

# Old Testament Law *for* Christians

ORIGINAL CONTEXT  
AND ENDURING APPLICATION

Roy E. Gane

**B**

**Baker Academic**

*a division of Baker Publishing Group*  
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Roy E. Gane, *Old Testament Law for Christians*  
Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2017. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

© 2017 by Roy E. Gane

Published by Baker Academic  
a division of Baker Publishing Group  
P.O. Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287  
www.bakeracademic.com

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Gane, Roy, 1955– author.

Title: Old Testament law for Christians : original context and enduring application / Roy E. Gane.

Description: Grand Rapids : Baker Academic, 2017. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2017010891 | ISBN 9780801049040 (pbk.)

Subjects: LCSH: Law (Theology) | Christianity and law.

Classification: LCC BS1199.L3 G36 2017 | DDC 241/.2—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2017010891>

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. ESV® Text Edition: 2016

Scripture quotations labeled CEB are from the Common English Bible © 2011 Common English Bible. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations labeled NASB are from the New American Standard Bible®, copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. ([www.Lockman.org](http://www.Lockman.org))

Scripture quotations labeled NIV are from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®, Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. [www.zondervan.com](http://www.zondervan.com)

Scripture quotations labeled NJPS are from the New Jewish Publication Society Version © 1985 by The Jewish Publication Society. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations labeled NKJV are from the New King James Version®, Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

17 18 19 20 21 22 23      7 6 5 4 3 2 1

# Contents

Abbreviations ix

Introduction xiii

*A Neglected Source of Wisdom regarding Values*

*Goal of This Book*

*Parts of This Book*

*Biblical Citations*

*Acknowledgments*

## Part 1 Getting into Old Testament Law

### 1. Is Old Testament Law Relevant for New-Covenant Christians? 3

*Jesus's Approach to Old Testament Law*

*Old Testament Laws as Background to Jesus's Life and Ministry*

*Paul's Approach to Old Testament Law*

*Old Testament Contexts Illuminating Values for Christians*

### 2. What Is Old Testament Law? 17

*Authority of Old Testament Law*

*Absolute Moral Standards and Accountability*

*Divine Principles and Values*

*Nature of Old Testament Law*

### 3. The Purpose of Old Testament Law 39

*Revealing God's Character*

*Specifying Terms for Accepting God's Covenant Grace*

*Teaching Wisdom in Response to Fallen Life*

*A Model Society as a Guiding Light to the Nations*

## Part 2 Literature and Background of Old Testament Law

4. Navigating Old Testament Laws and Related Literature 61
  - Locations of Law Materials in the Old Testament*
  - Law Concepts in Nonlegal Genres*
5. How Does the Old Testament Law Genre Inculcate Values? 79
  - Values before Laws*
  - Literary Expression of Principles to Inculcate Values*
  - Positive and Negative Formulations*
  - Manner of Address*
  - Unconditional (Apodictic) and Conditional (Casuistic) Formulations*
  - Recurring Formulas Expressing Consequences*
  - Motivational Elements*
6. Historical Contexts Illuminating Old Testament Laws 105
  - Ancient Israelite Social Culture*
  - Ancient Israelite Legal Culture*
  - Legal Development*
  - Relationships to Other Ancient Near Eastern Legal Systems*

## Part 3 Applying Old Testament Laws

7. Introduction to Applying Old Testament Laws to Christian Life 137
  - Problems with Direct Application of Old Testament Laws*
  - Indirect Application of Old Testament Laws*
8. Approaches to Applying Old Testament Law 163
  - Radical Continuity: Christian Reconstructionism = Theonomy*
  - Radical Discontinuity*
  - Both Continuity and Discontinuity*
9. Progressive Moral Wisdom 197
  - Introduction to Progressive Moral Wisdom*
  - A Progressive Moral Wisdom Model*
  - Profiles of Progressive Values Exemplified by Old Testament Laws*
10. Case Study of Progressive Moral Wisdom: Lost and Profound in Exodus 23:4 219
  - Analyze the Law by Itself*
  - Analyze the Law within the System of Old Testament Laws*
  - Further Analyze the Law within the Context of Its Ancient Life Situation*
  - Analyze the Law within the Process of Redemption*
  - Relate Findings regarding the Function of the Law to Modern Life*

## Part 4 Values in Old Testament Law

11. Ten Commandments and Related Laws, Part One 239
  - First Commandment: Relate to the Lord (YHWH) Alone as the Deity*
  - Second Commandment: Relate to the Lord Only as a Transcendent Personality*
  - Third Commandment: Treat the Lord's Name (Identity and Reputation) with Respect*
  - Fourth Commandment: Celebrate God as the Creator-Redeemer on the Sabbath*
12. Ten Commandments and Related Laws, Part Two 257
  - Fifth Commandment: Respect Parents*
  - Sixth Commandment: Respect Life*
  - Seventh Commandment: Respect Marriage*
  - Eighth Commandment: Respect Property Rights of Others*
  - Ninth Commandment: Tell Only the Truth about Others*
  - Tenth Commandment: Be Content with What You Can Rightfully Have*
13. Social Justice in Old Testament Law 281
  - God's Character and Social Justice*
  - Assistance for Israelites to Remain Independent*
  - Protection for Temporary Bonded Servants*
  - Protection and Assistance for Socially Vulnerable Free Persons*
  - Treatment of Women*
  - Protection of Animals and the Environment*
  - Basic Human Rights*
14. Old Testament Law and Theodicy 311
  - Permanent Servitude*
  - Severity of Punishments*
  - Divinely Mandated Destruction of Nations*
15. Questions about Keeping Old Testament Laws Today 341
  - Forbidden Mixtures*
  - Prohibitions regarding Cutting One's Hair and Flesh*
  - Tithing*
  - Dietary Restrictions*
  - Prohibition of Sexual Intercourse during Menstruation*
  - Homosexual Activity and "Marriage"*
16. Values Reflected in Ritual Laws 367
  - Identification of Ritual Law Topics in the Pentateuch*
  - Christian Appropriation of Values Reflected in Ritual Laws*
  - God at the Center of Human Life*

*Approaching God in Worship*  
*Removing Sin*  
*Assurance of Reconciliation with God*  
*Becoming Holy*

Conclusion: The Value of Obedience to God 399  
*Freedom through Christ as Obedience to God's Law of Love*  
*Need to Keep God's Law*  
*Possibility of Obedience to God's Law*  
*Love in Relation to Old Testament Law*  
*Obedience and Thinking*  
*Obedience and Legalism*  
*Growth in Love Guided by Law*

Selected Bibliography 411  
 Index of Modern Authors 414  
 Index of Scripture and Other Ancient Sources 418  
 Index of Subjects 438

# Abbreviations

## General and Bibliographic

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> , ed. David Noel Freedman, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992)
acc.	accommodation
AD	anno Domini
ANE	ancient Near East(ern)
AUSS	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
<i>b.</i>	Babylonian Talmud
BBR	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BC	before Christ
BCE	before the Common Era
BDAG	W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich, <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> , 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000)
BibSem	The Biblical Seminar
<i>BRev</i>	<i>Bible Review</i>
<i>BSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
BZABR	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für altorientalische und biblische Rechtsgeschichte
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CahRB	Cahiers de la Revue biblique
CBC	Cambridge Bible Commentary
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CE	Common Era
CEB	Common English Bible
cf.	<i>confer</i> , compare
CHANE	Culture and History of the Ancient Near East
chap(s).	chapter(s)

COS	<i>The Context of Scripture</i> , ed. W. W. Hallo, 3 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1997–2002), vol. 4 forthcoming
D	Deuteronomic source of the Pentateuch
DCH	<i>Dictionary of Classical Hebrew</i> , ed. David J. A. Clines, 9 vols. (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 1993–2014)
ECC	Eerdmans Critical Commentary
ed(s).	editor(s), edited by, edition
e.g.	<i>exempli gratia</i> , for example
<i>EncJud</i>	<i>Encyclopedia Judaica</i> , ed. Fred Skolnik and Michael Berenbaum, 2nd ed., 22 vols. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007)
esp.	especially
ESV	English Standard Version
etc.	<i>et cetera</i> , and so forth, and the rest
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
Gk.	Greek
GR	Greco-Roman
H	Holiness Code/source of the Pentateuch
Heb.	Hebrew
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
i.e.	<i>id est</i> , that is
ISBE	<i>International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i> , ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, revised ed., 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979–88)
ITC	International Theological Commentary
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JATS	<i>Journal of the Adventist Theological Society</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JETS	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JJS	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
JPS	Jewish Publication Society
JRE	<i>Journal of Religious Ethics</i>
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JSS	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
KJV	King James Version
LAI	Library of Ancient Israel
LBI	Library of Biblical Interpretation
LH	Laws of Hammurabi
LHBOTS	The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
lit.	literally
LXX	Septuagint (the Greek Old Testament)
<i>m.</i>	Mishnah
MAL	Middle Assyrian Laws
masc.	masculine
MT	Masoretic Text
NASB	New American Standard Bible (1995)
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament



NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIV	New International Version (2011)
NJPS	<i>The Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures: The New JPS Translation according to the Traditional Hebrew Text</i> (1985)
NKJV	New King James Version
no(s).	number(s)
NT	New Testament
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis
OT	Old Testament
OTS	Old Testament Studies
P	Priestly source of the Pentateuch
pl.	plural
PMW	Progressive Moral Wisdom
RBS	Resources for Biblical Study
repr.	reprint, reprinted
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLSP	Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers
ScrHier	Scripta Hierosolymitana
sing.	singular
SSN	Studia Semitica Neerlandica
STI	Studies in Theological Interpretation
<i>STRev</i>	<i>Sewanee Theological Review</i>
<i>TDOT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> , ed. G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringren, trans. J. T. Willis et al., 15 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974–2006)
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
trans.	translator, translated by, translation
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
v(v).	verse(s)
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
ZA	<i>Zeitschrift für Assyriologie</i>

## Old Testament

Gen.	Genesis	2 Sam.	2 Samuel
Exod.	Exodus	1 Kings	1 Kings
Lev.	Leviticus	2 Kings	2 Kings
Num.	Numbers	1 Chron.	1 Chronicles
Deut.	Deuteronomy	2 Chron.	2 Chronicles
Josh.	Joshua	Ezra	Ezra
Judg.	Judges	Neh.	Nehemiah
Ruth	Ruth	Esther	Esther
1 Sam.	1 Samuel	Job	Job

P <sup>s</sup> (s).	Psalm(s)	Amos	Amos
Prov.	Proverbs	Obad.	Obadiah
Eccles.	Ecclesiastes	Jon.	Jonah
Song	Song of Songs	Mic.	Micah
Isa.	Isaiah	Nah.	Nahum
Jer.	Jeremiah	Hab.	Habakkuk
Lam.	Lamentations	Zeph.	Zephaniah
Ezek.	Ezekiel	Hag.	Haggai
Dan.	Daniel	Zech.	Zechariah
Hosea	Hosea	Mal.	Malachi
Joel	Joel		

### New Testament

Matt.	Matthew	1 Tim.	1 Timothy
Mark	Mark	2 Tim.	2 Timothy
Luke	Luke	Titus	Titus
John	John	Philem.	Philemon
Acts	Acts	Heb.	Hebrews
Rom.	Romans	James	James
1 Cor.	1 Corinthians	1 Pet.	1 Peter
2 Cor.	2 Corinthians	2 Pet.	2 Peter
Gal.	Galatians	1 John	1 John
Eph.	Ephesians	2 John	2 John
Phil.	Philippians	3 John	3 John
Col.	Colossians	Jude	Jude
1 Thess.	1 Thessalonians	Rev.	Revelation
2 Thess.	2 Thessalonians		

# Introduction

“Wisdom” has been defined as “the capacity to realize what is of value in life for oneself and others.”<sup>1</sup> Anyone in touch with current developments in our world can recognize that Christians need informed discussion and effective inculcation of such wisdom more than ever before. Seismic shifts in social morality, controversial Supreme Court rulings, political debates and ethics, business practices, behaviors of church members, and clashes between adherents of Christian and non-Christian religious civilizations revolve around differences in values. How can we intentionally and proactively stabilize our own value system and gain a sense of perspective regarding our negotiable and nonnegotiable principles so that we can navigate the complexity of modern life in appropriate relation to others who hold values that diverge from our own?

## A Neglected Source of Wisdom regarding Values

A rich source of wisdom regarding values is contained in OT laws. However, Christians have generally neglected these laws, to our loss, because we have not regarded them as relevant to our lives. There are at least three reasons for this.

First, post-NT Christian tradition has tended to isolate the Ten Commandments as the only “moral law” that remains applicable and have not adequately taken into account the web of relationships between these commandments and other laws that also exemplify moral/ethical principles.

1. Nicholas Maxwell, *The Human World in the Physical Universe: Consciousness, Free Will, and Evolution* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 38.

Second, there are many OT laws that Christians simply cannot keep because the earthly sanctuary/temple, with its rituals and regulations, no longer exists and has been superseded by Christ's heavenly temple ministry. Furthermore, we lack other institutions and cultural practices governed by OT laws, such as theocratic administration of justice, cities of refuge, the Jubilee, bonded servitude, polygamy, and levirate marriage. Additionally, modern society has moved away from an agricultural subsistence economy, so for most of us, at least in the developed world, OT laws for farmers are unrelated to our lives.

Third, a significant number of OT laws are somewhat obscure or disturbing to Christians because they illustrate values within the context of ancient Israelite culture, which is quite foreign to us. For instance, why did God prescribe a special ritual to judge the case of a suspected adulteress (Num. 5:11–31) and provide no corresponding procedure to judge a husband whose wife suspects him of adultery? Why could a father or husband annul a vow made by his daughter or wife, respectively (30:3–16 [30:4–17 MT])?

### Goal of This Book

This book shows Christians how OT laws are relevant, interesting, accessible, and useful; how to navigate around them; how to uncover their wise values (cf. 2 Tim. 3:15, “to make you wise for salvation”); and how to arrive at answers to questions regarding their interpretation and application to modern life. The aim is to aid Christians, especially those who teach others, in understanding how OT laws reveal wise and enduring values and principles, even when certain laws do not directly apply to us today. The values and principles reflect the divine character of love (Matt. 22:36–40; 1 John 4:8), in continuity with the rest of biblical instruction (including that of the NT), in ways that are meaningful and helpful to Christians saved by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8–9) who are serious about following the God who transforms their lives (e.g., Rom. 8:1–17; Titus 3:3–7).

A key task of the present work is to evaluate and draw from existing methods for applying values and principles of OT laws to modern Christian life in order to develop a fresh and balanced approach that is faithful to both Testaments and is also clear and useable. In utilizing this approach, the author strives to consistently follow biblical evidence to its logical conclusions, without constraints from postbiblical traditions regarding interpretation or implementation of OT laws. The results are likely to generate discussion because they are not 100 percent in harmony with the prescribed practice of any existing Christian denomination, to my knowledge.

The book introduces OT law. It does not try to comprehensively elucidate all biblical laws, which would be impossible because the issues involved with them are complex and the relevant secondary literature is vast. Some historical issues are addressed here, but this is basically a synchronic study that lacks space for engaging the ongoing scholarly debates concerning the historical development (including sources) of OT law texts from their prehistory to their final canonical form.

### Parts of This Book

This volume is divided into four parts. Part 1, “Getting into Old Testament Law” (chaps. 1–3), introduces the relevance, nature, and purpose of OT law. Part 2, “Literature and Background of Old Testament Law” (chaps. 4–6), identifies locations of laws in the OT and law concepts in other genres, explains how OT law communicates values through its literary genre, and describes ancient historical contexts that shed light on OT laws. Part 3, “Applying Old Testament Laws” (chaps. 7–10), exposes issues involved in direct and indirect application of OT laws to modern Christian life, reviews and critiques methods for applying OT laws, synthesizes a Progressive Moral Wisdom approach, and illustrates this approach through a case study. Part 4, “Values in Old Testament Law” (chaps. 11–16), explicates moral values in the Ten Commandments and in social-justice laws, grapples with serious theodicy problems raised by some OT laws, and addresses questions regarding ongoing observance of several OT laws. The book concludes with a reflection on the value of obedience to God’s will, followed by a select bibliography that guides the reader to further resources, some with additional helpful bibliographies.<sup>2</sup>

### Biblical Citations

The present book develops concepts and reaches conclusions on the basis of interaction with biblical texts. This sometimes requires reference to the

2. E.g., Raymond Westbrook and Bruce Wells, *Everyday Law in Biblical Israel: An Introduction* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009); Raymond Westbrook, *Law from the Tigris to the Tiber: The Writings of Raymond Westbrook*, ed. Bruce Wells and Rachel Magdalene, 2 vols. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009); Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007); Joe M. Sprinkle, *Biblical Law and Its Relevance: A Christian Understanding and Ethical Application for Today of the Mosaic Regulations* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2006); and esp. John W. Welch, *Biblical Law Cumulative Bibliography*, CD-ROM (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005).

original Hebrew and Greek, although in as untechnical a manner as possible for the benefit of readers without training in these languages. Biblical citations adhere to the following patterns:

Quotations of the Bible in English translation are from ESV unless otherwise indicated.

Explanatory words in brackets within a biblical quotation are supplied and not part of the quoted English version.

Verse references follow English Bible numbering. When Hebrew Bible versification differs, it appears after the English reference and is labeled MT.

Transliterations of Hebrew and Greek words are according to the general-purpose style in the second edition of *The SBL Handbook of Style*.<sup>3</sup> Of the options for the letters *bet*, *kaf*, and *pe* when they lack the *dagesh lene*, this book uses the following: *bet* = *v*, *kaf* = *k*, and *pe* = *f*. Also, *vav* = *v* and *khet* = *kh*.

Names of basic Hebrew stems (*qal*, *niphal*, etc.) are according to *The SBL Handbook of Style*.<sup>4</sup>

## Acknowledgments

I am grateful to Jim Kinney of Baker Academic for inviting me to undertake this project and for his initiative, wise insights, and supportive collaboration along the way. Hearty thanks go to my Andrews University colleagues Richard M. Davidson and Robert M. Johnston for carefully reading an entire preliminary manuscript and offering excellent ideas and suggestions for improvement. I am also grateful to my colleagues P. Richard Choi, Jo Ann Davidson, and John C. Peckham for expert advice regarding parts of the book. Trisha Broy, my research assistant, gathered some of the secondary sources utilized here.

3. *The SBL Handbook of Style: For Biblical Studies and Related Disciplines*, 2nd ed. (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014), 58–60.

4. *Ibid.*, 57.

PART 1

# Getting into Old Testament Law

Roy E. Gane, *Old Testament Law for Christians*  
Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2017. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

---

# Is Old Testament Law Relevant for New-Covenant Christians?

We live in a world of competing value systems, which are at the center of much debate. What does the system of values in ancient OT law have to offer modern new-covenant Christians? If we are saved by divine grace through faith in Christ's once-for-all atoning sacrifice, not by our works of keeping God's law (Eph. 2:8–9; cf. Heb. 9:25–28), why should we invite outmoded values to play a role in directing our lives? Now that we enjoy the more glorious revelation of God in Jesus Christ, why do we still need the eclipsed revelation delivered through Moses (2 Cor. 3)? To put it in contemporary terms, why bother with an obsolete operating system when we are already enjoying a satisfying upgrade?

The NT is not an operating system that replaces the earlier OT one. Rather, the NT is the continuation of the OT story of redemption, in which earlier episodes provide crucial background for climactic later ones, which bring plotlines together toward the conclusion.<sup>1</sup> It is possible to read only the final portions of a story, but this approach misses a lot of the meaning. In the case of the Bible, the meaning is crucial wisdom, not mere entertainment or information.

This chapter addresses the relevance of OT law by considering the NT evaluation and use of it and its worth for providing background and context to the NT. Topics developed here include Jesus's approach to OT law, OT laws as background to his life and ministry, Paul's approach to OT law, and how

1. See, e.g., how genealogies in Matt. 1:1–17 and Luke 3:23–38 link the OT and NT periods, and how OT prophecies are fulfilled in the NT (Matt. 1:23; 2:6, 15, 18; etc.).



OT contexts (including law) illuminate values for Christians. It will begin to become clear that modern Christians can gain much practical wisdom from the rich and fascinating world of OT laws and the values encapsulated in them.<sup>2</sup> The remainder of the present volume will reinforce this impression.

## Jesus's Approach to Old Testament Law

### *Continuing Authority*

In the Gospels we read that Jesus regarded the OT laws given through Moses as coming from God and carrying continuing authority. For example, he responds to some opponents: "You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition! For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.' But you say . . ." (Mark 7:9–11). Here "the commandment of God" (cf. v. 13, "the word of God") is what Moses said. The laws that Jesus cites on this occasion are not only from the Decalogue (Exod. 20:12; Deut. 5:16) but also from Exod. 21:17 (cf. Lev. 20:9).

In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus strongly upholds the permanence of "the Law" (i.e., Torah, "Instruction" = the Pentateuch) along with the rest of the OT ("the Prophets"):

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (Matt. 5:17–19)

### *Bearing Witness to Christ*

Jesus also viewed the (OT) Scriptures, which include the "Law of Moses" (Torah = Pentateuch) as bearing witness to himself (John 5:39), and thus he concludes a discourse to his critics: "For if you believed Moses, you would

2. Joe M. Sprinkle summarizes some important ways in which the Mosaic law continues to carry value for modern Christians: The law "*serves to restrain sinners, . . . is a prelude to the gospel, . . . is a guide for Christian living, . . . shows the holy yet merciful character of God, . . . [and] points to Christ who is the fulfillment of the law.*" Furthermore, "*Biblical civil laws are suggestive for modern jurisprudence.*" *Biblical Law and Its Relevance: A Christian Understanding and Ethical Application for Today of the Mosaic Regulations* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2006), 26–27, emphasis original.

believe me; for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?" (vv. 46–47). When Jesus appeared to two disciples on the road to Emmaus after his resurrection, "beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27). That night, he declared to more disciples,

"These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead." (Luke 24:44–46)

The typological ritual laws prescribing the Passover sacrifice (Exod. 12:3–13, 21–27; cf. Lev. 23:5) and the "elevated sheaf" (so-called wave sheaf) firstfruits offering of barley on "the day after the Sabbath" (Lev. 23:10–11) could have been among the OT Scriptures in the Law of Moses to which Jesus referred to show that he had to suffer and then rise from the dead on the third day. Indeed, Jesus died on Friday ("the day of Preparation"; Mark 15:42; John 19:31) at the time of Passover (John 18:28, 39; 19:14; cf. Matt. 26:2) and rose on the third day, which was the first day of the week after the Sabbath (Matt. 28:1), when the elevated sheaf would have been offered. Paul explicitly referred to the crucified Christ as "our Passover lamb" (1 Cor. 5:7) and to the risen Christ as "the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor. 15:20).

Such correlations between the enacted redemptive typology of the OT rituals and what happened to Jesus of Nazareth contributed to confirmation—for his disciples and also for us—of John the Baptist's identification of him as "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29), meaning the Messiah/Christ whom the ritual system prefigured and in this sense prophesied.<sup>3</sup> Today our only access to this ritual system is through pentateuchal texts, mostly in the form of laws/instructions.

The OT laws testify to Christ in another important way. When he was asked which is the greatest commandment in the law (Matt. 22:36), he replied: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets" (vv. 37–40).

3. The OT sacrificial system also provides crucial background to Christ's heavenly priesthood, as presented in the books of Hebrews (esp. chaps. 7–10) and Revelation (esp. in introductory temple scenes; 1:12–20; chaps. 4–5; 8:2–5; etc.).

Here Jesus cites two laws (Deut. 6:5 and Lev. 19:18) outside the Ten Commandments to summarize all of OT law and also the messages of the prophets. That which unifies this divine revelation is the value of love, which is nothing less than the character of God: “God is love” (1 John 4:8). Because God loved the world, he gave Christ, “his only Son,” to save those who believe in him (John 3:16). Christ is God (e.g., John 8:58; 10:30; Col. 1:19), so he is love (cf. John 15:9). Therefore all of OT law testifies to Christ’s love, which he asks his followers to emulate (John 15:12).

### Old Testament Laws as Background to Jesus’s Life and Ministry

Some OT laws provide illuminating background to more specific aspects of Jesus’s life and ministry. Following are three examples from Luke, all of which concern women.

#### *Offering by a Poor Mother*

Luke 2 tells us what Jesus’s parents did soon after he was circumcised (eight days after he was born): “When the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord . . . and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, ‘a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons’” (vv. 22, 24).

This refers to Lev. 12, according to which a woman who gave birth would undergo a period of purification, at the end of which she would offer “a one-year-old lamb as an entirely burned offering and a pigeon or turtledove as a purification offering” (v. 6 CEB); if she could not afford a sheep, she could sacrifice “two turtledoves or two pigeons—one for the entirely burned offering and the other for the purification offering” (v. 8 CEB). Thus Luke 2:24 implies that Jesus’s parents offered two birds because they were poor. They could not even afford a lamb for Mary’s purification after the birth of “the Lamb of God”!

#### *Female Impure Discharge*

Another purity law sheds light on an incident recounted in Luke 8. As a crowd of people pressed around Jesus, a woman with a chronic discharge of blood

came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment, and immediately her discharge of blood ceased. And Jesus said, “Who was it that touched me?”

. . . But Jesus said, “Someone touched me, for I perceive that power has gone out from me.” And when the woman saw that she was not hidden, she came trembling, and falling down before him declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him, and how she had been immediately healed. And he said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace.” (Luke 8:44–48; cf. Matt. 9:20–22; Mark 5:25–34)

Why did she come trembling? She must have known that according to Lev. 15, her chronic genital discharge of blood made her physically and ritually impure, as during her menstrual period (vv. 25–27). Therefore, anyone who touched her would be impure until evening (cf. v. 19). No doubt hoping not to make Jesus impure, she only touched the fringe (Gk. *kraspedon*, “edge, border, hem”) of his garment (Luke 8:44). But when he asked, “Who was it that touched me?” and insisted that someone had done so (8:45–46), she felt caught and likely thought he was angry because she had defiled him. In response to her confession, however, he affirmed her faith and reassured her that there was no problem.

Two other OT laws illuminate this story. First, the “fringe” or “tassel” (Heb. *tsitsit*; LXX *kraspedon*) that Jesus had on his garment was required by a law in Num. 15:37–40 (cf. Deut. 22:12) as a sign of remembering and following all of God’s commandments and being holy to him. The tassel on each corner of a garment was to have a violet (or blue) cord attached to it (Num. 15:38). This color appeared in the holy priestly garments (Exod. 28:5, 6, 8, 15, 31, 33), and violet cords belonged to the high priest’s vestments (28:28, 36–37; 39:21, 30–31). Given this connection, it appears that the violet cords on tassels belonging to Israelites who were not Levitical priests, such as Jesus, evoked the idea that these persons were members of God’s “kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exod. 19:6).<sup>4</sup> Therefore the woman with the discharge of blood, who was ritually impure, touched a sign of Jesus’s holiness.

Second, there is no indication that the woman’s touch rendered Jesus impure. Rather, he perceived that power had gone out from him (Luke 8:46) to cure her impure discharge. There was a one-way flow of healing, with no backwash of impurity, just as when Jesus touched lepers to heal them (Matt. 8:2–3; Mark 1:40–42; Luke 5:12–13). As in the law of Lev. 11, Jesus was like “a spring or a cistern holding water,” which could not be made impure (v. 36; contrast vv. 29–35) because it was a source of purity.<sup>5</sup>

4. Violet color also evoked royalty because this kind of dye was very expensive. Cf. Jacob Milgrom, *Numbers*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), 127.

5. Roy Gane, *Leviticus*, *Numbers*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 216–17.

### *A Woman Considered Immoral*

On another occasion, Jesus was invited to eat at the home of a Pharisee.

And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner." And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." (Luke 7:37–40)

In this situation there are several striking points of comparison and contrast with the suspected adulteress ritual in Num. 5:11–31. As in the Num. 5 scenario, the woman's reputation is under scrutiny, with a man inquiring of the Lord whether she is guilty; she has a gift for the Lord but is in an attitude of mourning; her hair is let down, and she contacts holiness. "However, in Luke 7 (cf. Matt. 26:6–13; Mark 14:3–9; John 12:1–8) the focus of the woman's sorrow is on Christ, her gift consists of sweet-smelling perfume, the man who questions regarding her (Simon, the host; Luke 7:40, 43–44) is not her husband, he has no doubt that she has been guilty of indiscretion, and his accusation is only to himself rather than out in the open."<sup>6</sup>

In Num. 5 the Lord only renders a verdict of guilty or innocent (vv. 27–28), but Christ's verdict on the woman in Luke 7 is different: She is guilty as charged, but forgiven (vv. 47–50)! "Christ's forgiveness did not mean that he was lowering the moral standard. In his Sermon on the Mount he raised it by condemning even lust of the eyes (Matt. 5:27–28). It is not that his standard is weaker, but that his 'new covenant' forgiveness is stronger."<sup>7</sup> In fact, Christ's forgiveness is so powerful that the new covenant is based on it (Jer. 31:34, "For I will forgive their iniquity"; cf. 31:31–33).

### **Paul's Approach to Old Testament Law**

Like Jesus, Paul upheld the ongoing worth of the (OT) Scriptures, which include OT law. He encouraged Timothy to continue learning from "the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in

6. *Ibid.*, 527.

7. *Ibid.*

Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:15–17).

Paul was an expert in OT teachings, educated by the Pharisee Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), who was “a teacher of the law held in honor by all the people” (5:34). Paul said a lot about various aspects of law (Gk. *nomos*), but for our purpose here we will focus on his approach to the continuing relevance of pentateuchal law as divine instruction for Christian life.<sup>8</sup>

### *Good Works Resulting from Salvation*

The book of Ephesians can serve as an example, starting with Paul’s clear and concise summary of the way we are saved in 2:8–10 and then moving into his counsel regarding the Christian “walk,” the manner of life, in later chapters.<sup>9</sup>

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Eph. 2:8–10)

We are not saved by our own works in any sense. Rather, we are the workmanship, God’s work! We are incapable of performing our salvation because that is a work of creating (i.e., re-creating) us in Christ (cf. Eph. 2:4–7), and we cannot create ourselves. God creates us anew so that we can fulfill his ideal plan by doing good works as he designed (v. 10). While these works of ours do not produce salvation, they result from it and demonstrate that our faith is ongoing and genuine (cf. James 2:26).

Salvation by grace through faith is not the end of the Christian life; it is for the whole life. In Eph. 3 Paul prays for the believers in Ephesus, who have already received Christ (cf. 1:1, 15),

that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length

8. Cf., e.g., Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 97, 165–67, pointing out that Paul interpreted OT laws as directly speaking to Christians in his day.

9. Cf. use of the Hebrew term *halakah*, literally referring to walking or going, for traditional Jewish law.

and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (3:16–19)

The experience of faith and love that Paul wishes for the Ephesians, which he expresses in general terms, is progressive and growing (e.g., “being rooted and grounded in love”; cf. 4:11–16; cf. 1 Thess. 3:12–4:1).

Paul is more specific in Eph. 4: “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (vv. 1–3). Walking in a worthy manner is equivalent to walking in good works (cf. 2:10). Here in chapter 4 the Christian “walk,” or manner of conducting one’s journey through life, is characterized by several virtues, positive attitudes that govern corresponding actions (including speech). These radically depart from the traits of the unconverted, futile-minded Gentile “walk,” in which negative attitudes manifest themselves in impure practices (vv. 17–19).

#### *Ephesians 4–6 Drawing on Old Testament Laws*

As Paul continues in Eph. 4, he becomes even more specific. Christians who have “put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (4:24) will live differently in many ways, and he provides some examples in a series of exhortations:

Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil. Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. (Eph. 4:25–32)

The idea that behaviors such as telling the truth, controlling anger, and doing honest work represent good and beneficial values and that behaviors such as speaking falsehood, sinning as a result of anger, and stealing are bad

and destructive did not originate with Paul. He is drawing on OT teaching, including OT law, and treating it as normative for Christians. Some of his exhortations—such as not to speak falsehood or to steal—relate quite directly to the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:15–16; Deut. 5:19–20).<sup>10</sup> However, the backgrounds to most of his instructions here are clustered in Lev. 19, which belongs to the so-called Holiness Code (Lev. 17–27): not stealing, deceiving, or lying to one another (19:11); not nursing a grudge or prolonged anger (v. 18a); not slandering (v. 16); and not hating (v. 17), but loving your neighbor as yourself (v. 18b).

Reinforcing the idea that Paul has Lev. 19 in mind, he begins Eph. 5: “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (vv. 1–2). The first command in Lev. 19 is to imitate God: “You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy” (v. 2). And a command to love is at the heart of that chapter: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (v. 18).

Verse 34 combines love with implicit imitation of God: “You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.” Here the motive clause, “for you were strangers in the land of Egypt,” reminds the Israelites that they are to empathize with others and treat them with the same kindness that they have received from the Lord, who delivered them from slavery in Egypt (cf. v. 36).

Christians are to emulate divine love manifested in a greater deliverance: “And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Eph. 5:2). Christ’s sacrifice delivers us from condemnation resulting from sin (cf. Rom. 8:1–2; Col. 2:13–14), as foreshadowed by animal sacrifices prescribed in Leviticus.

Paul’s instructions in Eph. 5–6 contain additional allusions to OT laws. He speaks against sexual immorality and covetousness/greed (5:3, 5; cf. Lev. 18, 20; Exod. 20:17; Deut. 5:21) as well as drunkenness (Eph. 5:18; cf. Lev. 10:8–11). He also explicitly reiterates the Decalogue command to honor one’s parents (Eph. 6:1–3; cf. Exod. 20:12; Deut. 5:16), and he urges masters not to treat their servants harshly (Eph. 6:9; cf. Exod. 21:26–27; Lev. 25:39–43).

In this brief exploration of Ephesians we have found that Paul’s unpacking of the concept that we are God’s workmanship, re-created in Christ to walk

10. The ninth commandment of the Decalogue prohibits a particular kind of falsehood: bearing false witness in a judicial setting (cf. Exod. 23:1–2, 7; Deut. 19:16–19). The law against lying in general is in Lev. 19:11.



in good works (2:10), is saturated with values already revealed in OT law. The apostle doesn't need to reinvent these values; instead, he selects, adapts, applies, and connects them together in the context of the gospel.

Other NT books contain plenty of other reflections of OT values (e.g., James 1:27–2:17), and exploring these would be interesting and profitable. However, the examples from Ephesians suffice to establish the point that the NT builds on OT law as useful and authoritative teaching.

## Old Testament Contexts Illuminating Values for Christians

### *Need for Old Testament Contextualization*

Granted that the OT provides background to the NT, why should we take time to directly examine OT law itself, rather than limiting our study to the digested-for-Christians transmission of values in the NT? If the NT teaches values that apply to the Christian life, why should we go back to the earlier expressions of these values in the OT, which are outside the new-covenant context, sometimes involve ancient Israelite cultural elements that are foreign and obscure to us, and in some cases may be obsolete?

Paul could have saved busy Timothy a lot of time by advising him to confine his study to the newly developing body of Christian writings, which more directly applied to Christians within the Greco-Roman culture. However, Paul viewed the “sacred writings,” the OT Scriptures themselves—not predigested, abridged, or censored—as a rich resource to provide wisdom in various ways (teaching, reproof, correction, training) “for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:15–17). Even the entire NT is far from complete in this way. Concepts and values that are barely or not at all mentioned in the NT are thoroughly exposed in the OT in contexts that illuminate them and their effects and implications.<sup>11</sup> The NT needs the OT contextual background, which the NT supplements and culminates.

Just as contextual usage determines meanings of words in a given language, it is the operation of values in particular life situations that reveals their dynamic nuances. Lists of virtues and vices (as in Eph. 4:25–32 discussed above) provide some important knowledge, but wisdom, which Paul desired Timothy to possess, involves the ability to choose, balance, and apply values in varied and often complex circumstances. The NT contains some significant contextualizations of values, but the OT offers much more in several genres,

11. Cf. Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 33–34.

including law, narrative, wisdom literature, and prophetic writings. The following sections provide a few examples.

### *Immorality Excluded from God's Community*

In Eph. 5:3 Paul identifies categories of sins that are totally inappropriate among Christians: “But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.” As a young church leader, Timothy would be responsible for dealing with such problems if they arose, but he would need more guidance than this. So he could draw on Paul’s counsel to the church at Corinth, illuminated by OT background.

In the particular context of 1 Cor. 5, Paul illustrates the proper treatment of a kind of sexual immorality that should not exist in a Christian community: “It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father’s wife. . . . Let him who has done this be removed from among you” (vv. 1–2). On what basis did Paul demand that the man be removed from fellowship enjoyed by members of the Christian community (cf. vv. 4–5, 9–13)? According to the law in Lev. 20:11, individuals who commit such incest incur capital punishment under the theocratic governance of ancient Israel, which removed the perpetrators from the community of God’s people.

Paul did not condemn the Corinthian culprit to death at the hands of the church members, but he called for them “to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord” (1 Cor. 5:5). In the Christian setting, the equivalent of the OT death penalty is disfellowshipping (not dismembering!) to purge the church community,<sup>12</sup> which can serve a redemptive purpose so that the sinner ultimately may be saved, no doubt by impressing on the person the sense of being lost and desperately needing divine forgiveness and moral cleansing.

Further investigation of OT law, especially Lev. 18 and 20, would show Timothy that the case in Corinth exemplified only one among several kinds of sexual immorality that must be excluded from God’s community. Although the NT speaks of adultery (Matt. 5:27–28; John 8:3–4; Rom. 2:22; 13:9; etc.; cf. Lev. 18:20; 20:10) and homosexual practice (Rom. 1:26–27; 1 Cor. 6:9; 1 Tim. 1:10; cf. Lev. 18:22; 20:13), it never even mentions bestiality (Lev. 18:23; 20:15–16) or varieties of incest aside from the one identified in 1 Cor. 5 (Lev. 18:6–7, 9–18; 20:12, 14, 17, 19–21).

12. Cf. Deut. 13:5 (13:6 MT); 17:7, 12; 19:19; 21:21; etc. of purging evil from the Israelite community.

### *Covetousness Leading to Immorality*

In Eph. 5:3–8, why does Paul juxtapose sexual immorality, (moral) impurity, and covetousness, which he calls idolatry (cf. Col. 3:5)? He does not explain dynamic relationships between these violations of the Decalogue (Exod. 20:4–6, 14, 17). However, some OT narratives illustrate how covetousness can lead to sexual immorality. For example, David coveted Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11:2–3), (idolatrously) putting his desire for her above his relationship to God, and consequently he took her sexually. Balaam (idolatrously) coveted a reward for cursing Israel and ultimately sought to achieve his goal by plotting to entice the Israelites into sexual immorality and idolatry at Baal Peor (Num. 22–25; 31:8, 15–16; cf. 2 Pet. 2:15).

Paul’s warning to Christians—“Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not become partners with them” (Eph. 5:6–7)—is vividly illustrated by Num. 25, which recounts the Israelites’ disastrous Baal Peor experience:

While Israel lived in Shittim, the people began to whore with the daughters of Moab. These invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel yoked himself to Baal of Peor. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel. . . . Nevertheless, those who died by the plague were twenty-four thousand. (Num. 25:1–9)

Setting YHWH aside to covet Moabite women (a form of idolatry) and become their partners soon led the Israelites into idolatrous worship of their god Baal. No wonder OT law forbade covenants and marriages with idolaters (Exod. 23:31–33; Deut. 7:1–6)!<sup>13</sup> Revelation 2:14 (in the message to the church at Pergamum) points out that the danger continues for Christians: “But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality.”

### *Mercy for the Fallen*

The OT laws delineate the scope of sexual immorality and emphasize its seriousness, but what about the possibility of mercy for those who have fallen into such sins? Paul emphasizes mercy for sinners in Eph. 2:4–5: “But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even

13. Cf. Solomon’s flagrant violation of this prohibition and its initial results (1 Kings 11). The idolatry that Solomon’s wives introduced had a devastating long-term effect on the nation.

when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved.” The NT illustrates this magnificent gospel message in the lives of people (e.g., Luke 7:36–50 [see above]; John 8:11), and the OT provides additional contextualization of divine mercy.

For example, the narrative about David and Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11–12) and David’s prayer of repentance in Ps. 51 hold out hope that one whose heart is broken by regret for deep sin can receive forgiveness and cleansing (2 Sam. 12:13; contrast the death penalty in Lev. 20:10).<sup>14</sup> Divine mercy is found here in narrative and a hymn, rather than in laws regarding sexual offenses, because mercy is usually not prescribed in laws. Mercy is over and above law, which is the standard against which obedience or violation and the need for mercy are measured.

Mercy does appear in pentateuchal laws prescribing animal sacrifices, through which the Israelites received the benefit of Christ’s future sacrifice (Heb. 9–10): expiation prerequisite to forgiveness (e.g., Lev. 4:1–6:7 [4:1–5:26 MT]). However, David recognized that his capital offenses of taking Bathsheba by “power rape”<sup>15</sup> and murdering her husband by abuse of royal power (2 Sam. 11) were beyond the scope of remedies by animal sacrifices (Ps. 51:16 [51:18 MT]). He could only cling to a higher level of divine mercy, which was directly available through the coming sacrifice of Christ, by whom, according to Paul, “everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:39).<sup>16</sup>

The above discussion has shown that both Testaments of the Bible work together to inculcate wisdom for salvation by demonstrating the operation of values in a variety of contexts and through several genres complementing each other. This wisdom is comprehensive in that it equips a person of God “for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:17). However, it is not so exhaustive that those who are thoroughly equipped by studying Scripture can always safely and confidently rely on their own wisdom. A key piece of biblical wisdom is recognizing that humans are not adequately wise (e.g., Prov. 14:12; 16:25), so we need to depend on God for wisdom, which he “gives generously to all” (James 1:5).

14. The NT account of the woman caught in adultery magnificently demonstrates Christ’s mercy (John 8:3–11), but the exquisitely detailed report in 2 Sam. 11–12 concerning David and Bathsheba shows how sin works in a complex stream of events from temptation to fall and then cover-up until God rips off the covers but accepts honest confession and unconditional surrender.

15. Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 535.

16. Cf. God’s mercy on King Manasseh, whose appalling sins were not expiable through animal sacrifices (2 Chron. 33). Davidson points out that in 2 Samuel, even though the Lord forgave David, “his son born out of the illegitimate sexual encounter died as judgment for David’s sin (12:14),” perhaps as “an intimation of the ultimate Son of David, the Messiah, who died to take the penalty of all repentant sinners” (*ibid.*, including note 119).