

# **WHAT THE LAW COULD NOT DO**

## **The Giving of the Law**

For 2500 years from Adam to Moses we know of no written law of God to reveal to man the perfect righteousness and holiness of God and then the law was given to Moses, after the first born of Israel had 'been redeemed by the 'blood of the Passover Lamb, upon Mount Sinai. (Exodus 15:15 & 16).

There was a threefold giving of this law. The first time it was spoken orally to Moses on the Mount and communicated to the children of Israel, who accepted it and promised to keep it, 'All that the Lord has spoken we will do.' (Exodus 19:8). How little the children of Israel realised it was a very hard thing to keep God's law perfectly, and failure meant judgement and death. Israel, in their blindness, having confidently proclaimed their desire and ability to keep God's law, the Lord now calls Moses back up the mountain to give him the written copy of that law inscribed on tables of stone. This was the second giving of the law "and the Lord said unto Moses, Come up to me into the mount, and be there: and I will give thee tables of stone and a law and commandments which I have written: that thou mayest teach them. And Moses went up into the mount and a cloud covered the mount... and Moses was in the mount forty days and forty nights." (Exodus 24:12 & 16). "And He gave unto Moses, when He had made an end of communing with him upon Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God." (Exodus 31:18).

## **Forty Days and Forty Nights**

Why was the Lord communing with Moses for forty days and forty nights on the mount when He could have given Moses the two tables of the law and immediately sent him back to deliver them to the children of Israel?

There seems to be two reasons for the span of forty days; the one being to test Israel and show them that they could not, by their own efforts, keep God's law even for forty days. They had confidently boasted their ability "All that the Lord hath commanded we will do" and had to be convinced of their utter failure to please God by their own efforts. How they failed. "When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him." (Exodus 32:1). The rest of the story of the Golden Calf is well known. This people who had heard the word "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" are now dancing, carousing and offering sacrifices to just such a lifeless idol!

The other reason for the delay of forty days and nights before Moses returned to the people was to make a provision for escaping the judgement that the breaking of the law would bring. According to the law which Moses delivered, the death sentence was pronounced upon the sinner, and so, at the same time God gave the law which cursed the transgressor He also made provision for the redemption from that curse of death.

## **The Tabernacle**

When Moses went up Mount Sinai to receive the tables of the law, he also received the plan of redemption in the symbol of the pattern of the Tabernacle, God's answer to the broken law, for during the forty days God was giving him His provision for salvation for those who were even then transgressing those very commandments. Had Moses come down from the mountain with only the tables of the law, it would have been the end of the nation of Israel, but together with the tables of the law came also the message of salvation, the redemption by blood. The writer to the Hebrews tells us Moses received the pattern of the Tabernacle at the same time he was given the tables of stone. 'Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the Tabernacle: for See, saith He, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed thee in the mount.' (Hebrews 8:5).

The Tabernacle was called the Tent of Meeting, for here, on the basis of the shed blood the sinner could come to God. So when Moses came down from the mount after forty days and nights he brought the two things: 1) The law which condemned sinners, and 2) The pattern of the Tabernacle pointing to Jesus through whom we have redemption and forgiveness.

The law condemned the sinner and Moses on coming down from the mount and seeing the people carousing, in his righteous anger, cast the tables of stone upon the ground and broke them to pieces, showing what Israel had already done by their worship of the Golden Calf. Before Moses could present them with the tables of the law, they had already broken them. But God anticipated Israel's failure, and so, in His mercy, He provided again a

temporary covering, pointing to the Lord Jesus Christ, who was to take away the sin of the world, so that the transgressor might be spared and not perish.

The provision in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ was symbolised and taught by the pattern and the instructions for the Tabernacle which was God's answer to the judgement of the law. Every part of this Tabernacle pointed to God's substitutionary atoning Lamb and was climaxed in the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies.

### **The Third Giving of the Law**

The tables of stone which God had made were broken at the foot of the mount and must needs be replaced and this is the third giving of the law. "And the Lord said to Moses, Hew thee two tables of stone like unto the first: and I will write upon these tables the words that were in the first tables, which thou brakest, and be ready in the morning, and, come up in the morning unto mount Sinai... and he hewed two tables of stone like unto the first; and Moses rose early in the morning and went up unto mount Sinai, as the Lord had commanded him, and he took in his hand the two tables of stone." (Exodus 34:1-4).

Now this copy of the law was to be hidden in the Ark of the Covenant in the Tabernacle, The Ark of the Covenant was the central object, the very heart of the Tabernacle teaching. It was a wooden box overlaid with gold and covered by a lid of solid gold with two cherubim overshadowing it. In this box, or Ark was placed these second tables of the law - this law which demanded and cried out for justice. So God placed over this law a lid called the 'Mercy-seat'. Within the Ark, the law pronounced the sentence of death upon the sinner, but God provided a covering. The Mercy-seat, or cover of the Ark was a type of the Lord Jesus, He is called our Mercy-seat in Romans 5:25. Here we read concerning Jesus 'whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood,' The word translated 'propitiation' is '*hilasterion*' in the original and means literally 'Mercy-seat.' Upon this Mercy-seat covering the law which called for the death of the sinful nation, the High Priest, once a year, on the day of Atonement, took blood from the altar in the Court of the Tabernacle and sprinkled it upon the Mercy-seat over the (broken) law, and then when God descended in the cloud of shekinah glory into the Holy of Holies He did not look upon the broken law but the blood instead. God had said before, "When I see the blood, I will pass over you..." (Exodus 12:13).

All this was fulfilled by Jesus. He proved the same two things that Moses proved by his sojourn on the mount for forty days and nights: 1). The awful weakness of the human heart, in contrast to God's perfect law of righteousness, and 2). To demonstrate God's love and mercy in providing salvation, which the law could not. "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh" God did by sending His Son to redeem us and then to provide us with continual forgiveness throughout our present life.

The first thing the coming of Jesus proved was that the law could be kept and that sin was our fault, for Jesus was tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin. The crucifixion of Jesus was the crime of all time, by condemning to death the only One whom the law could not condemn. But Jesus coming not only showed the weakness of the human race and the failure of the law to make men better, but by dying on the cross and shedding His blood He opened the way whereby we sinners could be declared righteous; for His blood now stands between the faithful and God who said 'when I see the blood, I will pass over you.'

What the law could not do Jesus did, for during His lifetime in the flesh He condemned sin and at the same time provided forgiveness for the sinner who will go to Him in faith. By the shedding of His blood, by the substitutionary atoning death and resurrection, the Throne of God, which by the law was a throne of judgment and death, became a throne of grace, mercy and life.

### **From Adam to Christ**

How were people saved before Jesus died and rose to justify the faithful believer? How was Abraham saved? The Bible tells us that the law was not given to Israel until 450 years after Abraham was saved, (Galatians 3:17). Certainly Abraham was not saved by keeping the law, nor was he kept saved by it. However, the Bible takes great pains in telling us how Abraham was saved. In the first three chapters of Romans Paul had gone to great lengths to prove that no one was ever saved by works, but by grace. He comes to the final conclusion in chapter three verse 28 "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law."

This was a difficult truth for his hearers to accept, for they made great pretence at keeping the law and so Paul refers them to Abraham, who was revered and honoured by all. He asks "How then was Abraham saved? By the law, or by grace?" Listen to Paul "What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the

flesh hath found? For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. For what saith the scripture? (always the final word) Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh (the works of the law) is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.” (Romans 4:1-5).

What did Abraham believe? He believed what God said. He believed the good news of the virgin birth, the redeeming blood and the resurrection of Jesus! “And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying. In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then, they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham. For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, the just shall live by faith. And the law is not of faith: the man that doeth them (the works of the law) shall live in them.” (Galatians 5:8-12).

Paul contrasts faith and the law, and proves that Abraham was saved by faith, by believing the gospel. So what was the gospel which Abraham believed? Let us define what we mean by Gospel, The word in the Greek is ‘evangelium’ or ‘good news’. Usually the gospel is defined as the good news of the death and resurrection based on Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 15:5 “That Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures. And that He was buried and that He rose again the third day according to the scriptures.” But there is more to the good news than this, for the good news also includes the virgin birth.

### **The Virgin Birth and Isaac**

The virgin birth was declared to be the gospel by the angel on the hills of Judea, for the angel announced “Fear not; for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy... for unto you is born this day... a Saviour.” (Luke 2:10,11). The word here translated ‘good tidings’ is the Greek word ‘evangelium’, the gospel, for the miraculous begetting of Jesus is a very important part of the Gospel message.

God revealed to Abraham the gospel of the miraculous conception, the substitutionary death and the glorious resurrection of the coming Redeemer. Abraham believed in the super-natural conception of a promised son, for God had promised him a seed, in the birth of a son. God had said concerning Sarah, “I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her.., and she shall be a mother of nations.” (Genesis 17:16). But the years dragged on and this promise remained unfulfilled until Sarah had long passed the age at which, in the course of nature, she could conceive. Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah was 90 when we read “Now Abraham and Sarah were old and well stricken in age; and it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women.” (Genesis 18:11). Sarah had well passed the age of child bearing (Romans 4:19 and Hebrews 11:11), and it was at this time God told Abraham that he and Sarah would become parents of the promised son, Abraham believed this word of God, even though it was impossible in the course of nature, and it would take a miracle, a supernatural act, to make these two old people parents of a son, Abraham “believed in the Lord; and He counted it to him for righteousness.” (Genesis 15:6). Abraham believed the gospel of the birth of a promised son by a supernatural conception, and the birth of Isaac was as great a miracle as the virgin birth of Jesus, although of course, in the case of Isaac there were two human parents.

### **The ‘Slaying’ of Isaac and his ‘Resurrection’**

There is more to the gospel than the virgin birth. The next step is the substitutionary death of this promised son. This part of the gospel was preached to Abraham and believed by him. When the miraculously begotten son, Isaac, was a grown young man Abraham was commanded to take him to mount Moriah and sacrifice him upon the altar. Abraham again believed the gospel and in Genesis 22 we have a detailed account of Abraham (type of the Father) taking his son (type of Jesus) up the mountain and there potentially and typically offering his son upon the altar. Yes, Abraham believed that while he would have to put his son to death, God would also resurrect him. It had to be that way. How else could God fulfil His promise that in Isaac would his seed be called as Isaac had no seed when he was to die. If then God was to keep His word, Abraham reasoned, God would have to raise him from the dead after the sacrifice.

But in the event, Isaac was not literally slain, nevertheless. God reckoned it as though it actually occurred. And then God provided a substitutionary ram to die in Isaac’s stead, to take his place. But as far as God was concerned He reckoned it as though Isaac was actually slain, and that Abraham also potentially sacrificed his son. Abraham looked ahead and saw in this the gospel of the supernatural conception, the substitutionary death and the glorious resurrection of the Greater Son of Isaac, for we read in Hebrews 11:17, “By faith, Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son... accounting that

God was able to raise him up even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure (type)". For to Abraham, Isaac was as good as dead for three whole days from the time of the command to sacrifice his son until God spared him. So when God suddenly intervened it was a potential resurrection of the son. Abraham therefore believed the gospel of the miraculous conception, the substitutionary death and the victorious resurrection after three days.

Abraham understood that the birth, death and resurrection of Isaac pointed to the birth, death and resurrection of the Greater Son, the promised seed of which Isaac was only a type. In Genesis 22:14, after he had offered his son and saw him restored, Abraham called the name of that place JEHOVAH- JIREH, "The Lord will provide as it is said to this day, In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen."

This then was the gospel Abraham believed and by which he was saved. It had nothing to do with him keeping the law, for that was not yet given, and God's plan has never changed. Salvation today is still believing what God says about His only Son, who was virgin born, who died to redeem us and who rose again from the dead. Paul says, referring to Abraham's faith, "Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him (for righteousness) but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." (Romans 4:25-25), Salvation is believing "the record God gave of His Son" (John 5:10,11). Salvation is by faith in the virgin born, crucified, risen Saviour. The law is bad news for the sinner, the gospel of redemption is good news for the faithful.

### **The Law's Requirements**

The law of God is holy, eternal, perfect and good; it is the Divine pattern of righteousness which God required of those who would be saved by their works. The law of God is powerful and is absolutely just in treating all alike without respect of persons. There are no exceptions, for the soul that sinneth, it shall die. It is inflexible and rigid and makes no allowance for effort if that effort fails to measure up to every single demand of the perfect law. The law knows no distinction between big sins and little sins as far as guilt is concerned. Sin is sin. "Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." (Galatians 5:10). And as Paul records "for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." (Romans 5:25).

While the law is holy it cannot produce holiness in the transgressor. While the law is perfect, it cannot produce perfection in sinners. While the law is just, it cannot justify injustice nor unrighteousness. These things the law cannot do nor was it ever intended, to do. The law reveals the perfect righteousness of a holy God and righteousness is the one requirement for salvation for those depending on the law.

James says "For whosoever shall keep the whole law and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." (James 2:10). Adams sin in taking of the forbidden fruit we would call petty larceny but God regarded it as rebellion and His righteousness was incompatible with the unrighteousness of Adam. The law reveals the gravity of sin and the righteousness of God.

### **No Judgement**

The law stands as the pronouncer of death to all who fail to accept, by faith God's means of salvation from its power and condemnation and curse. We do not meet the high standards of the law and we cannot lower its standards to meet our own imperfections. While the law is powerful in condemning the sinner it is powerless to save the sinner. Also it is powerless to condemn the faithful in Christ, for the child of God is ever free from its judgement. For there is no judgement to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit and in spite of our failures there is NO JUDGEMENT. There may well be the chastening of the Lord when we offend, but there is no judgement, for if this were not the case it would mean that each time the believer sinned he would need to be baptised. That cannot be and God has made provision for our sins after we have been baptised into Christ, for He is our High Priest interceding for us and when "we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness," (John 1:9). "For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made us free from the law of sin and death." (Romans 8:2). For we have passed from death into life.

### **Not Our Way but His**

In Romans chapter 7 Paul, speaking of the time before his conversion and while he was yet 'kicking against the pricks,' admits his failure to keep the law of God by his own efforts. Paul earnestly desired to keep the law of God but found the desires of the flesh opposing him at every turn. He now, after his conversion, disclaims any perfection of his own and relies entirely upon the imputed perfection of Jesus. He now rejoices in the fact that



there is now therefore no condemnation (judgement) to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit,

God sees us in Christ as perfect and sinless and accepts us, not on the basis of our own righteousness, but on the basis of the imputed righteousness of Jesus. The law could not give us this righteousness, and it was beyond our reach as sinners, so the scripture says “what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending His Son in the likeness of sins flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh; that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit.” (Romans 8:5).

The failure of the law to justify the sinner became the occasion for God to step in and redeem lost humanity, for God, sending His Own Son in our likeness, tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin, as a sin offering, to condemn sin once and for all, for Jesus was born with our humanity, with our corruptible nature.

By Jesus miraculous conception and virgin birth He assumed our human nature but escaped the condemnation of Adam’s sin. (He was ‘Free-born, of whom Paul was a type). The law could not redeem Adam’s race so God sent His Son to redeem lost humanity from bondage to sin. But Jesus’ miraculous conception and virgin birth was not sufficient of itself to obtain redemption for us. It was only the first step. While Jesus did not share Adam’s condemnation as we do, Adam’s sin had first to be taken care of and in order to pay for Adam’s transgression every demand of the law had to be fully met and Jesus did this in His perfect life of obedience for He said “Who convinceth Me of sin?” Jesus fought extremely hard against sin in order to condemn it “who in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death, and was heard in that He feared.” (Hebrews 5:7). In the days of His flesh tells us when Jesus condemned sin as in Romans chapter eight where Paul says Jesus “condemned sin in the flesh” that is, He condemned sin while He was in the flesh. This is why Jesus was so very precious in the eyes of His Father. The righteous demands of the law must be met and the price paid to the last farthing. This was accomplished by Jesus, who needed no redemption for Himself, who was free of Adam’s sin, took it upon Himself to pay the price of our redemption on Calvary’ cross.

The fact that the law cannot save the sinner, nor keep those in Christ saved, is not the fault of the law but of our weakness and sinfulness, because we cannot, of our own efforts, attain unto the righteousness of God. So God, in His great love for us, sent His Son into the world, and though He was born with the same nature as ourselves. He trusted not in His own strength, but appealing constantly to His Father, He walked not after the flesh, and paying the price required by the law for our redemption, offered us His own righteousness that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us. Not by us, but IN us. Have we been trying to make ourselves fit for salvation? Have we tried to earn God’s favour by doing our best? Our best is not good enough. We must accept His righteousness and live by faith. Abraham was saved by believing. “Abraham believed God and it was accounted unto him for righteousness.” And even as God is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6), a person may believe in God and be lost for ever and indeed will be, if all he does is believe in God, for here is no diligent seeking. It is necessary to believe and seek diligently. We are His disciple and must follow His discipline.

### **We are His servants and our duty is to serve Him.**

The great things Jesus accomplished on our behalf satisfied all the requirements of the law and condemned sin. It shewed the awfulness of sin and the great love of God and His own great love for us, for “greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends...” (John 15:15). The result is that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us! The imputed righteousness provided by Jesus, who died to pay the price demanded by the law; who rose from the dead to take His own righteousness and clothe us with it!

The price is now paid and because we are in Christ, God looks upon us as being righteous, for Jesus is “made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Corinthians 1:50). God accepts what Jesus has done on our behalf and reckons it to our account. Now He sees us in Jesus as “to the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved. In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace.” (Ephesians 1:6,7).

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