

Application of the Old Testament: Exodus 19:1-7 and 20:2-17

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This past year and a half, I've been writing a book dealing with Expository Hermeneutics. A series of questions arose which are related to Application of Scripture. 2 Timothy 3:16,17 highlights several features in Scripture's presuppositions about itself: all Scripture refers initially to the Old Testament, it is authored and revealed by God, and thus it is profitable. That profit concerns both teaching what is not known and applying the truth taught concerning what one is doing to reprove, to correct and to instruct in righteousness. The goal is that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Thus, the tasks of hermeneutics include: to understand what is taught,
and to evaluate what needs to be addressed to equip one for every good work.

The first question concerns preaching and teaching. In the Dispensational tradition, we have devoted the pulpit almost exclusively to teaching, yet today many churches are looking for preaching. And preaching emphasizes application. Could it be that the absence of valuable application has contributed to a decline in the churches interest in Dispensationalism?

The second question concerns a dispensational hermeneutics. Frank E Gaebelein stressed this perspective: it is "a method of interpretation helpful in grasping the progress in revelation in the Bible". (Ryrie, 8) My concern is not to dismiss Dispensationalism as a Biblical Theology, but to examine its' role in the application of the Old Testament, and to see its' role in expository preaching. If a dispensation is a "distinguishable economy in the outworking of God's purpose", (28) then in order for it to be a workable hermeneutic, an agreed upon model of the progress of dispensations must be present to use in application. Application is a value judgment made on behalf of believers today, a judgment of what is to be applied based on the grammatical/historical message.

Thus, this paper will contain three sections:

1. A model of Old Testament progress in dispensations,
2. An understanding of the grammatical/ historical message of Exodus 19:1-7, and in 20:1-17
3. An evaluation of that message in Exodus 19:1-7, and in 20 :1-17 to be applied today.

First, a model of an Old Testament dispensationalism

The purpose of God in Scripture is to display **His Glory** in His providential rule on earth as He overcomes and conquers **evil**. That single purpose implies two supporting goals: to reconcile those who believe in him, into a living relationship and partnership with God, and to restore God's rule over evil with God's people in his kingdom on earth. In the narrative prologue (Gen. 1-11) these purposes are introduced, which will be realized in history through the progress of dispensations with his people.

God created a good creation in which evil was permitted to exist at the fringes. (Gen. 1,2)

Adam and Eve were created in his image, appointed to reproduce, and to mediate God's rule on earth. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil set apart the scope of man's rule. Now Adam was to mediate God's rule through good but not to eat of evil available in the tree. When Adam did eat, he and Eve died and lost their right to mediate God's rule to the Serpent. Satan usurped that rule and would then become identified as "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience". (Eph. 2:2)

Now God reset his purposes for his people to be in conflict with evil (Gen. 3-11)

There are four purposes addressing the presence of evil in the world;

1. To promise a descendant to the woman, who would ultimately judge the Serpent. Preceding that, there would be conflict between the Serpent and Eve, between the two lines of offspring, and the final conflict would be between the Serpent, returned to the conflict, with the offspring of the woman.
2. To establish nations to protect human life and to warn of divine judgment in the Noahic Covenant.
3. To resist the rebellion of cities which promote governance in opposition to God.
4. To provide reconciliation of fallen race through substitutionary sacrifice for ones who would believe and become part of God's kingdom.

With the purposes set, the narrative history that followed introduced the dispensations related to the Old Testament that will reach an initial climax in the Gospels.

Promise

The first dispensation featured **God's commitments** to act on behalf of his chosen ones, initially introduced in the promise to the woman. God chose Abram to whom promises were given (Gen.12:1b-3); to provide Land God would show him, to become a great nation, to provide personal blessing in a relationship with God and to partner with Abraham bringing blessings through his line to the nations.

Law (added to the Promise)

Along side God's commitments on behalf of Israel, God added **Law** which had a personal and a national role. Jesus clarified the personal role when he commented on the Sabbath: "the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." (Mark 2:27) In other words, the law was added to address man's need, not that man was created to be a law keeper. The need that mankind had was the need to know themselves that they were sinful. Failure to obey the law would expose their sin and need for sacrifices to be forgiven.

The national role was to introduce the condition of obedience to Law to be a holy nation. For as a nation they were called to be a kingdom of priests, as God's partner, among other nations to mediate what a relationship with God should involve. The peoples' corporate failure brought about the eventual captivity in Babylon. This introduced what Jesus called the times of the Gentiles. (Luke 21:24) Daniel anticipated that Israel would not be a nation again until they would become God's kingdom, through the Son of Man. (Dan. 9:24-27 and 7:13,14)

While Israel in this Theocratic Phase of the nation failed, a remnant would return to become a worshiping people. And in this community, the Promised One would be born to Mary

in a virgin birth. And in this event, the Gospels were introduced as an initial fulfillment of promise.

Grace

With the birth of Jesus Christ, God reached back to Genesis 3:15, to provide the Last Adam in **Grace**, the seed of the woman, and the free gift of Life. (Rom. 5:12-21) Unlike the original Adam who brought sin and death to the human race, the Last Adam brought much more in the **Grace** of God and the gift by **Grace** of one Man. (Rom. 5:15) This introduces the dispensation of **Grace** in which **partnership with God** would be **realized** through obedience united with Christ's obedience. (Mt. 5:17-20 and Rom. 5:12- 8:17)

While any work of God on behalf of fallen man involves Grace, this work of God in the last Adam, involved the much more of Grace, introducing this dispensation of **Grace**. This will be necessarily developed further in the application.

Second, a grammatical/historical interpretation of Exodus 19:1-7

When Israel had arrived in the Wilderness of Sinai, Moses went to speak with God to deliver God's message to the house of Jacob and the people of Israel.

19:4. Israel was to take note that the LORD alone had made it possible for them to depart from Egypt and arrive at Sinai. Their **relationship** with God had been a work of grace.

19:5. "Now", at the foot of the mountain, and "Therefore", as a consequence of their relationship to God, this message would be revealed in the Covenant:

IF they will **obey** His voice, and **keep** His covenant,
THEN they shall be a **special treasure to Him**, above all people,
a **kingdom of Priests**,
a **holy nation**.

These are terms of **partnership**, conditioned on obedience to the Mosaic Covenant. And that partnership was with the LORD, which potentially put them above all other people.

Grammatical/Historical **Message**,

- Israel's **partnership** with the LORD, as a kingdom of priests is **conditioned** on covenant obedience.

The history of Israel's mixture of disobedience and obedience resulted in their dispersion to Babylon. Yet it was in Grace that the remnant returned to Jerusalem, under Persia.

How is this message applied today?

We are not Israel, under covenant law.

Are God's ways repeated with or replaced by the church?

Third, an evaluation of a Contextualized Application

A contextualized message is necessary for application. The primary contextual influence is theological, in the Progress of Revelation, rather than historical or cultural changes. Historical/cultural are not necessary to God's ministry of grace.

Evaluation of the historical/ grammatical message considers:

- The same type of subject matter, **partnership with God**
- The audience addressed, the **church under Grace**, a changed economy.
- The **analogous message** incorporates what is the same and the appropriate changes.

The evaluation makes a series of value judgments, which are at the core of the message to be applied.

Applicational **Message**,

- The Church's **partnership** with Jesus, as his body is **conditioned** on Christ's **obedience** under the Mosaic Covenant, as representative of Israel (Matt. 5:17-20) and **dependent** on believer's **obedience** are enabled by the Spirit, and are united with Christ in his death and resurrection. (Rom. 5:12-8:32)
"For if by the one man's offence death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of **grace** and the gift of righteousness will **reign** in life through the One, Jesus Christ." (Rom. 5:17)
"Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of **obedience** leading to righteousness?" (Rom. 6:16)

But what do we **obey**?

Like that rest of the Law, the commandments in the Mosaic Covenant, do not carry **regulatory** force today---because their regulatory value is both **historically** and **theologically** conditioned as we saw in the application of partnership.

Historically, they were given to the nation Israel as the core of the covenant with the LORD, and **theologically**, they are no longer binding since Christ has fulfilled the law and the prophets on behalf of Israel. (Matt. 5:17) And the New Covenant with which believers are benefactors, "I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (Jer. 31:33) So the **Scriptural law** has a **revelatory** force, (Exodus 20:2-17) which may be applied as the revelation of righteousness. This is with the exception of the Sabbath, which was the sign of the **historical** existence of the **Mosaic law** with Israel. (Ex. 31:12-18)

Conclusion

An Expository Sermon need not rely on one passage alone. When it comes to the Old Testament, like Acts 2:14-47 or 13:15-41, two or more passages may be woven together as our examples illustrate to form the message. So, in this case, the conditional nature of the Mosaic Law must be taught, and the finished work of Christ must be taught and preached. (Ex. 19:1-7, 20:1-17 and Rom. 5:12-8:32)

