



MINUTES WITH MESSIAH

Volume 6, Issue 4

Web Site: <http://www.minuteswithmessiah.com>

February 2005

NEW SNOW

There is something wonderful, some might even say mystical, about a field of new snow. How marvelous it is to come upon such a field and realize that yours will be the first footprints in this expanse of otherwise smooth whiteness. For who can resist being the first to walk across new snow? To leave your mark where nobody else has been? To some of us, this is our way to leave a mark on the world. Others might say that it just shows man's tendency to take the pure and make it impure, just as man tends toward sin.

God, on the other hand, chooses to take the impure and make it clean. He takes this same snowy field after I have walked on it, and obliterates my footprints by wind or more snow. He is the same in our spiritual lives.

It amazes me that God can take the foulest deeds and forgive them. It doesn't matter what we do. God can forgive, and cover it with a blanket like new-fallen snow. Have I lied, cheated, stolen? He forgives. Jeffrey Dahmer killed seventeen people. God forgave him. One of my favorite passages in the Bible is 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 because it gives hope that anyone can be saved.

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

God brings snow in our lives. Not a blizzard that shuts down everything. Not a blinding snowstorm. Just a gentle snow to cover our past. "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." (Ps 51:7)

Those who paint tell me that it would take several coats of white paint to cover a red wall. God doesn't need several coats, however. "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." (Isa 1:18) The interesting

thing is that it is something red like crimson that makes us as white as snow—the blood of Jesus the Christ.

For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Heb 9:13-14)

There is another side to this phenomenon that may be just as fascinating. Under the Law of Moses there was an affliction that was apparently brought on most often by gossip or slander. The Jews call it *tzaarat*, and the King James Version (and thus all subsequent English translations) called it leprosy. It could be found on bodies, clothing, or houses. Medically, *tzaarat* is not the same as the disease we know as leprosy, although there are some similarities. The principle symptom of this affliction on the body was a patch of white skin. This whiteness is described as being like snow. "The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever. And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow." (2 Ki 5:27)

It would seem that God will make us white as snow, one way or another. If we persist in sin he will make us snow-white with *tzaarat*, at least spiritually. Our bodies, our clothing, our homes will reflect our spiritual sickness. If we turn to God, he will also make us snow-white, but with a cleansing rather than an affliction. Do we want the whiteness that requires cleansing, or the whiteness that is cleansing? The choice seems obvious.

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THE TEN AND ME

Where in the Bible does it say that it is wrong to eat pork? When did God change the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday? Since Moses said to kill all homosexuals, why don't we do so today? These are some questions that I have answered on the "What Does the Bible Say About..?" portion of my web site. That they are even being asked, and especially that the question about pork is one of the most frequently visited pages of that site, shows a fundamental error of many who consider themselves Christians today. The Law of Moses, which includes the Ten Commandments, does not apply to most of us today.

Over the past year or more there have been stories of people demanding that schools remove copies of the Ten Commandments. There was the case of the judge who refused, in the face of a court order, to remove a Ten Commandments monument from view in a courthouse. When people ask me whether I think the commandments should be displayed I have a standard answer. "I have no objection to the Ten Commandments being displayed in

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government buildings any more than I have an objection to portions of the Koran being displayed. If they are going to display these scriptures, they should also display a selection of Christian scriptures as well." Frequently people are taken aback at this response, thinking that the Ten Commandments are Christian scriptures.

Then I point out that the Ten Commandments are part of the Law of Moses. The Law of Moses was given specifically to the Jews. My possibly Jewish male ancestor notwithstanding, I am not Jewish and so have never been subject to the Law of Moses. If a Christian who has been by ethnicity or conversion a Jew chooses to follow the laws of kashrut (kosher), keep the Leviticus 23 festivals, and observe Sabbath, that is a matter of personal choice that is not binding on me. If I choose to eat a ham sandwich with cheese, that is a personal choice that I must not bind on him.

Two questions usually come up when I say that non-Jewish Christians are not bound by the Ten Commandments or any part of the Law of Moses. How can you say that? Does that mean that we can murder, commit adultery, or steal?

Where Does It Say That?

First of all, what I say about the Law of Moses is not original with me. I am just repeating what Jesus, Paul, and whoever wrote the book of Hebrews had to say. "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil." (Matt 5:17) "Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator." (Gal 3:19) "If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law,) what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron? For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law." (Heb 7:11-12)

What does Jesus mean by "to fulfil" the law? What is the difference between abolishing and fulfilling? Jesus explained it in part in Luke 16:16-17. "The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it. And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail." The law had a term limit, and that limit was the coming of the kingdom of the Messiah, which was announced by John. After the "seed should come," it had no more standing. Perhaps we can find a parallel example. If I borrow \$10 from Les, I have an obligation to that debt. If I pay the money to Les, then I fulfill the debt. If Steve comes to me, while I owe Les, to ask that I pay him \$10, I have no obligation to do so. The debt is not to him. If I loan him \$10 after I paid Les, my obligation is to Steve, not Les.

And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. (Heb 10:11-14)

Jesus fulfilled the Law by paying the debt that the sacrifices under the Law could not pay in full. Paul even argues (Gal 4:4-5) that Jesus had to be born under the law

so that he could save those who were also under it. Once Jesus died on the cross, the law was fulfilled. Its purpose was complete. Its time expired. We are no longer under obligation to a law that is no longer in force.

In keeping with what Jesus had said, he fulfilled the law. In doing so he did not destroy the law. (The King James version uses the unfortunate mistranslation of “abolish” for “destroy.”) To destroy the law would be to end the law before its time. Jesus did not come to utterly destroy the Law of Moses. It was not his purpose or intent to do away with the law without fulfilling its term. While he lived on earth he kept the Law of Moses. Unlike anyone else, he kept it perfectly. If he were come to destroy the Law he would not have kept the Law. He would, rather, have gone out of his way to violate it. Instead he made sure to meet all of its terms.

Then Why Not...

When I tell people I am not under the Law of Moses, including the Ten Commandments, the next logical question is whether that means I think I can covet my neighbor’s wife or steal or kill. There are at least two responses to this ridiculous question.

The first response is that there are certain things that God considers sinful, regardless of any specific code of law. He didn’t need to have given the Ten Commandments for Cain to know that it was wrong to kill his brother Abel. Long before the giving of the Law a Pharaoh of Egypt knew it was wrong to take Abraham’s wife for his own. (Gen 12:13-20) Some of these are expressed in the Ten Commandments. Some are not.

The second response is related. Just because I am not subject to the Law of Moses doesn’t mean I am not subject to another law of God. If God has forbidden something separate from the Law of Moses, and under the law of Christ, then I am obligated to obey it, even if it is also under the Law of Moses. When a person in the United States breaks a law they are entitled to a trial by jury. Trial by jury was invented by King Henry I of England, and expanded by the great Henry II. Does the American citizen who commits a crime have the right to a jury trial because it is an essential part of English common law? No. When the United States won its independence from England it also won its independence from English law. An American jury trial is based on American law. Since the eighteenth century Americans have been freed from British law. When Christ fulfilled the Law of Moses he brought us into another law. (Heb 7:12, see above) If that law includes loving God and man, not stealing, not committing adultery, and any other thing that was part of the Law of Moses, it is not because it was part of the Law but because it is part of the Law of Christ.

Why not the Gentiles

Included in the Ten Commandments is a law that God never gave to anyone else before or since, the Sabbath. The only people that were ever required to keep the Sabbath were the Jews. Part of the Law of Moses established clean and unclean animals. Under that part of the law, it became wrong to eat pork. Why? Because God said so. There is no other reason that some animals should be singled out as unclean. These are part of what the rabbis consider unexplainable laws. They are so simply by decree of God. Just because it was part of the Law to the Jews doesn’t mean it is part of the law to me.

The state of Texas has no personal income tax. As a New Mexico resident, could I argue that I did not owe any income tax to New Mexico or the United States Government because of the Texas law? I would probably end up in jail. Laws that apply elsewhere don’t necessarily apply where I live.

Laws that were given to the Jews, and the Jews only, are not binding on those of us who are not and never have been Jewish. To try to make them binding on most

An American’s right to trial by jury has nothing to do with it being British Common Law.

Christians merely shows a lack of understanding of the principle of law. Paul said I should not condemn Jewish Christians for keeping Sabbath. At the same time he said they should not condemn me for not keeping it. “Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.” (Col 2:16-17) I can not judge anyone who keeps these things, but they were a shadow, and not to be bound on me.

If anyone chooses to eat pork, or observe Sabbath, or hold a Passover Seder I would be wrong to prevent it. My objection to Sabbatarians and those who mistakenly tell me Jesus told me not to eat pork comes only when they try to bind those things on me. If they rely on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, they don’t need to go to the Law of Moses for authority for anything. But as long as they continue to rely on Christ and not on keeping law, they have the right to observe things out of the law. And non-Jewish Christians have a right not to observe those things.

JETHRO'S WISDOM

We don't know a lot about Moses' father in law, Yisro (Jethro in English translations). We know he kept sheep. We know he was at one time a Midianite priest, but became a follower of the true God when he heard about what God had done in freeing Israel from Egyptian bondage. We know that when Moses went to Egypt he sent his wife and sons back to Yisro, and after the exodus he brought them back to Moses. And we know he was a wise man. It is that last quality that I want to examine.

The day after he brought Moses' family back, he watched his son in law judge the people. Moses would spend all day judging individual cases. Moses told Yisro, "I judge between one and another, and I do make them know the statutes of God, and his laws." (Ex 18: 16) His father in law saw that this was wearying to both Moses and the people, and suggested a system of lower courts, so Moses would only see the most difficult cases.

And thou shalt teach them ordinances and laws, and shalt show them the way wherein they must walk, and the work that they must do. Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens: And let them judge the people. (Ex 18:20-22)

Some teachers have asked why Yisro tells Moses to teach first, and then set up the judges. Wouldn't it make more sense to set the infrastructure in place, and then explain it to the people, along with the laws? Why not teach the judges the laws first, and then the people? Moses' father in law was wise enough

to see both the solution to the problem, and a root cause.

One view of the matter is that Yisro saw the need to reduce the number of cases. If Moses first taught the people how to live with each other, "the way wherein they must walk, and the work that they must do," it would lessen the basic problem. If they were taught basic people skills and simple negotiation, they could work out many of their own problems. If he set up the courts first, then the structure might be more than would be necessary after the teaching.

I think Moses' father in law saw another flaw in what Moses was doing. When each case came before him, he would then "make them know the statutes of God." He had so many cases because nobody knew what God wanted them to do. It was as if somebody came to Moses and said, "I think he is driving too fast." So Moses then tells them about the speed limit. If he set up the courts first, it wouldn't help. The judges still couldn't judge, because they wouldn't know the standard until Moses heard the case. Yisro told Moses, you first have to lay down the law so the judges will know it. Then you can rely on them. Otherwise, you frustrate them and still overwork yourself.

Sometimes we follow Moses' example. We expect people to do things, even obey God, without setting the standards. We change the rules in the middle of the game. Yisro was wise enough to see that the referees needed the rulebook before the game. When we deal with people, we need to set the expectations first. Maybe then we, like Moses, will "be able to endure, and all this people shall also go to their place in peace." (Ex 18:23)

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