

CHAPTER 7

THE DISPENSATION OF LAW (FROM MOUNT SINAI TO MOUNT CALVARY)

The dispensation of law began when God gave the law to the children of Israel in the days of Moses (Exodus 19-20 and it came to an end with the crucifixion of Christ and the beginning of the Church on the day of Pentecost (Matthew 27 and Acts 2). This dispensation, therefore, covered a span of time approximately 1500 years in length. During this time almost all of the Old Testament books were written. Also during this time the children of Israel developed as a nation and went through various historical periods:

<p>THE HISTORY OF ISRAEL (UNDER THE LAW)</p> <p>From Moses To the Cross</p>	<p>The Period of Wilderness Wanderings under Moses</p> <p>The Period of Conquest under Joshua</p> <p>The Period of the Judges</p> <p>The Period of the Kings</p> <p>The Period of the Captivities (under Assyria & Babylon)</p> <p>The Period of Restoration to the Land under Zerubbabel and Ezra and Nehemiah</p> <p>The Period of History Covered by the Four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John)</p>
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Some of the important people who lived under the dispensation of law are these: Moses, Joshua, Samson, Samuel, King Saul, David, Solomon, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, Ezra, Nehemiah, John the Baptist and many others. Most of the people we read about on the pages of the Bible lived during this dispensation of law.

1. MAN'S STATE AT THE BEGINNING.

What great thing did the LORD do for the children of Israel (Exodus 20:2)?

The children of Israel were slaves in the land of Egypt for about 400 years (Genesis 15:13). God delivered and redeemed His people and brought them out of that land by a mighty miracle (see Exodus 14). The children of Israel saw God's power and greatness in a very special way (Exodus 14:30-31). In a wonderful way God proved beyond any doubt that He is able to take care of His people. The miracle at the Red Sea proved it!

In the last chapter we learned that the children of Israel were responsible to trust God and BELIEVE GOD'S PROMISES. In Exodus 3:8 and 17 we find a promise which God gave to Moses. Did God promise to bring the children of Israel out of Egypt? _____ Did God promise to bring the children of Israel into the land of Palestine (the land of the Canaanites)? _____ According to this promise, would the children of Israel come into the promised land or would they die in the wilderness?

Thus, the children of Israel should have remembered two things:

1. God promised to bring them into the land (Exodus 3:6,17).
2. God proved that He was able to take care of His people (Exodus 14--the crossing of the Red Sea; God's mighty act of redemption).

As we continue reading in the book of Exodus, we learn that the children of Israel *failed* to trust the God who had given them such a promise and had showed them such power. Consider the following examples of Israel's UNBELIEF:

- 1) Exodus 15:22-26 (only 3 days after the Red Sea crossing).

A BITTER WATER PROBLEM!

Did the children of Israel trust the Lord for the solution of this problem? Did they believe that God would take care of them? Did they thank God that He would take care of them or did they murmur against the Lord?

- 2) Exodus 16:1-15 (about a month after the Red Sea crossing).

A NO FOOD PROBLEM!

Did the children of Israel trust God or did they murmur? Did they believe God's promise that He would bring them into the land (see verse 3)?

- 3) Exodus 17:1-7.

A NO WATER PROBLEM!

Did the children of Israel believe that God was able to provide water for them? Did they believe God would bring them into the land or did they worry that they might die in the wilderness (see verse 3)? Were they convinced that God was among them to meet every need that they had (verse 7)?

Israel At Mount Sinai

In the third month after coming out of Egypt, the children of Israel arrived at the foot of Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:1-2). This was the place where God would give to the children of Israel His laws and His commandments. After they arrived at Mount Sinai, God had a message for His

people. God reminded them about something. What are the first three words in Exodus 19:4?

The children of Israel **had seen** what God did to the Egyptians (Exodus 14:30-31). The children of Israel **had seen** the way God made the bitter water sweet (Exodus 15:25). The children of Israel **had seen** how God provided food in the middle of a desert (Exodus 16:11-15). They **had seen** how God brought forth water out of a rock (Exodus 17:6). They **had seen** how GRACIOUS and MERCIFUL God **had been** to them in spite of their murmurings and their UNBELIEF! They **had seen** God's power and greatness demonstrated again and again.

In Exodus 19:5 we learn that God was going to make an agreement or a covenant with the children of Israel. This is sometimes called the MOSAIC COVENANT (named after Moses who was Israel's leader at this time).

Let us consider the terms of this covenant. According to Exodus 19:5-6, God promised to bless the children of Israel in a special way **IF** the children of Israel would keep their part of the deal - "if ye will _____ My voice indeed, and _____ My covenant" (Exodus 19:5). If Israel would obey, God would bless.

Were the children of Israel willing to accept the terms of this agreement? Were they willing to keep their part of the deal (see Exodus 19:8)? _____

The Danger of Self-Confidence

In Exodus 19:8 **all** of the people said, "All that the LORD hath spoken _____ will _____." In other words they were saying, "We will obey whatever God tells us to do!" Later when Moses gave them God's laws, did they say the same thing (Exodus 24:3)? _____ In Exodus 24:7 the people said, "All that the LORD hath said will we _____, and (we will) be _____."

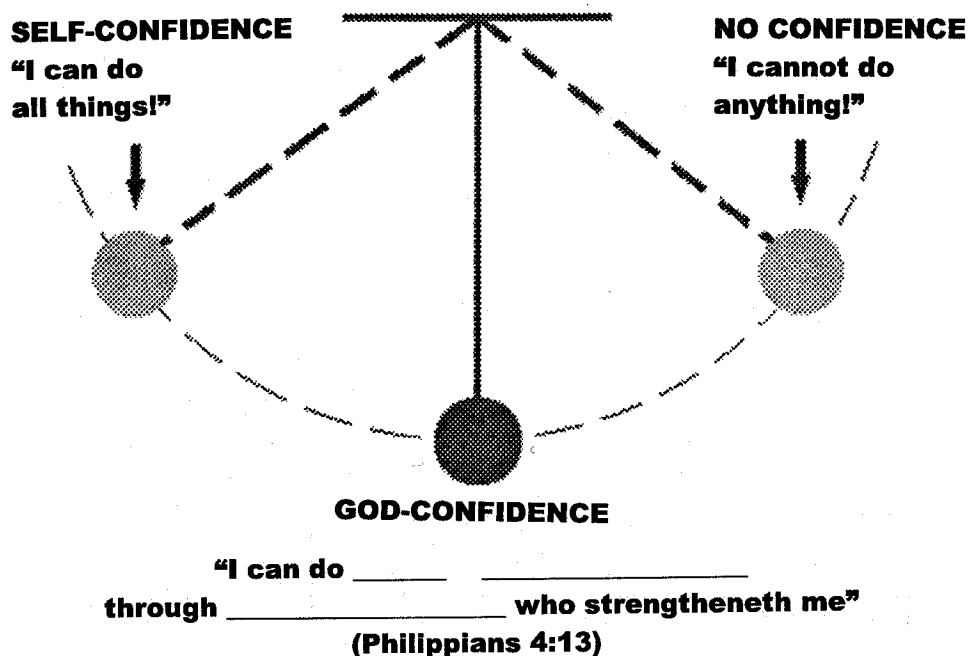
These people had too much confidence in SELF. These people failed to realize that **in themselves** they did not have the power to obey the Lord. Consider Deuteronomy 5:27-29. The children of Israel had a HEART PROBLEM (verse 29). The kind of heart they had (verse 29) did not match the kind of words they spoke (verse 28). They each had a sinful and rebellious heart. They each had the kind of a heart that was prone to DISOBEDIENCE.

The children of Israel should have realized how sinful their hearts really were. Before God ever gave the children of Israel the law, He gave them a test to see how well they could keep His commandments. In Exodus 16 God gave His people some very simple rules or commandments concerning how to gather manna. One rule is found in Exodus 16:19: **Don't leave the manna until the next morning.** Did they obey this simple rule (Exodus 16:20)? _____ Another rule was that **no manna should be gathered on the Sabbath** (Exodus 16:22-26). Did they obey this simple rule (Exodus 16:27)? _____ What should they have learned about their heart (see Exodus 16:28)?

In Exodus 19:8 (and in Exodus 24:3,7) the children of Israel should have answered differently. They should have said something like this:

"LORD, we cannot keep Your commandments. Our hearts are wicked and rebellious and sinful. In and of ourselves we do not have the power to obey. We could not even keep two simple manna-gathering rules. Unless You help us and give us the ability, we will surely fail. Lord, we cannot do it. You must help us!"

It is wrong to have SELF-CONFIDENCE and it is also wrong to have NO CONFIDENCE. Think of a pendulum of a clock which moves back and forth. We need to avoid the two extremes:



How much can a believer do without Christ's help and power (John 15:5)?

_____ The children of Israel should have said, "Without the LORD we can do none of these things that He has commanded. We can only do it if God helps us and gives us the power and does a work in our hearts." Read Mark 14:29-31 and Mark 14:66-72. Did Peter have GOD-CONFIDENCE or did Peter have SELF-CONFIDENCE?

The Laws That God Gave

God gave to the children of Israel a unique set of laws. This was something that no other nation on the face of the earth had ever received (see Deuteronomy 4:5-8). God gave His people 613 commandments in the law of Moses (according to Jewish calculations). These commands cover all phases of life and activity. The most famous and the most important of these commands are called the 10 COMMANDMENTS and are found in Exodus chapter 20 (and also in Deuteronomy chapter 5). If you want to read some of the other commandments which God gave, see Exodus chapters 21-23.

We should remember that Mount Sinai was not the first time that God gave commandments to men. What commandment did God give to Adam (Genesis 2:17)?

_____ Did God give any commandments to Noah and his children after the flood (Genesis 9:1-7)?

_____ Did God give any commands to Abraham (Genesis 17:9-12)? _____ Did the children of Israel have certain laws and commandments even before they were given the law at Mount Sinai (Exodus 15:26 and Exodus 16:28)?

God had given certain laws to men even before Mount Sinai, but at Mount Sinai God gave a special package of laws to His people which God called "MY COVENANT" (Exodus 19:5). This package included the 10 Commandments as well as many, many other laws which included rules and regulations for every area of life.

We need to also understand that the law was given only to the nation Israel, the nation which God brought out of Egypt (see Exodus 19:3; 20:2). God's law was not given to the Egyptians or to the Canaanites or to the Babylonians or to any other nation. God made this covenant with Moses and with _____ (Exodus 34:27). This special package, containing numerous laws and commandments, was given to a very special nation--Israel. No other nation had such a law (Deuteronomy 4:8). See also Romans 9:4.

2. MAN'S RESPONSIBILITY.

God had put His holy laws into Israel's hands. The children of Israel had a great responsibility: they were to obey God's _____ and they were to keep God's _____ (Exodus 19:5). What responsibility did the children of Israel have according to Deuteronomy 6:1-2?

According to the conditions of the Mosaic Covenant, the children of Israel would be blessed for obedience and they would be cursed for disobedience. This is most clearly seen in **Deuteronomy chapter 28:**

OBEDIENCE is followed by
(verse 1)

BLESSINGS
(verse 2 and see verses 3,4,5,6)

DISOBEDIENCE is followed by
(verse 15)

CURSES
(verse 15 and see verses 16,17,18,19)

Why did God give the children of Israel all of these commandments (read Deuteronomy 6:24 and circle the correct answer)?

- a. to make them miserable
- b. to make them unhappy
- c. these commands were given "for their good always"
- d. to curse them

We should also keep in mind that the children of Israel were responsible to keep ALL OF THE LAW, not just some of the law. They were to obey ALL OF THE COMMANDMENTS. Do you find the word "ALL" in Deuteronomy 6:2? _____ Do you find the word "ALL" in Deuteronomy 28:1 and 15? _____ When God gave the law to the children of Israel the people said, "_____ that the LORD hath spoken we will do" (Exodus 19:8 and see Exodus 24:3,7). God did not want PARTIAL OBEDIENCE (obey some of the laws and disobey others) but He wanted TOTAL OBEDIENCE (obey them all). Does God expect TOTAL OBEDIENCE from believers who live today (Matthew 28:20)? _____

What to Do in Case of Failure

God knew that no man (except Jesus Christ) would ever keep the law perfectly. God knew that even the best of men would fail and disobey and sin. Therefore, God's law contained many commandments which told men what to do about sin. For example, in Old Testament times (according to the law of Moses) men were told to bring animals for sacrifice (see Leviticus chapters 1-5). The children of Israel were responsible to follow God's instructions carefully and to bring the right kind of animal for the right kind of sacrifice. God had important rules and regulations for His people to follow whenever they sinned.

The same is true for believers living today. When we sin, God has told us exactly what we should do. When a believer sins, what is his responsibility according to 1 John 1:9?

_____ We do not need to bring an animal sacrifice to the altar because Christ has already died and He is the perfect sacrifice. But we do need to obey God by confessing our sins. If we confess our sins, what does God promise to do (1 John 1:9)? _____

3. MAN'S FAILURE.

Did the nation Israel keep God's law or not? The Israelites said, "ALL THAT THE LORD HATH SPOKEN WE WILL DO!" Did they really do this or not? In Jeremiah 31:32 we learn that they BROKE this covenant! They failed to keep the law.

The history of the nation of Israel is one long and sad record of flagrant and persistent violation (breaking) of the law.

The children of Israel broke God's law in a hurry! They wasted no time in disobeying God. They broke the 10 Commandments even before Moses came down from Mount Sinai. This sad story is found in Exodus 32:1-6 (and compare Exodus 20:3-5). After this great sin God said, "They have turned aside _____ out of the way which I commanded them" (Exodus 32:8).

During the period of the Judges, the children of Israel did not follow God's law, but instead "every man did that which was right in _____ eyes" (Judges 21:25). During the time of most of the kings, the Israelites served other gods (idols). They ignored God's law. "For they served _____, whereof the LORD had said unto them, Ye shall _____ do this thing" (2 Kings 17:12). Israel's failure can be seen by reading 2 Kings 17:7-19 (and see especially verses 15 and 19).

Later on the children of Israel committed the greatest crime of all. They crucified their own Messiah--the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 2:22-23 and 1 Thessalonians 2:15). The sad thing is that this crime was carried out by people who thought they were keeping God's law! For example, in John 18:28 we learn that these Jews did not want to be defiled by stepping into Pilate's palace because Pilate was a pagan Gentile. But these were the very same Jews who were doing everything they could to have Christ crucified. This would be like a bank robber who carefully wipes his feet on the door mat so that he won't dirty up the bank's nice rug, and then he comes in the bank and shoots the teller at the window and runs away with \$300,000! Jesus described this kind of people in Matthew 23:23-24. They get all upset when they find a tiny bug in their orange juice and they carefully strain it out. But they could care less when a camel is in their orange juice and they swallow the whole huge animal with one big gulp! Stepping into Pilate's palace is like the tiny bug (gnat) and crucifying Christ is like the camel.

This does not mean that every Jew failed to keep the law. There were some Jews who believed in God and God gave them the help and power that they needed in order to keep His laws and commandments. John the Baptist's parents kept the law in this way (see Luke 1:5-6), though they did not keep it perfectly. But for the most part the children of Israel FAILED to keep God's holy law.

4. THE JUDGMENT.

We have already seen that DISOBEDIENCE to God's law must be followed by God's CURSES (Deuteronomy 28:15). This is exactly what happened to the nation Israel. The many curses that we read about in Deuteronomy 28:16-26 have actually happened to this nation. Three of the great judgments upon the nation of Israel are these:

1) THE ASSYRIAN CAPTIVITY 722 B.C.

The 10 northern tribes of Israel were carried away captive by the mighty Assyrian army.

See 2 Kings 17:3-6.

The reason for this judgment: 2 Kings 17:7-18.

2) THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY 605 B.C. (with the temple destroyed in 586 B.C.).

The southern kingdom of Judah was carried away captive by the mighty Babylonian army.

See 2 Kings 25:1-11.

The reason for this judgment: 2 Chronicles 36:14-17.

3) THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM BY THE ROMANS 70 A.D.

The city of Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed by the Romans and the Jews were dispersed and scattered throughout the world.

See Matthew 23:38; 24:1-2.

The reason for this judgment: Matthew 23:37; 27:23-25 and John 1:11.

God's Commands To Us

Believers living today are not told to obey the law of Moses. We are not told to obey the package of commandments that God gave to the children of Israel. But there are certain commandments which God has given us to obey. What are you doing with the commands that God has given to you in His Word? How can a believer prove that he really loves Jesus (John 14:15,21,23)? _____

How can a person really be a FRIEND of Christ (John 15:14)?

_____ If Jesus
Christ is really my Lord, then what should I do (Luke 6:46)?
_____ We have a wonderful Lord who expects us
to obey Him!

Can you find some commandments in Ephesians chapter 4? Ephesians chapter 5? 1 Thessalonians chapter 5?

What is the first commandment that God wants you to obey (1 John 3:23—the first part of this verse, and compare Acts 16:31)?

_____ Have you obeyed this command?

We are much like the children of Israel. Our hearts are sinful and rebellious. We are prone to disobey God's Word and God's commands. This is even true for believers. Without God's help and power we could never live an obedient life. Who is it that WORKS IN US to make us willing and to give us the ability to obey God and do His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13)?
_____ Apart from Him we would only fail, but with Him we must succeed! "I can do
_____ through _____ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

May God help each one of us to walk as _____ children" (1 Peter 1:14)!

For an additional study on OBEYING GOD, see Obeying Christ's Commands
