

The Lawgiver

Centuries before the Roman Empire spread its vast reach across Europe, North Africa and the Middle East with rulers such as Julius Caesar leading powerful armies to conquer new lands, there was the much smaller Kingdom of Rome. Unlike other kingdoms, this one had a quite democratic method of choosing its kings: they were elected. But once elected, they held office for life and (like many ancient kings) wielded great – almost total – power.

The King of Rome was not only the head of the government and commander of the army, but also the chief priest, judge and legislator. Imagine all that power. The King decreed what was law, decided when someone had violated it, determined the punishment and represented the wrongdoer seeking appeasement before their pagan gods. The King was one powerful man. But he was just a man, with faults, limitations, mortality.

The Lord our God is a great and powerful lawgiver, one who is faultless, unlimited, immortal. He has given us his word, the Bible, as our guide. The first five books – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy – are often called the Books of the Law because in them we are introduced to God's laws for his people. The Jews simply called them Torah, meaning to shoot straight. This week we will explore what it means to be given the gift of God's law.

Monday – The Judge of All the Earth

"To offend and judge are distinct offices, and of opposed natures." William Shakespeare, The Merchant of Venice (Act 2, sc. 9)

1. Please read Genesis 18:16-26. What was it that grieved God about the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah?

Text Insight: This physical appearance of God with Abraham is what Bible scholars call a Christophany, Christ (God the Son) appearing in bodily form before the birth of Jesus.

2. In this passage, God had given his people a law that the people were to live up to. First hand, he investigated the reports that his law was being broken, and he was prepared to judge the people and carry out the necessary sentence. What is it about God's nature that makes it right for him to perform these functions?
3. What assurance are we given in verse 25 that God will decide this case correctly? How significant is it that God chooses to visit in bodily form?

Making it Personal: Do you trust God to do what is right? Ask him to assure you of his love for you.

Tuesday – Giving the Law

Covenant: a formal agreement of legal validity. Random House Dictionary, unabridged (2006)

1. Please read Exodus 24:3-7. Describe the Israelites' response and promise upon receiving "all the LORD's words and laws" from Moses.
2. In Deuteronomy 8:1-9, what did God say he had done for his people? What did he further promise to do?
3. What warning is given to the Israelites in Deuteronomy 8:10-20 if they fail to live up to their obligations in their covenant with God?

Digging Deeper: The covenant we are under today is called the New Covenant, made possible by the blood of Christ. It is a covenant not written on paper but on human hearts. Read Hebrews 8 and record some insights as to how this New Covenant is different from its predecessor.

Wednesday – Rediscovering God's Word

"That is a good book which is opened with expectation and closed with profit." Amos Bronson Alcott, 19th c. American educator and writer

1. Please read 2 Kings 22:1-13. How old was Josiah when the officials found the Book of the Law? What had happened in Israel in the absence of the Law of the Lord?

Text Insight: The Book of the Law found by the High Priest was probably a scroll of the Book of Deuteronomy.

2. What was Josiah's response in verses 11-13? What might the phrase "concerning us" mean for us today?
3. In 2 Kings 23:1-3, Josiah shared his new knowledge of God's word. How does the people's response remind you of the scene in Exodus 24:7?

Making it Personal: How do you respond to the Bible?

Thursday – The Word of Joy

"A joy that's shared is a joy made double." English proverb

1. Please read Nehemiah 8:1-12. How did the people first respond to hearing God's word (verses 6 & 9)? Why do you think they reacted this way?
2. What were the leaders careful to do with God's word in verses 7-8? Why is this important even today?
3. According to verses 10-12, what is the result of learning from God's word? How did the people share their joy?

Making it Personal: Ask God to guide you as to how you should regularly read and gain understanding from the Bible.

Friday – The Word fulfills the Law

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." John 1:1, speaking of Jesus Christ

1. Please read Matthew 5:17-19. What is Jesus' role regarding the Law of God? Why is this proper in light of John 1:1?
2. What does Paul tell us in Romans 13:8-10 about fulfilling the Law?
3. How is love shown when fulfilling the law as Jesus instructed in Matthew 5:21-6:4?

Making it Personal: God longs to see his Word fulfilled. Do you desire to experience the fulfillment of God's law? Ask God to show you how you can love others in obedience to his word.

For the Weekend: Read 1 John 3:11-24, 4:7-21 and 5:1-5 to learn more about fulfilling the commands of God. Spend time in prayer considering how God specifically wants you to love him and those around you.