



# The Torah

## The Law of God

By Jacques B. Doukhan

The keeper of the *Torah* (the law) has often been accused of being a legalist without soul or intelligence, a disciple of backward religion. On the contrary, the law as it is understood in Israel implies a light that helps one walk and promotes progress. The Psalmist sings of the law as “a lamp that shows me the way and a light that guides me” (Psalm 119:105). It is an allusion to the custom of wearing a light tied to the sandals. The ray thus dispersed shed light on the journey while it also drove serpents away. This image thereby translated the double function of the law: to enlighten, to teach, and therefore help to move forward, but also to protect and ensure the walk.

Thus, we understand the Jewish resistance to Christian teaching. It is essentially because Christians rejected the law, that the Jewish-Christian separation took place. It is therefore around the law that Jewish-Christian reconciliation should take place, reminding both camps of the bond between justice and love, and our human need for both grace and law.

### 1. When was the law of God mentioned for the first time?

“The Lord god gave the man a command. He said,

“You can eat the fruit of any tree that is in the garden. But you must not eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. If you do, you can be sure that you will die” (Genesis 2:16-17; cf. Exodus 20 1-19).

God’s first words to Adam are expressed as a commandment. The verb *tsawah* (“command”) from which comes the word *mitzwah* (“commandment”) is used in Genesis 2:16. Thus God’s first revelation, first teaching (*torah*), was through a *mitzwah*. (See the word “bar-mitzwah.”) The term “law” or *nomos* (in Greek) with its legalistic connotation is not a correct rendering of the Hebrew word *torah* from the root *yrh* which means “teaching” (Leviticus 10:11). *Torah* and *mitzwah* (commandment) belong together and complement each other, as a rabbi expressed it: “They borrow from each other, as wisdom and understanding—charity and loving kindness—the moon and the stars” (*Exod. R.* 31.15).

### 2. How should the law of God be received by men?

“Remove from me the way of lying, and grant me Your law graciously” (Psalm 119:29; cf. Exodus

24:12).

### 3. Why should humans keep the law?

As a response to God's love: "So be careful to follow the commands, rules and laws I'm giving you today" (Deuteronomy 7:11; cf. vs. 8-9).

As a response to God's grace: "You have seen for yourselves what I did to Egypt. You saw how I carried you on the wings of eagles and brought you to myself. Now obey me completely. Keep my covenant. If you do, then out of all nations you will be my special treasure. The whole earth is mine" (Exodus 19:4-5; Psalm 119:41-45).

As an expression of our love: "I take delight in obeying your commands because I love them. I praise your commands, and I love them. I spend time thinking about your orders" (Psalm 119:47, 48; vs. 69, 72, 97; Deuteronomy 6:3-6).

### 4. What is the internal clue in the Ten Commandments which suggests that they are universal and apply to all men and women?

"In six days I made the heavens and the earth. I made the oceans and everything in them. But I rested on the seventh day. So I blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy" (Exodus 20:11).

The Sabbath commandment is justified by the reference to creation. The fourth commandment occupies the center of the Decalogue, like the seal of the ancient covenant documents (See lesson on the Sabbath). Its strategic position suggests that the Ten Commandments are universal, since the God who is there implied is the Creator of the universe, thus the God of everyone.

### 5. What other laws point to the same universal scope as the Decalogue?

"Speak to the people of Israel. Tell them, 'Many animals live on your land. Here are the only ones you can eat'" (Leviticus 11:2; cf. vs. 3-8; Genesis 1:24-

25).

"Many creatures live in the water of the oceans and streams. You can eat all of those that fins and scales" (Leviticus 11:9; cf. vs 10-43; Genesis 1:26).

### 6. What are the social/civil laws which are not universal and are no longer relevant today?

Slaves: "You must get your males and female slaves from the nations that are around you. You can buy slaves from them" (Leviticus 25:44; Exodus 21:4; Deuteronomy 21:10-12).

Punishment: "If anyone attacks his father or mother, he will be put to death . . . If anyone calls down a curse on his father or mother, he will be put to death . . . But if someone is badly hurt, a life must be taken for a life" (Exodus 21:15, 17, 23).

Garment: "You must make tassels on the corners of your clothes. A blue cord must be on each tassel. You must do it for all time to come. You will have the tassels to look at. They will remind you to obey all of the Lord's commands. Then you will be faithful to Him. You will not go after what you own hearts and eyes long for. You will remember to obey all of my commands. And you will be set apart for your God. I am the Lord your God. I brought you out of Egypt to be your God. I am the Lord your God" (Deuteronomy 22:12; cf. Numbers 15:37-41).

Mixtures of wool and linen (*sha atnez*): Exodus 28:6, 8, 15. *Kil.* 9.1. "Priests wear only wool and linen when they serve in the Temple; also according to Maimonides heathen priests wore such garments" (*Guide* 3:37). This suggests that Biblical laws were to distinguish between priests and non-priests or between Jews and pagans.

Agriculture: "Don't plant two kinds of seeds in your vineyard. If you do, the crops you grow there will be polluted. Your grapes will also be polluted" (Deuteronomy 22:9). Mixing of seeds applies only in

Israel (*Kid.* 39a). Reason: Maimonides associates with pagan worship (*Guide* 3.37).

### **7. What cultic/ceremonial laws are not universal and are no longer relevant today?**

Sacrifices: *“Instead, go to the special place he will choose from among all of your tribes. He will put His name there. That’s where you must go. Take your burnt offerings and sacrifices to that place. Bring your special gifts and a tenth of everything you produce. Take with you what you have promised to give. Bring any other offerings you choose to give. And bring the male animals among your livestock that were born first to their mothers”* (Deuteronomy 12:5-6).

*“Make an altar out of dirt for me. Sacrifice your burnt offerings and friendship offerings on it. Sacrifice your sheep, goats and cattle on it. I will come to you and bless you everywhere I cause My Name to be honored”* (Exodus 20:24).

*“Sacrifice an animal from your flock or herd. It is the Passover sacrifice in honor of the Lord your God. Sacrifice it at the special place the Lord will choose. He will put His Name there”* (Deuteronomy 16:2). Sacrifices were to be offered only in the Temple.

### **8. What clues suggest an essential difference between the Decalogue and the laws dealing with sacrifices?**

*“Then I came back down the mountain. I put the tablets in the ark I had made, just as the Lord had commanded me. And that’s where they are now”* (Deuteronomy 10:5).

*“Take this scroll of the Law. Place it beside the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God”* (Deuteronomy 31:26; cf. Exodus 25:16; 1 Kings 8:9).

The Decalogue was written by God (Deuteronomy 10:4) while the sacrificial laws were written by Moses (Deuteronomy 31:9, 24). The Decalogue

was graven on tablets of stone—an imperishable material (Deuteronomy 10:3), while the sacrificial laws were written in a book—a perishable material (Deuteronomy 31:24). The Decalogue was entrusted by God to Moses, who himself placed it in the ark (Deuteronomy 10:5), while the sacrificial laws were entrusted by Moses to the priests, who, in turn, placed it alongside the ark (Deuteronomy 31:26). That this book was specifically about the sacrifices is confirmed by the fact that King Josiah (2 Chronicles 34:15, 31) found in it the sacrificial instructions (2 Chronicles 35:6, 12) he needed to achieve his reformation. The Ten Commandments concern everyone beyond time and space; the sacrificial laws are related to the Temple at a specific time.

### **9. What kinds of laws did the ancient rabbis and the early Christians declare binding for the non-Jews as well as for the Jews?**

*“Here is what we should write to them. They must not eat food polluted by being offered to statues of gods. They must not commit sexual sins. They must not eat the meat of animals that have been choked to death. And they must not drink blood”* (Acts 15:20-21; cf. Genesis 2:16).

*“But you must not eat meat that still has blood in it”* (Genesis 9:4).

Seven Biblical laws (called Noachic laws by reference to Noah) are considered by rabbinic tradition as the minimal moral duties for all men: prohibitions of idolatry, blasphemy, bloodshed, sexual sins, theft, consuming blood, etc. (*Sanh.* 56-60; *Yad Melakhim* 8:10; 10:12; *Gen. R.* 34; *Sanh.* 59b). These general principles imply the observance of other laws considered as subheadings of the seven laws: prohibition of idolatry implies the commandment of the Sabbath which implies faith in the Creator; prohibition of blood implies the *Kosher* laws; prohibition of sorcery; injunction to practice charity and honor the To-

rah (Hul. 92a; Sanh. 57b; Mid. Ps 21). Gentiles who submit themselves to Noachic laws may also freely choose to practice some other laws from the Jewish Torah (*Yad. Melakhim* 10:9-10).

**10. Does the experience of “renewal of covenant” (*teshuvah*) encouraged by the Hebrew prophets between God and Israel imply the law has been done away with?**

“A new day is coming, announces the Lord. I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel” (Jeremiah 31:31; cf. Ezekiel 11:17-20; 36:26-27).

**11. Does the experience of “renewal of covenant” (*teshuvah*) encouraged by the teaching of the New Testament imply the law has been done away with?**

“Does faith make the law useless? Not at all! We agree with the law” (Romans 3:31; cf. Matthew 5:17-22, 27-28; Romans 7:6, 22-25; James 1:22-25; 2:10).

A Talmudic principle: “Be not like servants who serve the master for the sake of receiving reward; but serve him without the condition of receiving a reward” (*Abot* 1:3)

**12. Why does the experience of “renewal of covenant” imply the observance of the law?**

“So the law is holy. The commandment also is holy and right and good” (Romans 7:12).

“If you love me, you will obey what I command” (John 14:15).

**13. What will characterize God’s people in the “last days” in regard to the law?**

“Remember the law my servant Moses gave you. Remember the rules and laws I gave him at Mount Horeb . . . I will send you the prophet Elijah. He will come before the day of the Lord arrives” (Malachi 4:4).

“God’s people need to be very patient. They are the

ones who obey God’s commands. They remain faithful to Jesus” (Revelation 14:12).

**14. How will the nations respond to the law in messianic times?**

“People from many nations will go there. They will say, Come. Let us go up to the Lord’s mountain. Let’s go to the house of Jacob’s God. He will teach us how we should live. Then we will live the way he wants us to. The law of the Lord will be taught at Zion. His message will go out from Jerusalem” (Isaiah 2:3; cf. 42:1-4; Micah 4:1-2; Revelation 21:24).

“The Torah is not the Torah of the Priests, nor the Torah of the Levites, nor the Torah of the Israelites, but the Torah of Man (*Torath ha-Adam*), whose gates are open to receive the righteous nation which keepeth the truth and those who are good and upright in their hearts” (*Torath Kohanim* 86b).

According to Jewish tradition, the Torah was given in the wilderness, an extraterrestrial place and was heard in all the seventy languages so that men of all nations would have a right to it (*Mekh. Yitro* 5; *Shab.* 88b). “A Gentile who studies the Torah is like the *kohen hagdol*, the high priest” (*Avodah Zarah* 3a).

**15. What is the purpose of the law?**

Freedom: “I will lead a full and happy life, because I’ve tried to obey our rules” (Psalm 119:45; cf. James 2:8; 1:25).

Lucidity: “So it can’t be said that anyone will be made right with God by obeying the law. Not at all! The law makes us more aware of our sin” (Romans 3:20; cf. James 1:23-25; Psalm 119:105; Proverbs 6:23).

“The Laws of the Torah were given that men should live by them, not that they should die by them” (*Avodah Zarah* 27b).