Andrews University Seminary Studies, Vol. 48, No. 1, 7-15.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MOSES AND ELIJAH

Adventist Theological Society
Presidential Address 2009

Roy E. Gane
Andrews University

Introduction

The last prophet of the Hebrew Bible concluded his appeal with these words:

> Remember the teaching of my servant Moses, the statutes and ordinances that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel. Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents, so that I will not come and strike the land with a curse (Mal 4:4-6; NRSV here and in subsequent quotations).

Malachi pointed back to Moses and forward to a future prophetic ministry like that of Elijah. Moses and Elijah represent Torah ("Teaching") and Prophets. But Moses was also a great prophet, and later prophets brought their people back to his covenant and Torah. Thus Torah is prophetic and the Prophets are Torah. The Writings portion of the Hebrew Bible also builds on Torah (e.g., Ezra 3:2; Neh 8:1, 14; 9:14). So Isaac Kikawada, a Japanese scholar at the University of California, Berkeley, aptly referred to the three parts of the Hebrew Scriptures as Torah, Torah, Torah.[1]

The New Covenant/Testament also builds on Torah. Quoting Deut 6:5 and Lev 19:18, Jesus stated that all the Torah and the Prophets hang on love (Matt 22:37-40), which he reaffirmed as the principle to govern his followers (John 13:34-35; 14:15, 21). On the road to Emmaus, the risen Christ queried, "Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things?" Then he showed how Moses and the other prophets revealed him and his role (Luke 24:26-27).

Unity between Torah, Prophets, and New Covenant was affirmed when their living representatives appeared together on a mountain. There the transfigured Christ conversed with the glorified Moses and Elijah regarding his *exodus* ("departure"; Luke 9:28-31; cf. Mark 9:2-4; Matt 17:2-3). Here are Moses and Elijah in the Gospel narrative, in historical time. Jesus and the NT writers believed their stories and witness to God, or their appearance on the Mount of Transfiguration would be meaningless. Moses and Elijah had been grand ministers of the gospel in their times, so they also ministered to the Son of God when he needed encouragement to offer the sacrifice on which the gospel is based.[2]

[1]Presidential address, annual meeting of the Pacific Coast region of the Society of Biblical Literature, Santa Clara, California, 1986.

[2]Moses and Elijah knew about departures and mountains (Exod 12–13, 19, 24;

Moses' Gospel of Deliverance

Moses' gospel concerned deliverance from Egypt (Exod 3–15; cf. Rev 15:3-4) to a new, better society, guided and blessed through a covenant with God. Rather than forming and regulating this society according to a neat, abstract rule-book that could be applied with equal ease to any community throughout history, God demonstrated his dream for the Israelites in ways they could better understand: by interacting with them in their own historical context. God reaches out to people where they are, not in a cultural vacuum.[3] Like taking care of a child, the approach is a bit messy, but it is more successful than limiting nurture to systematic proclamation of magisterial maxims.

Accordingly, Christopher Wright urges that we allow the OT

> to say what is says 'warts and all', and refrain from sprinkling our moral disinfectant around its earthiness or wreathing its human characters in stained-glass hagiography. Yet at the same time we receive the Old Testament as the Bible of Jesus Christ and his church. Since it renders to us the God whom we acknowledge and worship as the Holy One of Israel, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, it is ultimately the Old Testament that claims and judges us, not we who judge, convict or exonerate it.[4]

Much of God's teaching through Moses is recorded in narratives, which show how the Lord treated his people and how they responded. Even laws, which were crucial for the success of the infant nation, are embedded within the narrative framework, which tells a story of deliverance. The laws were not merely God's way to assert or maintain control; rather, they were a vehicle for further progress in delivering faulty, damaged, formerly victimized people to a better life.

There are several kinds of connections between pentateuchal laws and the narrative theme of deliverance:

1. God's laws were for grateful people who had already experienced deliverance from the pharaoh's oppressive rule (Exod 20; Deut 5); they were not to help the Israelites earn redemption.[5]

2. Pentateuchal laws reflect the character of the divine deliverer, whose holy moral character is love, which includes both justice and mercy (Exod 34:6-7; cf. Ps 85:10-11 [Heb. vv. 11-12]).[6] By teaching and empowering people

Deut 34; 1 Kgs 19; 2 Kgs 2), and they had powerfully interceded for their people (Exod 32; Num 14; 1 Kgs 18:36-37). If Christ did not die for everyone, including them, they would lose the glorified lives they were already enjoying.

[3]Cf. Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004), 48.

[4]Ibid., 445.

[5]Compare the fact that God delivered Noah and his family from the flood (Gen 7–8) before giving them covenant stipulations (chap. 9).

[6]Cf. Roy Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers,* NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 286-287; idem, *Cult and Character: Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 320. On the unity of love and justice in the character of God, see Hermann Cohen, "The Day of Atonement

to live in harmony with his love, the Lord enables them to become holy in character as he is holy (Lev 19:2, 18; cf. 1 Pet 1:14-16; cf. 1 Thess 3:12-13). So nothing less than God's character is the authority for his law: "the reality of YHWH's character implies the authority for an ethic of imitation and reflection of that character in human behaviour. We ought to behave in certain ways because that is what YHWH is like, and that reality is sufficient authority."[7]

3. Having redeemed the Israelites from the Egyptian "god-king" (Exod 12–13; Deut 7:8), the truly divine king and protector of Israel resided among them and accepted their homage (e.g., Exod 25:8; 29:38-46; Num 23:21; 28:1-8).[8] He made provision to forgive them through sacrifices, thereby delivering them from condemnation when they violated his laws (e.g., Lev 4–5). Such expiatory sacrifices showed how God remedies sin with complete love by extending mercy with justice.[9]

4. God's laws are in harmony with the principles of cause and effect that he has set up, so they are for the good of his people (Deut 10:13), delivering them from nasty results of ignorance. Their distinctive society, favored by God, is a paradigm for the service of other communities (Exod 19:4-6). When his people are blessed through sensible living, others notice their connection to him because of their prosperity (4:6-8).[10] Thus all peoples can be drawn to him so that they, too, can receive his blessings (cf. Gen 12:2-3; 22:17-18). This could be called evangelism through excellence for the healing of the nations. "Keeping the law, then, was not an end in itself for Israel, but related to their very reason for existence—God's concern for the nations."[11]

5. Because God had delivered his people, they were responsible for passing the kindness of his justice and mercy on to others, including vulnerable poor persons and debt-slaves, widows, orphans, and resident aliens (e.g., Lev 25; Deut 10, 15, 16, 24; cf. Matt 18:21-35). Divine laws even protected vulnerable animals and trees (e.g., Deut 20:19; 22:6-7, 10).

6. Pentateuchal laws delivered Israelites from social instability caused by injustice or conflict, even when this legislation may appear chauvinistic to us. For example, God gave suspected adulteresses the unique right to trial at his sanctuary Supreme Court in order to protect innocent women from

---

II," *Judaism* 18 (1969): 84.

[7]Wright, 460.

[8]In a depiction at Abu Simbel, the tent of Pharaoh Ramesses II (thirteenth century B.C.) is in the center of his war camp, but the Israelite camp was arranged around the Lord's sanctuary (Kenneth Kitchen, "The Tabernacle—A Bronze Age Artifact," *Bible and Spade* 8 [1995]: 36).

[9]Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, 284-288; idem, *Cult and Character*, 318-323.

[10]James Watts has pointed out that pentateuchal law shows YHWH's use of and adherence to internationally recognized ideals of justice (*Reading Law: The Rhetorical Shaping of the Pentateuch*, BSem 59 [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999], 96-98).

[11]Wright, 64.

false condemnation by all-male human courts (Num 5:11-31).[12] There is no corresponding suspected adulterer ritual because men did not need this level of protection. Another example is that God freed females from their vows to him when these solemn promises conflicted with the interests of their fathers or husbands, who controlled the property that women could offer to God (Num 30).[13] Thus the Lord preserved domestic harmony within the existing patriarchal culture, rather than overturning the culture through social engineering.[14] Patriarchal culture was not a divinely instituted, timeless norm. It was not the message, but part of the background, the imperfect ground that God tilled to accomplish his purposes.[15]

7. Divine laws separate right from wrong in a way that can provide vindication and profound emotional deliverance to those who are innocent and victimized. Minnie Warburton searingly describes how Lev 18 brought her healing:

> I remember very clearly the moment. Sunlight coming in the window onto my desk . . . and the pages . . . the words leaping out at me. . . . "You shall not have intercourse with . . ." Incest taboos. One after another. I slammed the book shut. I was shocked. I had no idea *that* was in the Bible. I never imagined it might be mentioned there. I was reeling. . . .
>
> It didn't matter that my father by now was six years dead. Nor did it matter that long before he'd died, I'd confronted him on all the things he'd done to me. Nor did it even matter that he'd continued to deny them until the day he did die. . . . I never knew that what he did was condemned by *his* God before he ever did it. I never knew he was breaking God's law. But there it was, clear as anything. . . .
>
> I will never be able to explain what that moment was like, that discovery of Leviticus 18. I wanted to call up everyone I knew and say, "It was wrong. What he did was wrong. It says so right here, in the Bible." Therapists had told me, my own instincts told me, everything had told me—yet *nothing* told me the way Leviticus told me. Wrong. Condemned. Hateful in the eyes of

[12]Cf. Herbert C. Brichto, "The Case of the Śōṭā and a Reconsideration of Biblical 'Law,'" *HUCA* 46 (1975): 67; Jacob Milgrom, *Numbers*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), 350; idem, "A Husband's Pride, a Mob's Prejudice," *BRev* 12 (1996): 21.

[13]Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, 764.

[14]As communism has attempted to do, with catastrophic results.

[15]Within the patriarchal society, it made good sense that hereditary priests (restricted to Aaron and sons) be male. Undoubtedly there were other practical reasons for this limitation, e.g., to avoid defiling sancta due to internal (and therefore not always discerned) onset of female impurity, distancing from fertility cults, and the need for priests to guard the sanctuary. None of these carry any weight in limiting Christian ministry to males. Our ministers belong to the priesthood of all believers (1 Pet 2:9). Christians have no elite mediatorial priesthood aside from that of Christ in heaven (cf. Heb 4:14-16). Like all Israelite sacrificial animals, female victims (e.g., Lev 4–5; Num 15, 19) represented Christ (cf. John 1:29), ruling out the notion that a female could not represent him (Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, 375-377).

> God. Even as I wanted to yell out, I was struck dumb, speechless. It was wrong, truly truly wrong. And for the first time I felt utterly and absolutely vindicated. For the first time, I felt clean. For the first time I felt that what had happened was between him and his God and he'd have to make his expiation however he did it. I felt absolved. I felt released.
>
> What is striking to me now, even as I write this, is that what I am describing is precisely the effect that scripture should and can have. That if scripture is in any way the word of God then it is an awesomely powerful agent. We need to be judicious when reading scripture . . . but we also need to remain open to hearing, because the voice of scripture can indeed heal, can absolve, can cleanse and purify.[16]

Elijah's Gospel of Deliverance

Like Moses' role, that of Elijah involved deliverance. God used him at Mount Carmel to deliver his people from the confusion of apostasy and from false religious leaders who refused the kingdom of heaven and prevented others from entering it (1 Kgs 18; cf. Matt 23:13). Like Moses, Elijah was concerned with social justice. When Ahab and Jezebel abused their royal power to seize the ancestral inheritance of Naboth through judicial murder, it was the prophet who issued divine condemnation (1 Kgs 21).

Most striking about Elijah was his deliverance from death itself, which he had earlier craved (1 Kgs 19:4),[17] when he vanished into the sky (2 Kgs 2). The facts that he did not die and that Malachi prophesied a future Elijah ministry (Mal 4:5-6) spawned hope that he might return (Mark 6:15; 8:28; John 1:21).

Malachi's Elijah is also a deliverer, but not in the way we would expect. After the words, "Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes" (4:5), we anticipate something dramatic like: "As at Carmel, he will call consuming fire down from heaven to show that the Lord alone is God" (1 Kgs 18:36-39; cf. 2 Kgs 1:9-12—consuming enemies). For Israelites and Seventh-day Adventists, that would be a satisfying way to end the OT.[18] Instead, we hear a kind of "still small voice"[19] anticlimax: "He will turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents, so that I will not come and strike the land with a curse" (Mal 4:6).

Reconciling parents and children is an important example of restoring relationships. Elsewhere, Malachi is concerned about other relationships, such as between husbands and wives (2:13-16), his people and their ancestors (2:1-12), and the people and their divine father (1:6). Lest we entertain the notion that reconciliation is of trifling significance, the Hebrew word for "curse" in

[16]Minnie Warburton, "Letting the Voice of Leviticus Speak," *Sewanee Theological Review* 37 (1994): 166-167.

[17]Cf. discouraged Moses' death wish (Num 11:15).

[18]But note that the Hebrew Bible ends with 2 Chronicles.

[19]Or "soft whisper" (קוֹל דְּמָמָה חַרְשׁ קוֹל דְּמָמָה; 1 Kgs 19:12).

4:6 is none other than the terrifying חֵרֶם, which refers to sacral devotion to total destruction (e.g., Num 21:2-3; Josh 6:17, 21; cf. Mal 4:1).

The angel who announced the birth of John the Baptist as a fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy more fully described "Elijah" ministry:

> he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord (Luke1:15c-17).[20]

Here God's Spirit empowers return to God, relational reconciliation, and character transformation to prepare for the Lord's coming. From Paul, we learn the secret of the Spirit's power: This divine personality pours unselfish love, the basis for reconciliation and transformation, into the hearts of those who have peace with God through faith in Christ (Rom 5:1, 5). Growth in this kind of love is growth in holiness (sanctification), which also prepares Christians for Christ's Second Coming:

> And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints (1 Thess 3:12-13).

Ongoing Benefit of Divine Ethical Teaching

In Mal 4:4-6, there is a tight connection between the "Elijah" message of reconciliation (vv. 5-6) and the laws of Moses that God's people are to remember (v. 4): Both are about God's kind of unselfish love in relationships.[21] Loyalty to God is expressed through ethical treatment of other people.

The appeal of Malachi ("My Messenger") to remember divine teaching mediated through Moses, the founder of Judeo-Christian ethics, is echoed by an angel/messenger in Rev 14 during a judgment before Christ's Second Coming (v. 7): "Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and hold fast to the faith of Jesus" (v. 12).[22]

As a group with eschatological self-awareness, Seventh-day Adventists know how to evangelize with vivid graphics of apocalyptic beasts, identifications of Antichrist, predictions of Armageddon, and by upholding the law of God. These are important. But have we fully grasped the importance of receiving love through faith in Jesus and following his example of life and

[20]Also Jesus identified John the Baptist as a fulfillment of Malachi's Elijah (Matt 11:12-14; 17:12-13).

[21]This love is the only principle on the basis of which "intelligent beings with free choice can live in harmony and not destroy each other" (Roy Gane, *Altar Call* [Berrien Springs: Diadem, 1999], 88).

[22]On the parallel between these requirements (keeping God's commandments and holding Jesus' faith) and the Israelite expressions of loyalty to God on the Day of Atonement—humbling through self-denial and keeping Sabbath by abstaining from work (e.g., Lev 16:29), see Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, 413.

faith as the basis for obedience to the commandments and reconciliation with one another?

Principles contained in God's paradigmatic pentateuchal teaching continue their usefulness as guides to practical love and reconciliation.[23] Christians have tended to limit timeless moral law to the Ten Commandments. These are paramount examples, but elsewhere there are other straightforward statements of moral principles that similarly lack cultural limitations (e.g., Lev 18, 20; cf. 1 Cor 5).

Christians routinely dismiss the "civil laws" of Moses as obsolete and irrelevant. But beneath their cultural garb and apart from their ancient penalties, much of this neglected body of divine legislation incarnates valuable and timeless moral principles that are subprinciples of God's overarching principle of love, which can and should guide the interpersonal growth of modern Christians. For example, Exod 23:4 commands: "When you come upon your enemy's ox or donkey going astray, you shall bring it back." The principle is respect and care for another's property, the opposite of stealing (20:15), even if the owner has not treated you well in the past. This law shows one practical way to fulfill Jesus' teaching: "Love your enemies" (Matt 5:44).[24]

God does not ask for "knee-jerk," unthinking obedience that thumps the Bible and intones the mantra: "Just read and do!" If he did, we would need massive reform to reinstitute levirate marriage (Deut 25:5-10). No, there is an intermediate step of analysis and reflection to handle the word of truth accurately (2 Tim 2:15): "Read, think, and then do." It is timeless principles, not culture, that are authoritative for us. But differences in culture must be taken into account in the process of identifying biblical principles and applying them to our contexts.

[23]On the relationship between a total paradigm and principles embodied in it, see Wright, 70-71.

[24]I have tentatively concluded that any given biblical law "should be kept to the extent that its principle can be applied unless the New Testament removes the reason for its application." The exception clause accommodates Acts 15, which has removed the reason and therefore the requirement for circumcision, which we could otherwise keep (Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, 310). Thus I agree with Gordon Wenham that "the principles underlying the OT are valid and authoritative for the Christian, but the particular applications found in the OT may not be" (*The Book of Leviticus*, NICOT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979], 35). A considerable number of biblical laws have limited or no application for modern Christians because the institutions or situations they were designed to regulate no longer exist. E.g., without the sanctuary/temple, we cannot keep the biblical festivals and their required sacrifices (Lev 23; Num 28–29), and we do not need deacons and deaconesses at the doors of our churches asking personal questions to exclude the ritually impure (cf. Lev 15). Without ancestral land tenure we cannot observe the Jubilee (Lev 25), and without levirate marriage we should not urge married men to marry their widowed and childless sisters-in-law additionally (Deut 25:5-10). Without the ancient theocratic judicial system we should not think of stoning anyone or even knocking out one of their teeth (e.g., Lev 24:13-23).

When Jesus embodied the law of Lev 19:18 ("you shall love your neighbor as yourself") in a paradigmatic case through the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37), he concluded with the words, "Go and do likewise" (v. 37).

> Jesus did not mean that the young lawyer who had asked him the question should hire a donkey, buy some bandages, oil and wine, keep some change for friendly inn-keepers, and set off immediately on the road to Jericho to look for victims of robbery with violence. Jesus' words did not mean 'Go and do *exactly the same'*. They meant 'Go and live your life in a way which expresses the same costly and barrier-crossing neighbourliness that my story illustrates—that is what it will mean to obey the law (since you asked).[25]

A Community of Love from the Spirit

The eschatological messages of Mal 4 and Rev 14 concerning relational, ethical restoration to harmony with God and his principles are basically the same. Also relevant to people living before "the great and terrible day of the Lord" is Joel's promise of a special outpouring of God's Spirit (2:28-32 [Heb. 3:1-5]), who empowers relational growth by providing love (Rom 5:5).[26]

The Spirit does not simply perform seismic signs or overwhelm the populace with the indisputable correctness of our theological argumentation. The Spirit accomplishes a more powerful witness for Christ by enabling his community to be loving and united (John 17:20-23), as his praying disciples became after his resurrection (Acts 2). The greater the challenges to unity in the church and in the world, the greater the opportunity for the "fruit of the Spirit" (Gal 5:22-23) to stand out.

As modern Christians, we have focused on individual salvation by faith in Christ. That is basic, but perhaps we have overlooked the evangelistic role of communal sanctification through growth in love. The church is not only to provide people with mutual support and to combine their outreach efforts; it should be a haven of divinely empowered social love to reveal God's character. When the early church was such a haven, its growth was exponential (Acts 2).

As the "body of Christ" (1 Cor 12), the Christian community extends the incarnate Word ministry of Jesus, which simultaneously upholds God's ideal, draws all kinds of sinners to desire it, and welcomes all who will come and enjoy the forgiveness and transformation that he offers (e.g., Matt 9; Mark 2). This balance between ideal and acceptance, law and grace, "the commandments of God" and "the faith of Jesus" (Rev 14:12), is impossible to achieve without wisdom, humility, and compassion provided by the Spirit.

It is easy to accept or condemn people the way they are. But to befriend all fallen sons and daughters of Adam and Eve and to walk together through Jesus' miracle of "new birth" to a better life (John 3; cf. 1 Cor 6:9-11; Titus

[25]Wright, 72.

[26]David W. Baker has pointed out an intertextual parallel between Joel 2:31 and Mal 4:5, both of which speak of a time "before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes" (*Joel, Obadiah, Malachi*, NIV Application Commentary [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006], 301).

3:3-7) is the real challenge, one that Christians have not always met. We could profitably ponder the following observation by Philip Yancey:

> I view with amazement Jesus' uncompromising blend of graciousness toward sinners and hostility toward sin, because in much of church history I see virtually the opposite. We give lip service to "hate the sin while loving the sinner," but how well do we practice this principle?[27]

Conclusion

Jesus' way with sinners did not make sense to Simon the Pharisee. He saw a woman who had lived a sinful life bring Jesus an alabaster jar of ointment, bathe his feet with her tears, wipe them with her hair, kiss his feet, and anoint them. The remarkable display of love only excited Simon's suspicion that Jesus must not be a prophet (Luke 7:36-39).

Just as the Shekinah Lord in Num 5 received a gift on behalf of a woman whom he judged at the sanctuary regarding sexual immorality, whose hair was also let down, and who contacted something holy, the incarnate Lord in Luke 7 accepted the woman's gift and contact with him. She was not suspected by her husband in this situation, but inwardly condemned by another man. As the Lord himself judged a suspected adulteress, Jesus miraculously answered Simon's thoughts to deliver a divine verdict: guilty as charged, but forgiven (Luke 7:47-48). "And he said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you; go in peace'" (v. 50).[28]

Jesus' forgiveness did not mean that he was lowering Moses' standard (cf. Matt. 5:27-28). It is not that his morality is weaker, but that his "new covenant" forgiveness, based on his own self-sacrifice, is stronger (cf. Acts 13:38-39). Thus Jesus' gospel culminates the deliverance messages of Moses and Elijah and points to our role: If we love Christ a lot because he has forgiven us a lot (Luke 7:40-47), we will find no greater joy than reconciling precious people to one another and to him before the great day of his return.[29]

[27]Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 259.

[28]Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, 526-528.

[29]"Malachi and John's third angel call us to repent of our uncooperative unlove that fragments our unity and thereby dilutes our witness for Christ in the world. There is one God, one Savior, one faith, one baptism, and one church body of fellowship (see Eph 4:4-6). It is time to return to the Messiah who has brought us together, to put aside our differences, to revel in our God-given diversity, to pull toward the banner of the uplifted Christ (see John 12:32) at the center of our faith, and to march victoriously through the end of the great war to the great peace on the other side!" (Roy Gane, *Who's Afraid of the Judgment? The Good News About Christ's Work in the Heavenly Sanctuary* [Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2006], 128).