

Responding to the New Atheists' attacks on the God of the Old Testament-32: The Mosaic Law-5 The Spiritual & Ethical Superiority of the Mosaic Law

In the last few essays I have been pointing out that the Mosaic Law was provisional and included laws, at least in some respects, which were divine concessions of grace that met them where they were with a view of moving them forward to His perfect overarching purposes. In other words, some of the laws were not according to the perfect will of God in the absolute sense of the word, although they were according to the perfect will of God given the state of the Israelites' status and God's ultimate goals.

However, there were many Mosaic laws which were the expressions of God's perfect will and character. These laws are far superior to the laws of other nations around Israel. Unlike the abstracted ancient Near Eastern law codes, the Mosaic law is surrounded by lengthy narratives that often illustrate spiritual and ethical life for Israel. The Mosaic law presents an utterly unique spiritual outlook that sets itself apart from its ancient Near Eastern counterparts—like the famous Hammurabi Code.

Hammurabi claims merely *to speak* for the deity Shamash; the Hittites claimed the sun god established the laws of the land. Moses, on the other hand, isn't the legislator on God's behalf. Rather, the law portrays a personally interactive God who throughout speaks in the first person: "*If you afflict him [the widow or the orphan] at all, if he does cry out to Me, I will surely hear his cry; and My anger will be kindled*" (Exod. 22:23-24); again, "*You shall not defile the land in which you live, in the midst of which I dwell*" (Num. 35:24). God's historical action of delivering enslaved Israel from Egypt becomes a model for how Israel is to live—for example, how to treat aliens and the disadvantaged in their midst. In other words, God Himself is personally involved with His people and cares for those in great need and helplessness.

Instead of a God who arbitrarily relishes the idea of a father sacrificing his innocent son (e.g., with Abraham, and Isaac), or a God who lays down draconian laws designed to inflict pain and misery on all of His people, the Old Testament portrays a God concerned enough to enter into and act in history; these actual events and interactions are to shape and inspire the character and actions of the people of God. In His matchless marvelous grace, He settled less for than the best with national Israel with some issues; on other issues, He was able to set down strong moral principles to begin to take them on a journey of moral and spiritual improvement culminating in the work and person of the Messiah Jesus Christ. We regularly see God work in and through sinful human beings—as inefficient as it seems!—to bring to pass His goal of preparing them ultimately for Himself. The God of the Old Testament and New Testament truly cares!

In Him,
Pastor Don