ask why did God order Israel to carry out genocide against the Canaanites - even women and children?

Recall, what God said to Abraham in Genesis 15. He was preparing Israel to be a tool of judgment to use against the Amorites once their “*iniquity was complete.*”

These Canaanite tribes flirted with demons. Their worship blended sex with demonic activity. It harkened back to the pre-flood perversions, where demons polluted the human race. God wouldn’t let it happen again. We’d been there, done that, and got the T-shirt.

Once the evil of the Amorites passed the point of no return God wiped them out. He had no choice. To protect the world from diving into the same perversions all over again He told the Israelite army to kill them all.

4) Leviticus 25:44 states that I may indeed possess slaves, both male and female, provided they are purchased from neighboring nations. A friend of mine claims that this applies to Mexicans, but not Canadians. Can you clarify? Why can’t I own Canadians? Realize, God’s plan to promote Israel. He

made the Hebrews His own special people. He chose to work through them to reveal His heart to the world.

This meant the only way a citizen of a neighboring nation could find and learn about the one, true God, was to become part of Israel. And here was one of the ways that could occur. A prisoner of war, or a man in debt to a Hebrew, could sell himself into slavery.

Again, much like divorce, this was never God's ideal. It was a concession to life in a fallen world. The Law regulated slavery and gave it benevolent parameters.

In fact, Leviticus 25 is an amazing chapter. In it God orders two occasions when all Hebrew owners are commanded to free their slaves. Emancipation Day occurred every 7th or Sabbath Year, and every 50th year, which was the Year of Jubilee. There is no other example of a nation of antiquity ever freeing its slaves, let alone every seventh year. That meant Israel had no slaves in perpetuity. They were freed ever seven years.

5) I have a neighbor who insists on working on the Sabbath. Exodus 35:2 clearly states he should be put to death. Am I morally obligated to kill him myself?

At the dawning of Israel's national life God did impose severe penalties to hammer home the importance of certain laws that might otherwise have seemed insignificant. And the Sabbath was a law the Hebrews might've had a difficult time taking seriously.

People in antiquity battled the elements to carve out a living. They tilled the ground, laboring by the sweat of their brow. They worked despite nature's uncertainties, and fought

pestilence, drought, and floods. Even seven days wasn't enough time to do all that life demanded.

Yet, the fourth commandment stated, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.” Moses was told, as God spent six days creating the Earth, six days would be given to man for work, but as God rested on the seventh, He wanted His people to do the same.

This was revolutionary in the ancient world.

Neighboring nations spent every day grinding it out. They needed all seven days to provide for their family.

But God wanted His people to be an example of His loving care. He asked them to trust Him enough to let Him provide for them one day in seven. After a day of rest and family they would return to their work happier and holier, with a renewed vision of why they worked in the first place. Without a day of rest, mankind would work himself to death. Thus, the penalty God imposed on Israel for breaking the Sabbath Day was death.

God's Sabbath stipulations weren't a petty god's attempts to manipulate His people's schedule or make them go to Temple. To the contrary He wanted to enhance their enjoyment of life, and see them rested.

As Jesus said in Mark 2:27, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.” A day of rest was intended as a gift to God's people, not a burden.

As for Christians, though we too are not exempt from needing a day of rest - as with the sacrifices, the Sabbath has been fulfilled in Christ. **He is our rest.**

Jesus provides His people a lifetime of grace and rest from all their labors. He gives us a perfect peace. And as with the Old Testament Sabbath, if you reject His spiritual Sabbath, the punishment again is death.

6) A friend of mine feels that even though eating shellfish is an abomination (Leviticus 11:10), it is a lesser abomination than homosexuality. I don't agree. Can you settle this? There were Hebrew Laws that dealt with diet. Certain foods were considered clean and unclean. Shellfish - shrimp, crabs, lobster - was unclean or off-limits to Hebrews. There were some foods that were considered holy and others unholy.

Of course, in the New Testament, on a rooftop in Joppa, in a vision to Peter, God declared foods that were once considered unclean to now be clean. The point being the designations clean and unclean were not always based on nutritional value. Sometimes they were arbitrary. God just wanted to drill into His people that there are categories in life like **holy** and **unholy**.

And this was part of a masterplan - an overarching lesson God wanted ingrained in His people's thinking. That life is about choices. There's clean and unclean, there's holy and unholy, there's God's way and man's way. And every time you cooked you were reminded.

God wanted His people to know that in a world that's increasingly gray some things are still black and white, right and wrong. And God desired a holy people.

And this was also true when it came to sexual preferences. There was God's natural use of sexual functions, and there

were twisted or distorted uses. Many of which came with harmful consequences.

Remember pagan sexuality had no taboos, *certainly not homosexuality*. Yet God wanted His people to know there's still holy relationships and unholy relationships.

And it was as true for God to call the eating of shellfish distasteful, as it would be for Him to refer to a homosexual lifestyle by the same term - **abomination**.

7) Leviticus 21:20 states that I may not approach the altar of God if I have a defect in my sight. I have to admit that I wear reading glasses. Does my vision have to be 20/20, or is there some wiggle room here?

Once again context is king when it comes to understanding God's intent behind His Laws. In our informal, laidback American culture one of the things we no longer appreciate as we should are symbols.

Actually we can't escape them. Even in our culture symbols are all around us. From a Nike swoosh, to the Apple logo, to an American flag our world is defined and shaped by symbols, and no one is more into symbols than God. Just think of the two symbols He's left us: baptism and communion. They speak volumes.

And so it was with who could approach God's altar. A person with a handicap, a physical deformity or defect was disqualified. Not because of a prejudice, or due to a cruelty, but because of the symbolic meaning God wanted to convey. To approach His altar you had to be perfect or unblemished - *at least to the naked eye*.

This was important because it set the stage for our need for Jesus. The New Testament says that spiritually speaking, in God's eyes we've all sinned and fallen short of His glory. We're all spiritually blemished; and thus, none of us are allowed to come to His altar.

That's why we need Jesus. Only Jesus can atone for our sin. He is our perfect High Priest. The intent behind Leviticus 21:20 isn't to discriminate against the physically impaired, it's to help us appreciate Jesus!

8) Most of my male friends get their hair trimmed, including the hair around their temples, even though this is expressly forbidden by Leviticus 19:27. How should they die? Again, this was a pagan practice. It was part of a Canaanite's dedication to his idol. He would shave away the edges of his hair or beard.

And it would be blasphemous against God for an Israelite to follow suit. He would be rejecting the one, true God for the worthless idols of the Canaanites.

Even to this day this is why Orthodox Jews let the edges of their beards and hair grow and go unshaved.

As a side note, Leviticus 19 doesn't say the friends who trimmed their hair should die. The punishment isn't mentioned, but recall Israel was an earthly kingdom, under God's governance, with religious laws.

It wasn't America, *a secular democracy with freedom of religion*. Everyone today answers to God eventually, **but the Hebrews answered to God immediately**. In a theocratic kingdom the every law is God's Law.

Today, Christians live in a spiritual kingdom scattered among many earthly kingdoms, that all have different forms of government, and diverse customs and laws. In secular, human-run societies not always do God's concerns track with the government's concerns.

Today, the blessings God promises us are spiritual, not physical... The kingdom He's building involves individuals not institutions... Our ruler is His Spirit, not the president... And our day of reckoning is future, not immediate... This was all very different for OT Israel.

9) I know from Leviticus 11:6-8 that touching the skin of a dead pig makes me unclean, but may I still play football if I wear gloves? First of all, despite all the folklore a football isn't made from pigskin, but cowhide.

Here the skeptic doesn't even get his facts straight!

But this goes back to the clean and unclean distinctions. Thankfully, the New Testament teaches us that Jesus changes us from the inside out so that to the pure all things are pure. For the Christian clean and unclean is now about attitude, not the leather we touch.

10) My uncle has a farm. He violates Leviticus 19:19 by planting two different crops in the same field, as does his wife by wearing garments made of two different kinds of thread (a cotton/polyester blend).

The mixing of things... Leviticus 19 mentions the breeding of different livestock, or the sowing of various seeds in the same field, or wearing clothes of mixed fabrics. The

Canaanites viewed this mixing of different brands of the same item as a source of magical power.

Again, God didn't want His people participating in these practices or even becoming guilty by association. The Israelites were to avoid the appearance of evil.

And who knows what other ways a 13th century BC agrarian society benefited from these avoidances? Mixing livestock can yield genetically inferior offspring.

Again, it's all about context. *Are we arrogant enough to look on laws intended for other people, at a different time and circumstance, and label them useless?*

You and I are no longer subject to a law with ancient implications - but even for us, as with all the Law, this commandment may have some symbolic inspiration.

Often, mixing certain stuff has a detrimental effect.

Just as mixing certain breeds of livestock may yield inferior animals, *mixing different personalities might be a combustible combination, mixing truth and error, mixing grace and works, mixing a believer and an unbeliever* (2 Corinthians 6 makes much of this)...

This Law may be a symbolic foreboding... By the way, *you know what you get when you mix Lassie with a pit bull? A dog who mauls you, then runs to get help.*

Then finally 11) My uncle also tends to curse and blaspheme a lot. Is it really necessary that we go to all the trouble of getting the whole town together to stone them? (Leviticus 24:10-16) Couldn't we just burn them to

death at a private family affair like we do with people who sleep with their in-laws? (Leviticus 20:14)

I suppose the modern shock over these passages stem from the harshness of the punishments.

Yet remember, Israel was a theocratic society held together by divine Law. Nothing was gained, for God to be apathetic or vague about what He desired.

In ancient times a person's name was their most sacred and valuable possession. God was the thread of their national life, to insist on honoring His name was not only appropriate, it was essential for social order.

And morally, what could be worse than the situation described in Leviticus 20:14, a man marrying a woman and her mother? *We're talking a man marrying his mother-in-law! What kind of sick-o does that? "Lord, help me refrain from the jokes I might be tempted to tell at this moment, and just say that's a really bad idea."*

Leviticus 20:14 commands that all three perpetrators should be burned with fire. One Bible commentator I read interpreted that phrase "*branded with a hot iron.*"

All parties had to bear the stigma of their sin the rest of their life. When it comes to marrying your mother-in-law execution would've been getting off too easy.

This passage in Leviticus 20 assigns capital punishment to a number of sexual sins people today might be inclined to tolerate - *an incorrigible child, adultery, incest, bestiality, homosexuality.* But these were all crimes against society's basic building block, *the family.* God punished these sins

severely to protect His designs for family life - **the incubator of society.**

Again, after God lists these sins and assigns their punishments, He says, “And you shall not walk in the statutes of the nation which I am casting out before you; for they commit all these things, and therefore I abhor them. But I have said to you, “You shall inherit their land, and I will give it to you to possess, a land flowing with milk and honey...” And you shall be holy to Me, for I the Lord am holy, and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be Mine.”

God looked at the pagan nations and saw them mired down in spiritual and social decay. Israel was His hope. He designed for them to be different, and it was His Law that separated them, and made them special.

Of course, punishment is not God’s only way of preserving His values in a society. Today, He prefers the Gospel. The New Testament teaches us that it’s the goodness of God that leads a person to repentance.

We live in light of a new covenant where God changes men from the inside out. God’s Holy Spirit operates today in a way He didn’t in times past.

Jesus died on the cross for sinners - *for adulterers, homosexuals, incorrigible kids, etc...* then rose again to give them new life. Today, He wants us to die with Him spiritually, and rise with Him in resurrection power.

The Law teaches us lessons. After reading it there’s no question as to God’s attitude toward certain behaviors. But in Christ there’s hope. Even the most calloused sinner isn’t

beyond the reach of God's grace. His cure for sin isn't *our elimination*, but *our salvation*.

Let me close with 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. It teaches us how to interpret *the Law of God* in light of *the grace of God*. Paul writes, “Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.” That’s what’s reiterated over and over in the Law of Moses.

But then Paul says, “And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.” Today, God changes society and creates for Himself a special people, the Church, by changing men’s hearts - by the power of Jesus Christ.