

H2R The Law E1 Final

The Purpose of The Law

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Jon: Ask someone what the Bible is, and you might get the answer, it's a book full of laws - rules for how to please God.

Tim: The laws throughout history in Judaism and Christianity have created different crises of biblical authority.

Jon: And there are a lot of laws in the Bible. And if you've ever read any of them, especially the ones in the Old Testament, they can get really confusing.

Tim: There's over 100 laws that get repeated. and if you compare laws that are about the same thing, you'll start to notice differences.

Jon: Differences in the laws. Well, that's something that's difficult for modern Westerners to understand. Isn't the law supposed to be some very clear, clean document that uniformly applies to everyone?

Tim: For most of human history, and certainly in Ancient Near East, that was not how law worked. So maybe I'm the one who needs to back and get a whole different paradigm for what the Torah is, accounting for the laws and for the narratives.

Jon: Today, we talked about the laws in the Bible. It's been the most rewarding set of conversations we've had in a long time. Thanks for joining us. Here we go.

The law.

Tim: Here we are beginning another conversation.

Jon: A second conversation.

Tim: We're talking about how to read the legal or law parts of the Old Testament. Our first two episodes of this podcast ever were about a similar topic.

Jon: By the time we decided to do this podcast, that was the video we were discussing, was the theme video on the law.

Tim: Yeah. So you turned on a microphone.

Jon: We were under the stairs.

Tim: Oh, man, we were in that basement room under the stairs. That was a dark, small room.

Jon: It worked. That was a great conversation, but now you've got a lot more that you've been thinking about. That conversation was on looking at the law from the point of view of a theme that strings through the whole narrative structure of the Bible and how it's fulfilled in Jesus.

This conversation is more specifically on "when you're in the Bible reading law code, how do you read it, and how do you think about it?" It's similar conversation but slightly.

Tim: Yeah, it is. Because how you make sense of the laws in the first five books of the Bible, a lot of it is how they fit into the larger narrative context, and where they fit in the plot of the overall storyline of the Old Testament, that's what our law video is about. So that's part of it. But there's also another next level set of skills for how to read and engage the law that's really interesting, which is a lot of what we'll talk about in this conversation.

Jon: Cool.

Tim: Sort of like the next level - 2.0 skill-set.

Jon: 2.0 conversation.

Tim: Totally.

[00:03:52]

Tim: Let's start with some facts...

Jon: Facts on the ground.

Tim: ...and then show the problems in the facts.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: There's a lot of laws in the Old Testament. If you're doing the one-year Bible read through or the six months read through the Old Testament or something—

Jon: First of all, when I think of law, I think of...

Tim: Yeah, good. Let's start there.

Jon: Well, I'm an American, and we have laws like don't kill each other. There are all sorts of laws over everything.

Tim: That's right. Every couple of years we vote.

Jon: That's a law?

Tim: It would be some form of legislation or an ordinance that we're voting that has been proposed by—

Jon: Oh, we vote on new laws?

Tim: Yeah, new laws or changing laws. I'm trying to think when laws come into our day to day view, it's when we vote on them, when we hear about them being enforced.

Jon: But then also we think of, "Oh, you can't do that. It's against the law. Don't speed, that's against the law." Then if you break the law, there are either fines or even worse, imprisonment.

Tim: Yeah, that's right. So law can have this law enforcement. That's more on the enforcement side. Or you're thinking of their prohibitions, and there's enforcement. Then there's a sense of law in our common day to day life that floats above that, which is just these are the rules of engagement that we've all agreed on as we live here in this city, in this state, and in this country and so on. That's all they are.

There's different views on whether you can say some of them are natural, they are innate agreements that humans have between each other. We usually break those anyway. So we have to be explicit and say, "Here's the rules for how we're going to live together in this city." That's the law.

Jon: But if there's no enforcement, then it's not really a law. It's more of a courtesy.

Tim: That's a good point. Custom.

Jon: Or a custom.

Tim: It's our practice.

Jon: And really the only punishment is being a social outcast or not being accepted by the in-group. But as soon as there is a penalty for not adhering to the mutually agreed upon way, then that's when I think of it as a law.

Tim: That's interesting. The English word, you're right, conjures up both of those nuances of just the rules of our community and then also this law enforcement. Right?

Jon: Yeah. I can't detach those two.

Tim: It's true.

Jon: Am I supposed to in my mind?

Tim: Well, let's just note that that's the first thing that comes to your mind. And then as we read on, we'll find out. But at its most basic, it's just the agreed upon rules that the humans create, and then agree, and say, "This is how we're going to live together." The rules of civic engagement. But it's about politics in the classic sense. It's dealing with the polity or the Greek word polis, which means city - a group of people in a walled environment who agree on a set of terms for how they're going to live together. And one of the main English words is law.

Jon: Cool.

Tim: Also statute, ordinance. I feel like this last election, or this last voting round in Oregon we voted on ordinances. Remember having....

Jon: It's like, what's the difference?

Tim: Language is so complicated. Read these long descriptions. Anyway. So if you're reading the Bible, you read happily or unhappily. I don't know. It depends on if you're making any sense of what you're reading.

Jon: And, I think, your mood.

Tim: The book of Genesis 50 chapters of action-packed narrative. There are some genealogies that make people bored, but I think they're fascinating.

Jon: You can skip those.

Tim: But 50 chapters turned into Exodus, blazing narrative. I mean, just so excited. You get out into the wilderness by chapter 16 of Exodus, and then you have crises of water and food. It's thrilling. You get to the foot of a mountain, a divine being appears and cloud and smoke. And then the narrative just grinds to a halt. And for the next four chapters, you're reading what feels like an ancient law code. It begins with The Ten Commandments. God speaks to Israel in the Ten Commandments and then 42 more follow.

Jon: After the Ten?

Tim: After the Ten. Then you're reading the blueprints for the tabernacle—

Jon: Which isn't law.

Tim: It's not law but it is stated in the form of commands: "You shall make the ark as a box. This many cubits, this length. Make the curtains this way. Do just as I command you." So even though it's a blueprint, it's stated in terms of a legal requirement.

Jon: Interesting.

Tim: It is interesting.

Jon: Sorry. But it's not considered law even though it's commanded?

Tim: It is.

Jon: It is considered law?

Tim: Jewish tradition is considered part of the commands of the Torah.

Jon: So when they add up all the laws, is that one? The blueprint is one?

Tim: The blueprints are a part of the "make an ark, make the table of showbread."

Jon: Is the table of showbread one, and the ark is one, and the curtains is one, or is it all together one?

Tim: Separate.

Jon: They are all separate?

Tim: Yeah, they're separate.

Jon: So how many laws in the...?

Tim: Hold on. Let's finish the Tour. Then there's a narrative of Moses doing all those things. Then they finished the tabernacle, and Moses can't go in. God shows up, comes to live in the tabernacle, and Moses can't go in. So we got to solve that problem. That problem is solved by a block of nine chapters of ritual laws, like a priestly tech manual of how to do the different types of sacrifices. It's all about sacrificial rituals and then appointing the priesthood.

Then the priests are appointed, everything's great, and then to have the priests blow it big time. They take upon themselves, their dad's responsibility, to offer incense in the temple. And that doesn't go well for them.

Jon: That's an understatement.

Tim: It's an understatement. They die. Then dead corpses are in the holy place, which is one of the main ways that things become ritually impure. So what follows after that are six long chapters about ritual impurity and purity - how to make things pure after they've been made impure.

After that is a whole block of laws about Israel's as a whole, not just priests, moral ritual purity. Then there are laws about Israel being in the camps as the organization of their camps, laws about trumpets. Then they begin to leave Mount Sinai. Finally, you've left Mount Sinai, it's been like two and a half books of the Bible, and the narratives got nowhere except just—

Jon: There's little interspersed narrative.

Tim: There are actually some important narratives we'll talk about but there's very few. Then they're off into the desert and then it's just that bad news. All these rebellion narratives in Numbers. The road trip gone bad. And then each narrative of the people's rebellion in the wilderness is interspersed with a block of more laws. Sometimes what seems to modern readers as really random topics. You'd be like a rebellion of the priests and then there will just be a set of laws about Nazarite vows or additional offerings you make on the Sabbath.

Jon: I remember the first time reading through the Bible, I was in a haze through all of that stuff.

Tim: Totally. At that point, law codes become a haze. Yeah, totally. Yes, very common. Then they go through the wilderness, they get to the edge of the Jordan River. And then Moses is about to die and he gives a long speech where he says he's expositing the laws of the covenant. It's the book of Deuteronomy. And the center of Deuteronomy is chapters 12 to 26, and it's just hundreds of more laws. Most of them are repeats. They are repeated from the earlier sections. So then you're just like, "I'm over this."

Jon: Yeah... It was hard enough reading at the first time and now I'm reading then again.

Tim: "Again? I'm reading all this ancient legal literature again?" And then this one most people bail if they've made it that far.

Jon: If they made it that far.

Tim: They bail at Deuteronomy. And by that point, by the time you finish Deuteronomy, you have taken in over 600 individual laws and commands given to ancient Israel. That's a lot.

Jon: Yeah. And they feel random and they feel irrelevant oftentimes.

Tim: Irrelevant at best, odd at medium, and primitive and barbaric at worse. This is a major issue.

Jon: It's not a great strategy for the beginning of a holy book. I feel like if God had a literary agent, he would have been like, "You know, let's rework the first five books."

Tim: There's a lot going on here. A lot of the issues at work here are problems in our how we come to it, the problems in us modern readers, and then the assumptions that we have loaded that we don't even know about when we come to the Bible. Some of the problems are just in cultural translation. The way that laws work in the storyline of the Bible, once it's pointed out to you, it seems really common sense. It's not that hard actually I think to get. But it's a paradigm shift.

If you think of the Bible is some kind of divine behavior manual, so you can make baby Jesus happy or whatever by living according to the law of God, but that's going to frustrate you real quick. You said it in our law video, "Do I buy some of these? None of these? All of these right? What am I supposed to do?"

Jon: Pick and choose. The top 10, those are good. We'll keep those. Well, maybe 9 of the 10.

Tim: Totally. The Sabbath at least for Protestant and Catholics. Some of the problems are on our end, that we need to address those. Some of the problems are in the cultural gap. And so learning about what law codes were in the ancient world, and how they were actually really, really different than the way we conceive of law, that little conversation we had about law at the beginning here, the way that Moses or Jeremiah, or any of the ancient Israelites, Ruth, would have thought about law would have been really different concept of law. So we need to address that.

Then it's learning to see that these laws embody a different way of thinking about the world. If you think about it, there are certain laws that any culture has that are unique to their worldview. I didn't prepare for...this was an illustration.

Jon: An example of a law that isn't universal, but it's specific to a worldview.

Tim: Oh, okay. Here, because this is related to religion. In America, religious institutions are given a certain nonprofit tax status. Whoa, even older. I learned this when I was a pastor. For clergy, there's this tax rule called the housing allowance. It goes all the way back to when clergy were paid very little, and so part of their compensation would be in reduced housing costs by giving your pastor a place to live in the parish house next door to the church. So all of a sudden, whatever they spend on housing can be tax deductible. That law is carried forward. And now for clergy who qualify. That's very unique is very.

Jon: It is very unique.

Tim: It's unique to the religious history of one particular country. If you go live in another country...

Jon: You're not going to find that.

Tim: ...you don't have housing allowance.

Jon: So you're saying that's from a specific worldview, and that the mentality of young America was, "Hey, we really care about our pastors."

Tim: Yeah. This is an honored institution and we want..." Right?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: I mean, that's what government does when it subsidizes something. It's saying, "This should have a place in our society, even if it's not financially sustainable by itself." That comes from a value set - a set of convictions and beliefs and a worldview that say this thing's valuable.

So in the same way, all these ritual laws about bodily fluids, and purity, and sacrifices, and Sabbath, all the feasts, and all the holy days that are set on patterns of the number seven, this is all symbolic worldview, stuff. Once you see how all these different laws actually tie together, and just like a count on two hands, the set of symbols that work, tying all the laws together, it really helps. At least helps us become more sympathetic readers of these ancient laws.

I've learned a ton over the years that's really helped the second to the Bible become way more vibrant and profound to me. Even so there not my favorite parts of the Bible to read. But they've become way more interesting and engaging than they were even three, four years ago. That's what I hope the video can at least begin people to start that journey.

Jon: Yeah, that makes sense.

[00:17:47]

Tim: You asked how many laws are there? I said over 600.

Jon: Over 600 laws. That's not too many.

Tim: Oh, it depends on your point of view. If you're trying to read through the bible—

Jon: For some reason that feels reasonable amount. Like, if you're just like, "You're going to read through the Bible, and it's going to be very difficult because you got to read all these ancient laws. Oh, man, they are confusing..."

Tim: I see. If it was like 8,000 that would—

Jon: And you're like, "Really? How many are there?" "600." "Okay, I could get through 600." "Some are duplicates." "That's all right."

Tim: Well, that makes the number technically smaller." "Yeah. Okay. That's a good point. I'll grant you that." I think it's a lot.

Jon: It is a lot.

Tim: I think it's a lot.

Jon: Well, I mean, I wouldn't want to memorize 600 laws.

Tim: There is an ancient debate in Jewish tradition about exactly how many there are. This is really interesting. There are two standard counts. One is 611.

Jon: 611 laws.

Tim: The other is 613. So they're close.

Jon: We are not too far off of each other. So there's two laws in dispute.

Tim: In the Babylonian Talmud which is a big collection of traditional Jewish rabbis' conversations about everything in their worldview, but particularly about the hundreds of commands, because there's only 600, and they were trying to discern in these 600 the principles of divine wisdom that governed every aspect of human life, which would require tens of thousands of laws. And so, the Talmud is then kind of extending those 600 laws into principles that can then become those tens of thousands of laws that cover all of life. They're using the 600 plus as a base...

Jon: Like axioms.

Tim: Yup, that give them the core principles, and then they reason out.

Jon: And these are then the further laws and customs that Jewish people will use?

Tim: Yeah, that's right. The classic one is on the Sabbath. Don't work on the Sabbath. Then there's additional clarification that says: don't light a fire on the Sabbath.

Jon: That's in the Torah?

Tim: In the Torah, yeah. There you go. Don't work. Example: don't make fire and don't prepare food.

Jon: But can you prepare the fire, and just don't light it?

Tim: Totally. There's a whole section of the Talmud that's the debates and conversations and formulating the principles. They became an official list. I forget off the top of my head. It's in the 40s of the basic...Sorry, of 40 rules.

Jon: 40 rule?

Tim: 40 clear guidelines for...

Jon: Oh, principles came out of the Torah.

Tim: ...what not to do on the Sabbath.

Jon: Oh, specifically for the Sabbath?

Tim: Specifically, for the Sabbath.

Jon: That's totally fine.

Tim: Too long to get to it. So the two rules in the Bible: don't work on the Sabbath. Example, don't make your food and don't lite a fire, those two get probed and debated over to make a list of 40.

Jon: And the 40 will then cover pretty much everything you need to know.

Tim: Correct. That's how the Talmud works. So this is the section of the Talmud where Rabbi Simlai is entering this conversation of how many commands are in the Torah.

This is a quote from...I forget where. It always starts with a quote, and then they discuss the quote. The quote is, "God gave us abundant Torah and numerous commandments. Rabbi Simlai expounded 613 commandments were given to Moses, 365 negative ones - thou shalt not.

Jon: Don't do this, don't do that.

Tim: And interestingly, 365. That corresponds to the days of the solar year. There are 248 positive commandments "thou shalt" corresponding to the parts of a man's body. So some footnote there. On some ancient accounts there 248 parts of the body. That's interesting.

Now, this is interesting. Rabbi Hamnuna...this is how the Talmud will often work. It'll be an intro quote, one Rabbi says this, and then another Rabbi will come and say, "Wait a minute."

Jon: It's a straight-up dialogue?

Tim: Yeah, that's what the Talmud is. It's dialogues of the rabbis disagreeing and then sometimes coming to a conclusion.

Rabbi Hamnuna says, "What verse of scripture indicates that there are 613?" Well, Moses commanded us Torah and inheritance of the congregation of Jacob. That's a quote from Deuteronomy chapter 33. The numerical value assigned to the Hebrew letters of the word Torah is 611. That's a fact.

Jon: Because in Hebrew the letters are numbers?

Tim: The letters are also the numbers system. Let's just stop, just let that register. Every time you're looking at words, in Hebrew you're looking at numbers.

Jon: And sometimes that's important.

Tim: Yeah. The biblical authors were very keen on this, and they often were very creative. We've talked about one of these. The section of Proverbs in the center of the book, chapters 10 to 22, there are 375 Proverbs in that section. And that section begins with a little heading that says, "The Proverbs of Shlomo." Solomon. And Shlomo is the number 375. That's awesome.

Jon: Convenient.

Tim: They do stuff like this. So the word "Torah", four letters in Hebrew, and it's the number 611, which is the number of commands in the Torah minus two. So Rabbi Hamnuna goes on. He says, "But that 611 doesn't account for these two other ones." And what are the two? The first one is "I am."

Jon: That's a law? Is it one of the 613?

Tim: The Divine name, he's counting as a law. It's interesting. The second one is "you shall have no other god since these have come direct from the mouth of the Almighty."

Jon: Which is the first commandment.

Tim: Here's how the count got to 613. There are actually 611 thou shalt and thou shalt nots. The two additional ones, one is from the first commandment, which is actually not a commandment. The opening of the Ten Commandments isn't a command, it's a statement. God says, "I am Yahweh your God." The assumption being that's a command to believe that Yahweh exists. In other words, they're assuming that statement is a command. "Believe that I am."

Jon: So that makes it into 613?

Tim: Yeah. And then the other one - This is interesting. I'm just now realizing this - you shall have no other gods...Oh, yes. Okay. You shall have no other gods is the one that follows. But that is a shall. Interesting. Sorry. There's a conflict of my notes and I'm just realizing in this moment.

There are other rabbis who say that the Shema is the second implicit command, namely, that Yahweh is one - to believe that Yahweh is one.

Jon: That's how you got rid of two?

Tim: That's how I understood the second one to be but then right here in the Talmud, it says "I am and you shall have no other gods."

Jon: And that's from Hamnuna, and his logic is, both of these commands come from the mouth of God so let's not count them as law.

Tim: No. He's adding them to the 611.

Jon: I see.

Jon: So it's like we have 611 that all comes via Moses, but those two come straight from God.

Tim: Yeah, that's Rabbi Hamnuna's argument.

Jon: And that gets us to 613.

Tim: 613.

Jon: But what it seems like it's happening though is I just want to make sure in the 613, included in that is the "I am Yahweh", the implicit law and the end then the second one, "Yahweh is one" in the Shema is also in the 613.

Tim: And implicit command.

Jon: And it's an implicit command.

Tim: Right.

Jon: Another way to look at it, what you are going to describe is that there are two implicit commands.

Tim: There are two implicit commands that aren't formed as thou shalt or thou shalt not.

Jon: You're kind of adding to their tradition right now it seems like.

Tim: No, no, no. I'm telling you the classic rabbinic conversation. Are there 611 or are there 613? One was there was a rabbi in the medieval period in the 1100s, Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon who became known as Maimonides or his acronym was Rambam.

Jon: Rambam.

Tim: Yeah, Rambam. He was an Arabic speaking and Hebrew medieval philosopher and rabbi, and he wrote kind the official commentary on the Torah, and all the laws. He was collecting all the discussions of generations past and he put it into this collection called Mishneh Torah or a second Torah. He came to the count 613.

Jon: Wait. The Mishnah, all comes from him?

Tim: No. Mishneh Torah is different than the Mishnah.

Jon: Oh.

Tim: I'm sorry.

Jon: That's okay.

Tim: He advocated 613. And that's why it's the standard number today is because he took the two rival positions, argued it out and said, "613. That's the deal." And that's still today. However, it's important to note that, that 613 contains two commands that

aren't phrased as command. One is the Shema "Yahweh is one" and the other one is "I am Yahweh your God." If you take those two out, you get 611. Lo and behold, that number is the value of the word Torah itself.

Jon: Now, that's different logic than—

Tim: Rabbi Hamnuna. He has two. I need to do more homework on that.

Jon: Interesting.

Tim: Here's what's interesting. Let's just finish this out. There's a conversation going about the number of laws in the Torah. But then check this out. This is continuing in the Talmud. "Rabbi Simlai continued and said, 'David came, and he reduced them all down to 11.'"

Jon: Did he?

Tim: And what he quotes is Psalm 24.

Jon: Oh, okay.

Tim: This is just a long quotation of Psalm 24. And he reads Psalm 24 as giving you the essence of the 613 by giving you 11. Who can dwell in your holy tent and go to the holy mountain? The one who walks uprightly, one; works righteousness, two; speak truth in his heart, three; no slander on his tongue, four; no evil to his fellow, five. You get it?

Jon: Yeah. They go from really general to really specific. Because at the end it's like, "Does not lend on interest, and does not take a bribe."

Tim: Now, those are all actually commands from the Torah.

Jon: But the first one, walks uprightly—

Tim: Yeah, that's more general.

Jon: That's a catch-all

Tim: Then he continues and he says, "But you know, Isaiah came and reduced them to six. The one who walks righteously - He's now quoting from Isaiah chapter 33 - walks righteously, speaks uprightly, despises the gain of oppression, shakes his hand from holding bribes, stops his ear from hearing of innocent bloodshed." He continues. "Micah comes along and reduced them to three." We quoted this in the Justice video. Do justice, love mercy, walk humbly with your God.

Isaiah came again and reduced them to two, quoting Isaiah 56: Do justice and do righteousness. Amos came and reduced them to one. Thus says the Lord to the house of Israel, 'Seek Me and live.'" Seek me.

Jon: Seek me.

Tim: "And Habakkuk came further and he didn't reduce it to one, he based all the commandments just on one thing: The righteous will live by faith."

Jon: That's a good one.

Tim: This is good. Paul the Apostle would feel right at home in this conversation.

Jon: And Jesus.

Tim: And Jesus, yeah. Yeah, totally.

Jon: Paul quotes Habakkuk on righteous will live by faith.

Tim: In other words, Paul wasn't the only Rabbi arguing that true fulfillment of all the laws is based on a heart disposition of trust in God.

Jon: It's interesting. I mean, how do you see his name? Simlai?

Tim: Simlai.

Jon: Simlai?

Tim: Yeah, Rabbi Simlai.

Jon: I think what he's observing is that there's a lot of laws and there are many different ways to try to understand the essence of these laws.

Tim: Yes, that's right.

Jon: And all these biblical authors have been involved in that exercise.

Tim: Correct.

Jon: Well, all of these prophets, and David. It just strikes me that Jesus is right in that conversation too.

Tim: Yeah, when they say, "What are the most important commands?..."

Jon: And he boils it down to two?

Tim: Well, he's asked, "What's the most important one?" He says one, and then he just says another one, as if they're both the most important one.

Jon: He's specifically asked, "Hey, out of all the laws, which is the most important?" not like, "What's the essence of the law?"

Tim: That's right. He's asked what's the most important and what he gives is two as the most important one. This is ancient conversation. For me, this is significant in that all the way back to—

Jon: We just read some Talmud. I don't think I've ever done that.

Tim: You've never read Talmud?

Jon: That's my first reading of the Talmud.

Tim: It's awesome.

Jon: That's cool.

Tim: It's totally cool. It's really interesting stuff. Like, imagine in printed editions, all of the Bible texts are in quotes. When you read this in Aramaic and Hebrew, these guys know the Bible so well, all they have to do is utter a phrase. And they don't say, "That was from Deuteronomy 33." They just quote a couple of phrases from Deuteronomy 33, and everybody in the room is like, "Oh, yeah, that's a good one."

Jon: It kind of reminds me of when I used to do marketplace explainers. and you'd go to a room and everyone just starts speaking jargon.

Tim: Oh, yeah, totally.

Jon: And you could sit there going like, "I don't know what anyone is talking about."

Tim: Totally. That used to happen to me at The Bible Project.

Jon: Really?

Tim: Yeah. The early days when I didn't know the acronyms.

Jon: For video production stuff?

Tim: Video production jargon. So, ancient Jews who are way closer to the origins of the Bible - then we are - they also took note of the hundreds of commands, and we're trying to think through why and how to think of them as a whole statement. That's what they're doing in reducing it down. And they're trying to find other biblical authors who create little short list of what God's will is for human life.

Jon: Now, that's interesting because it seems like two opposite things are happening. One is they'll take a law and then they'll expand it into 40 more.

Tim: That's correct. And it's not clear.

Jon: And it's not clear enough. And so they're creating like a more robust law code.

Tim: That's right.

Jon: But this other exercise is, how can we distill it down to its essence? And they're doing both.

Tim: Yeah, they're doing both. Which makes sense. If you have a rule that isn't adequate as stated to cover all the situations it needs to do, you need to fill it out. But then you get a ton of commands which is going to force you to constantly go back and be like, "Why are we doing any of this in the first place?" That's right.

Jon: But the fact that there's 611, the number—

Tim: That's the value of the word Torah.

Jon: Torah, which is what this is in, it makes you realize even more like, "Okay, yeah, they're designing this in a very specific way."

Tim: Totally. Some larger body of laws have been drawn upon and selected. 611 were selected to be in the Torah for a reason. What's the reason?

Jon: What's the reason?

[00:35:10]

Tim: We've already talked about that first one, that there are irrelevant, sometimes primitive and barbaric. We don't need to emphasize that. That's clear. The laws have, throughout history in Judaism and Christianity created different crises of biblical authority for people who say that the Bible's God's word and is a statement of God's will for his people.

Jon: And what could be more clear of God's will than...

Tim: Than laws?

Jon: ...thou shalt and thou shalt not?

Tim: Totally. For example, a quarter of the Book of Leviticus is all detailed priestly tech manual. It requires a sanctuary - either a tabernacle or a temple. At two different times, the temple was destroyed. Once by ancient Babylon, and then once by the Romans. After that one by the Romans, it hasn't existed since then.

Jon: For almost 2,000 years.

Tim: So you can see the crisis there.

Jon: How do you obey those laws when you don't even have the temple?

Tim: Correct. If a whole bunch of the laws for how God wants us to relate to Him require the presence of a physical building where we can offer sacrifices, what do we do? So this happens in the Talmud and earlier, that the rabbinic leaders had to shape new ways of reading those texts to discern principles from them. That they could do, even without a temple. And so certain forms of prayer could take the place of a sacrifice. Certain forms of generosity could take the place of a gift. Instead of giving a gift to the Levites you give a gift to the poor within your town. That kind of thing.

Jon: But it corresponds in a way that feels like I'm still obeying the law.

Tim: That's right. But just the fact that a set of written laws were bound to a certain place in time connected to a building creates a problem. If you still want to do this. In Christian tradition, it's been similar problem, but in different ways. Especially once

the Jesus movement went multicultural, all of the ritual purity laws of kosher, diet, circumcision, Sabbath and so on.

Jon: There's a bunch of laws about how to keep a Jewish identity separate from other people.

Tim: That's right.

Jon: So now, if you have other people who want to get involved in the Jesus movement, which is a Jewish movement, what do you do with those laws?

Tim: Actually, you can see immediately. That's a problem. We're going to solve that problem. Jesus was waiting into that problem, and people knew it, which is why he had to say things like I didn't come to set aside the Torah and the prophets, but to fulfill them. But then you have Paul the apostle, who says that the Messiah is the fulfillment of the Torah, but yet he'll still quote from the Ten Commandments.

Jon: Like it's authoritative.

Tim: Yeah. He'll still go from the Ten Commandments. And then you get to Acts 15, the apostles come together and elders, and they say, "Yeah, non-Jews don't have to follow the ritual laws anymore."

Jon: Although they wanted them to follow some of them.

Tim: Yes, that's right. But in terms of holy days and kosher food laws, and so on, those were—

Jon: They gave a pass.

Tim: Yeah, they gave a pass on those. This is all just saying the 611 laws cover lots of topics. And the fact that they're bound to a time and place in ancient Israel is when they were written has created crises of biblical authority in later generation.

Jon: For Jewish people who live in a time where there is no temple sacrifice, it creates a problem.

Tim: Or just living in the promised land. Like all these laws about pilgrimage feasts or what you do with your harvests and taking it to the temple. I mean, seriously, it's like a third of the laws are irrelevant without a temple and the promised land.

Jon: Interesting.

Tim: And they have to be totally reconceived how you might fulfill them.

Jon: So that becomes a problem. The other problem is if you aren't Jewish, and you believe that Jesus was the fulfillment of the whole storyline, then, do you adhere to laws that are specifically for Jewish people to keep themselves separate from other nations? Because you are the other nations.

One argument is, "Yeah, well, then just follow the laws." In fact, there are Gentile followers of Jesus, non-Jewish followers of Jesus, who believe that.

Tim: Pre-Jesus, there were—

Jon: I'm not saying like, "I know, guys like that.

Tim: Oh, got it. My point is even before Jesus, there were non-Jews who would essentially become Jewish? Circumcision for men.

Jon: And what would they be called? The God fears?

Tim: Yeah. God fears. And then that continued on in the Jesus movement, where it was non-Jewish followers of Jesus who converted as much as their life as possible to a form of cultural ethnic Judaism.

Jon: And then you run into the same problems that Jewish people run into terms of adhering to all the laws.

Tim: Yeah, that's right. Then that has continued on today. Certain strands of Messianic Judaism take that view that we should try to keep as much as possible as many of the laws. All that to say is that these laws, their very presence in the first books of the Bible cause that tension.

Another problem. This is the last one. It's one that most readers will not have noticed because the laws are just boring for them to read.

Jon: The haze.

Tim: The haze. But there are about 100 of the laws...I forget there's account. I forget. I should remember this, but I don't. There's over 100 laws that get repeated. In other words, they're stated more than once.

Jon: And they get counted twice.

Tim: They get counted twice. If you compare laws that are about the same thing between like Deuteronomy and their earlier statement in Exodus, Leviticus, you'll start to notice differences.

Jon: Discrepancies.

Tim: Here's a significant one because it's in the Ten Commandments. It's the Sabbath command in the Ten Commandments.

Jon: Oh, there's a discrepancy. Oh, that's right. We've talked about this one.

Tim: Yeah, we have. In the book of Exodus, this is God speaking from the mountain - from the fire cloud. That's the scene here. In Exodus 20, God says, "Remember the Sabbath, keep it holy. Six days, labor, do your work. The seventh is a Sabbath, don't do any work. Your son, your daughter, your male, your female servant, your cattle, the sojourner with you?" "Why? Why?"

Jon: Tell me why.

Tim: What's the reason? "In six days, the Lord made the skies and the land and the sea and everything in them and rested on the seventh. Therefore, he blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy." Why do you obey the Sabbath?

Jon: It's inherent to the fabric of creation.

Tim: That's right. The fabric of creation. So you rest, because you're imitating God. In the book of Deuteronomy, remember when Moses expose it's the Torah for the next generation?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: The Generation that went through the Exodus—

Jon: He repeats the Ten commandments.

Tim: That's right, he repeats the Ten. Here in Deuteronomy 5:12, when he repeats, he's just retelling the narrative "Here's what happened on the mountain. Here's what we saw." In verse 12, he says, "This is what God said, 'keep the Sabbath day as the Lord your God commanded you.'" In Exodus 20, it was "remember the Sabbath," In Deuteronomy 5 is "keep the Sabbath. It's a small difference.

Jon: It's very small.

Tim: But it's a difference.

Jon: It's like hear and obey. Remember and keep.

Tim: Remember and keep it. Totally. I'm not saying they're different in meaning in a drastic way. I'm just saying it's a different word, which if you're retelling a key moment in your foundation story, if you're quoting God's word... and I am not saying he's doing anything wrong. I don't think this is actually a problem. But it's important to pay attention to it. Well, it doesn't end here. Let's keep going. Why should you keep the Sabbath? In Exodus, do you remember why?

Jon: Because God did too.

Tim: God did. So you go down in Deuteronomy 5, it goes through the command, six days, labor, seventh day, do your rest, don't do any work, the list of people, daughter, servant, and so on, so that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. That's an addition to Deuteronomy. In other words, Moses makes explicit here that it's not just for you it's not just for rich landowners.

Jon: But that's in Exodus 2.

Tim: It is.

Jon: But it's just phrased differently. In Exodus, it says, you're going to do this, your female servant, your male servant, and your cattle are going to do this."

Tim: Well, that they don't work. That list of people is not supposed to work. In Deuteronomy, it says, "You and this list of people is not supposed to work. And you know what? Your slaves get the same rest that you do."

Jon: That's the same thing.

Tim: Oh, it is, but it's making it explicit. In other words, there's some reason, there's some purpose, there's some agenda in Deuteronomy that's trying to show that the landowners on the Sabbath are equal to their slaves.

Jon: Got it. So he's making it more explicit.

Tim: More explicit, yeah. Totally. Why should you obey the Sabbath according to Deuteronomy 5:15? You will remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out of there by a mighty hand and outstretched armed. Therefore, the Lord your God commanded you to obey the Sabbath.

Jon: So that he's wrapping it in another kind of paradigm. In Exodus, the logic is, let's look at creation. Look at the way that God created and let's imitate God's rhythm. Then in Deuteronomy, he says, "Why will you remember the Sabbath? Let's do it because our story is that we were slaves and now we're not."

Tim: Yeah. Therefore, you and your slave get the same rest on the Sabbath day. This is just important because it's one of the Ten Commandments quoting God's speech and yet you can phrase it differently for a different audience in a different moment. That's a different approach to law than how we think of law.

Jon: Oh, yeah. Well, man, it's so interesting. There is probably a similarity in American politics where you get these founding fathers who write something like, "You have the right to bear arms," and then everyone's like, "What does that mean and where do we draw the line?" And then people restate and then new restatements become —

Tim: The new formulation.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: That's right. And you can see that process right here within the Torah itself, where the Mount Sinai version of the Sabbath command is stated to that generation who came out of Egypt. The audience of Moses is the children of the Exodus generation. And he reshapes the reason for the Sabbath and makes explicit the social equality that the Sabbath creates. That's the highlight here. It's the same person in both of those stories.

That's really significant that the approach to law... You can see the same discussion that the rabbis are having about the essence of the laws. If there's something similar you can see going on right here where there's a core law, core essence, but in different seasons of a nation's life, we need to talk about it or frame it in a different way. Its core principle, but it can be applied in different times and places with different language. That's interesting. Well, I don't know.

Jon: Why do you find interesting. I just want to be really explicit here.

Tim: Oh, what it means is that there's...we'll talk about this later. We modern Westerners, if they live in a certain kind of democratic republic or democratic society, we are a couple of centuries into cultures that have what's called statutory laws or statutory law societies, where the laws of the land are actually located in actual body of formulated laws written in books. And when judges and lawmakers want to create new law or change law, what they have to consult is the stated wording of the law. I've been on a couple of juries, and whatever. Actually, I was skipped out on most of my civics classes in high school. But that's how law works here. We think of the law as something written somewhere.

Jon: And the way it's written is what—

Tim: The wording of the law.

Jon: The wording of the law.

Tim: That's why the wording of the law is what gets debated in courts, is, "Is worded this way? So how does it legitimately apply in this way, and not that way and so on?" That's our cultural setting.

For most of human history, and certainly in the ancient Near East that was not how law worked. These cultures were part of what is called today a common law tradition in which the law doesn't exist in a written code. And that the law isn't something precisely worded and written that you go consult. Rather written laws are assuming and then just different expressions of some ultimate even greater source of law behind the written code. And you can see that coming out here.

The Sabbath, for one generation, Moses will word it one way, for another generation, Moses will word it to another way. What we as later readers of the Bible, we have now two statements of the Sabbath for two different audiences with two different rationales behind it. One is creation, one is Exodus now.

Jon: But it's the same law. The law doesn't change. It's just the rationale changes.

Tim: Correct. What I'm saying is you have two written expressions of law that are not the same. There's overlap, but they're not identical. And so a statutory approach to law would be like, "Well, we need to reduce these into one so we just have one law."

Jon: You wouldn't keep both in there.

Tim: Correct. Let's go to another difference. This is good. This is great. This is about Passover. Passover is important—

Jon: The meal?

Tim: Yeah, the meal. I mean, if you think what cultural religious community has been celebrating the same thing every year for 3,500 years? It's this pretty short list. This is a huge significant event for Jewish history. In Exodus 12, it's the first statement of the laws about the Exodus, the rules and the rituals for holding the feast. In Exodus

12, it says, "You shall eat the Passover lamb the same night, roast it with fire, eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. Do not eat any of it raw or boiled." The Hebrew word for boil is bashal. "Don't boil it at all with water, rather, roast it with fire. Head, legs, and entrails" So it's very clear. Roast it

Jon: Entrails being the intestines?

Tim: Correct. In other words, basically, it's like—

Jon: Don't gut it.

Tim: Yeah, exactly. Kill it, put it on a steak and rotate it over a fire. That's roasting. Don't prepare it or dress it. It is not what a butcher would do? Dress it?

Jon: Sure.

Tim: In terms of removing skin and all this, just cook it as it is. Roast it as it is. Once again, you get to Deuteronomy. And when you get to the description of the Passover laws and Deuteronomy, as it says in chapter 16, Deuteronomy, "At the place where the Lord your God chooses to establish his name, you shall sacrifice Passover in the evening at sunset, at the time that you came out of Egypt. You shall boil bashal and eat it in the place the Lord your God chooses. In the morning, go back to your tents."

Jon: Contradiction.

Tim: This very practical.

Jon: Boil or not to boil?

Tim: Do I boil the Passover lamb or do I roast it?

Jon: In Exodus, it says, "Roast, do not boil."

Tim: It says, "Roast and don't boil."

Jon: And then and Deuteronomy it says, "Boil."

Tim: There it is. Now, this is fascinating. Actually here. Go to Deuteronomy 16:7. Great. You tell me what it says Deuteronomy 16:7.

Jon: "Roast it and eat it." Referring to the Passover lamb.

Tim: Passover lamb. Just right there.

Jon: Roast it and eat it.

Tim: Roast it. Do you see what they've done? Here, look down. In Exodus 12, it says, "Don't eat any of it raw or boiled. Roast it." Deuteronomy 16:7, "You shall boil it. Bashal."

Tim: NIV says roast it.

Tim: NIV says roast.

Jon: So they smooth out the contradiction?

Tim: Yeah. The New International Version has taken the word "boil" and translated it "roast" to make it agree with the statement in Exodus 12.

Jon: Sneaky.

Tim: Do you see that? There's actually an ancient debate, people have noticed this difference for thousands of years.

Jon: Sure.

Tim: It's just straight up.

Jon: Let's what the King James does. I want to see what King James does.

Tim: Oh, yeah. Let's see what King James does.

Jon: Roast it.

Tim: They say roast?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So just think about what's happening there. There's a clear Hebrew word for roast, the Hebrew word *tsalah*. There's a very clear Hebrew word for boil. *Bashal*. Exodus 12 says, "Don't bashal the Passover." Deuteronomy 16 says, "You shall bashal the Passover." And translators—

Jon: They're like, "Let's go with the first one."

Tim: "Let's just go with the first one." Which hides the problem from readers of the translation. But ancient Jews know exactly what they're doing. So dude, check this out. In the book of Chronicles, in the Hebrew Bible itself, there's a story where Josiah one of the kings of Israel is holding a Passover. And it tells you how they prepared the Passover. Look at what it says. "And they boiled the Passover lamb with fire."

Jon: How do you do that? Well, I guess if the fire is boiling the water.

Tim: It doesn't say that. It says, "They boiled with fire."

Jon: They're just like, "Boiling is just another word for roasting at this point."

Tim: There's a couple of views on what's happening here. One is that they boiled it namely by heating up the water with fire. Another one is that they're actually adapting the meaning of the word "boil" to mean roast, but they created a new phrase "to boil with fire."

Jon: We've got a word that sounds like boil, but means roast. Broil.

Tim: Oh, broil. You can do a great wordplay here. They broiled it.

Jon: They broiled it.

Tim: But here's what this shows us. This shows us that the author of Chronicles first of all observed—

Jon: Saw the discrepancy.

Tim: Saw these two. And what he wants to show in the Chronicles, his strategy is to make very clear what kings, are the kings that are the signposts of the line of David that was faithful to the covenant and therefore an image or figure of the ultimate coming - descendant of David. There's just a handful. Solomon, Hezekiah, Josiah. So he wants to depict Josiah as the ultimate Torah faithful person.

Even though it feels like a contradiction in terms of how you boil something with fire, he's trying to portray him as obeying all of the Torah. So he's obeying both commands simultaneously.

Jon: Even though it's impossible.

Tim: Yes. I think that's what he's doing. It's a theological creative claim about his hyper Torah faithfulness, that he could boil the Passover lamb with fire.

Jon: He's so faithful to the Torah, he's defying the laws of physics.

Tim: I mean, I think the author Chronicles, you're supposed to kind of chuckle and get it. Here's why I don't think this should bother us. Let's land the plan on this part of the conversation. If you think of the Torah as a law book, a law codebook, that gives you all in one statement, God's will for all people of all time, then all of these differences in the laws—

Jon: They become massive problems.

Tim: Massive problems. Massive problems. So much so that you'll be willing to re-translate words that don't actually mean what they mean to harmonize the problem. Maybe the problem is us and our approach because the biblical authors clearly don't have a problem with these differences. They highlight them. The author of Chronicles is highlighting this difference. So there's a difference of audience.

Like the people leaving Exodus, the whole point is, pack your bags, cloaks on, staff in your hand, you're ready to go. So like, you're not going to do an overnight baking. It's just roast it, eat the thing, because you're going to go any a moment.

Jon: That's why it's like, "don't dress it. Put that thing on a stick, roast it up, we're going."

Tim: "Any moment we're going to be out of here. And so you can't take eight hours to cook this thing." Deuteronomy 16 assumes you're in the land, you're settled, you have homes, so you can—

Jon: Let's adapt the recipe.

Tim: You can adapt the recipe. So it makes sense that the laws are stated differently for different audiences just like the Sabbath command is. But the moment you try and take the laws out of their narrative context and make one seamless whole code a statutory code, that's where the problems come in.

Jon: We talked about this before when we talked about the law is that, if that's what the Torah was trying to do, it just failed big time at doing that.

Tim: That's right.

Jon: By giving a comprehensive coherent law code, that now I can go and follow as an Israelite.

Tim: Correct.

Jon: First of all, don't throw narratives in there.

Tim: What are the narratives doing in there?

Jon: That doesn't make any sense. Just give me the laws. Second of all, don't repeat laws. That's redundant. And if you're going to repeat a law, maybe restate it the same way.

Tim: Totally.

Jon: That would make it easier.

Tim: Basic rules for making a law code.

Tim: That's right.

Jon: So something's going on in which we're supposed to clue in immediately, "Okay, the purpose of this law code? Yeah, it's something bigger than a law code."

Tim: It's actually very similar to when my little boys - we have a small garage with the tools shed and they'd love to use my tools for all the wrong purpose. And so for two summers they were convinced that my hammers were a kind of pickaxe.

Jon: Because you could turn it around.

Tim: You could turn around and use the claw. It was a very effective pickaxe. I remember the first time that I showed Roman, my older son it's for pulling out nails. And then he was like, this thing. I just remember seeing in his eyes like it dawned on him what this is really for. And then all of a sudden, he was so excited, I mean, he wanted me to pound in nails just so you could pull them. It's kind of like that. It's kind of like, if you use the laws of the Torah as a law code, you can do it, but there will be problems.

Jon: You can dig a hole with that.

Tim: It doesn't explain the design of the whole thing. It just you're repurposing one part, but there'll be some problems with it, and then it won't explain all these other features.

Jon: And you sit back and you look at that hammer thing, you'd be like, "It'd be a lot more effective if it was more like a shovel."

Tim: Totally. And then you find yourself wishing, like, "Why didn't God make a shovel?"

Jon: And then you're embarrassed for God. You're like, "You know, God, you could have designed this little better."

Tim: Exactly. When, in fact, the problem is me and my assumptions, and I'm attributing my ignorance to God. So maybe I'm the one who needs to back up and get a whole different paradigm for what the Torah is accounting for the laws and for the narratives, and why the laws work together and where they occur, and so on. There we go.

That's the rest of our conversation is a handful of perspectives about the laws and their ancient context and their literary context to help us rediscover the purpose of the Torah that is not a shovel.

Jon: Thanks for listening to this episode of The Bible Project podcast. Our video on the law is on our YouTube channel and on our website, thebibleproject.com.

This episode was produced by Dan Gummel. If you'd like to follow up on some of the ideas we talked about in this episode, make sure to check out our show notes.

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