

Find the Principle

By Eric Mitchell

Pre-Session Assignments

One week before the session, participants will take the following assignments.

Assignment One

Read Exodus 23:20-33; 34:11-17; Deuteronomy 20:16-18; and Psalm 137. Prepare to share your answers to the following questions: What is God's plan for Israel? Why does God want Israel *not* to interact with the Canaanites or make a covenant with them? How would intermarriage with the Canaanites lead to idolatry? Why would an Israelite rejoice at the thought of babies being dashed against rocks?

Assignment Two

Read Exodus 20:10-11; 31:14-17; Numbers 15:32-40; Deuteronomy 22:9; Matthew 12:1-12; Acts 21:25; Romans 6:14-23; 14:4-8; Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18; and Matthew 22:34-40. Prepare to share your answers to the following questions: Why is the Sabbath holy to God? What will be done to an Israelite who breaks the Sabbath law? How does the Sabbath act as a covenant or sign between God and Israel? Why does God require the Israelites to wear tassels on the corner of their clothing?

Scripture to Memorize

"Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come." 1 Corinthians 10:11

Session Goal

Consistent with God's Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit—by the end of this session, disciples will understand that with passages that are hard to understand, the authors of Scripture always have a universal principle in mind as they write.

Eric Alan Mitchell is associate professor of Old Testament and Archaeology at Southwestern Seminary, and he directs the Tel Gezer Archaeological Survey in Israel. Eric has served two churches as youth minister. He authored *A Literary Examination of the Function of Satire in the Mišpat Hammelek of I Samuel*, and coauthored *Old Testament Survey 2nd edition*. He is associate editor for the new *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* and is a translator and editor for the new *Modern English Version Bible*. He has also edited the Dead Sea Scroll fragment *FrgDSSDeut4* (Deuteronomy 12:11-14).

Eric has traveled to Israel seventeen times as well as to Jordan, Turkey, and Egypt. He currently teaches a young adult Sunday school class at Travis Avenue Baptist Church. He and his wife Nancy have been happily married for 27 years and have four children. He enjoys riding his bike, lifting weights, woodworking, and shooting guns. www.ericalanmitchell.com.

It's in the Book

30 minutes

Real-Life Scenario

Pastor George was trained to separate the Old Testament laws into one of three categories: moral laws that are timeless truths (thou shalt not steal, Exodus 20:15), civil laws (when you lend money, don't go into someone's house to take his pledge, Deuteronomy 24:10), and ceremonial laws (such as those about keeping the Passover, Deuteronomy 16).

Many today say that Christians have to keep only the "moral" laws. However, these distinctions are not always clear or consistent. If we disregard the civil and/or ceremonial laws, we can miss significant theological principles which the authors intended. Is this a new thought for you?

Assignment One Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment One** during the week can now report on God's plan for Israel (Exodus 23:22-23), God's desire for Israel to avoid interaction with the Canaanites or making a covenant with them (Exodus 34), and how intermarriage with the Canaanites would lead to idolatry (Exodus 34:15-16).

Read Exodus 23:20-33 out loud.

Studying the Passage

Verse 20. to bring you to the place. God's plan was to bring Israel to the land which He had promised to Abraham. God could not give it to Abraham because He was giving the Amorites time to repent (Genesis 15:16).

Verse 23. I blot them out. God planned to destroy the idolatrous peoples living within the promised land.

Verse 24. You shall not bow down to their gods. God's principle in destroying the Canaanites was to keep Israel from the sin of idolatry.

Read Deuteronomy 20:16-18 out loud.

Studying the Passage

Verse 17. But you shall devote them to complete destruction. God commanded Israel to be His instrument of judgment upon the Canaanites.

Verse 18. that they may not teach you. Again the principle was to keep Israel holy and free from idolatry. It may sound harsh, but serving God alone is a primary principle for all mankind for all times. God did not treat Israel any differently from the Canaanites. Centuries later, when Israel broke the covenant, they were conquered and sent out of the land as well.

Assignment Two Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Two** during the week can now report on why God set aside or sanctified the Sabbath day (Exodus 20:11), the consequence which God required for any Israelite who breaks the Sabbath law (Exodus 31:14-15), the nature of the Sabbath law as a covenant or sign (Exodus 31:16-17) and which laws are specifically required of New Testament believers (Matthew 12; Acts 21:25; Romans 6:14-15; and 14:4).

Read Exodus 31:14 out loud.

Studying the Passage

Verse 14. Keep the sabbath. This meant for all Israel to rest on the Sabbath in honor of God's resting from His work in creation. **Everyone who profanes it.** The principle is that whoever works on the Sabbath was not a part of God's covenant people. He showed disregard for God and did not honor God as Holy, as Creator or as their covenant God. That person was to be cut off from the people of Israel and put to death.

Read Numbers 15:32-38

Studying the Passage

Verse 32. a man gathering sticks on the sabbath. All the people gathered to stone the man for his action. The man broke the law of the Sabbath, which revealed both the man's attitude (see above) and the principle behind the law.

Verse 38. Tell them to make tassels. The principle behind this law is simple. The tassels were to remind Israel to keep the laws of God.

Read Matthew 12:1-12 out loud.

Studying the Passage

Verse 7. I desire mercy. Jesus' interpretation of the law of the Sabbath is that the law must be kept but that mercy and compassion take precedence.

Read Romans 6:14 out loud.

Studying the Passage

Verse 14. you are not under law. Christians are now slaves of righteousness, being set apart for service to God and eternal life in Christ.

Read Romans 14:5,13 out loud.

Studying the Passage

Verse 5. One person esteems one day. In practice, the early church had freedom to worship on any and every day of the week (see Acts 2:46).

Verse 13. let us not pass judgment on one another. As we serve the Lord, we are not to judge one another regarding how we serve Him (see Colossians 2:16). Apparently, the early church often met on the first day of the week (i.e., Sunday, see 1 Corinthians 16:2; Acts 20:7). When John mentions the Lord's Day in Revelation 1:10, he may have been referring to the first day of the week (Sunday). The principle here is to set aside one day for weekly worship to honor God.

Read Matthew 22:34-40 out loud.

Studying the Passage

Verse 36. the great commandment. Jesus announced two principles that summarize "the whole Law and the Prophets" (v.40).

Verse 37. love the Lord your God with all your heart . . . soul . . . mind. This command is to

love God with one's total being (see Deuteronomy 6:5).

Verse 39. love your neighbor as yourself. This second great commandment is like the first one (see Leviticus 19:18). Disciples also remember that Jesus said, "Whoever has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me" (John 14:21). We need to search out and keep the commands of Christ in the New Testament.

On Your Own

Study 1 Samuel 21:1-6 and Matthew 12:1-8. In the space below, write answers to questions based on the law of "the bread of the Presence" being for the priests to eat:

What did this law mean to its original audience?

What is the difference in culture and understanding between the initial audience and Christians today?

What is the timeless, universal principle from the text (it should be relevant to Old Testament and New Testament believers)?

How can you correlate the principle with New Testament teaching? Does the New Testament repeat, reaffirm, expand or change a law?

How can you apply the universal principle to life today?

Discussion Questions

How can finding the universal principle in a passage help believers today to see the usefulness of ancient Old Testament laws for teaching, reproof, correction and training in righteousness (see 2 Timothy 3:16)?

Heart and Hands

8 minutes

Read again the **Real-Life Scenario** near the beginning of the lesson. Consider whether your answers have changed during the session.

Be silent for two or three minutes. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice and for the gospel. Adore Him for His glorious reign on the throne of heaven. Then ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you:

1. A way the Scriptures you studied today will change your heart for the glory of Christ.
2. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to stop doing something for the glory of Christ.
3. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to do something for the glory of Christ.

Write what the Spirit reveals to you below, and then be ready to share what you have written with the group.

Since Last Week

5 minutes

Grace-Filled Accountability

5 minutes

Planning for Evangelism, Missions, and Service

5 minutes

Prayer

7 minutes

Every disciple will pray aloud, offering praise to Jesus, thanking Him specifically for His gracious acts, making heartfelt confession, committing to actions flowing from the Bible study, praying toward evangelism locally and globally, and interceding for others as prompted by the Holy Spirit.

At Home: Nail It Down

The following discussion will provide a practical example of applying the universal principle in an Old Testament passage to life today.

Moses gives an unusual law in Deuteronomy 25:4: “You shall not muzzle the ox when it is treading out the grain.”

First, the reader of this passage must determine what it meant to the original audience.

This law meant exactly what it states. Ancient farmers would use an ox to pull a sled of wooden planks, embedded with rocks, back and forth over piles of grain. This would separate the grain from the chaff. As the ox worked, it could dip its head down and eat the grain. If they muzzled the ox, they would lose no grain, but this would be torture for the animal being so close to the grain and not being allowed to eat.

Second, the reader should ask, What is the difference in culture and understanding between the initial audience and Christians today? Most modern cultures do not use oxen to thresh wheat and do not immediately understand this concept.

Third, the reader should discern the timeless, universal principle from the text. The universal principle is that every worker should be fed and supported.

Fourth, the reader should correlate the universal principle with New Testament teaching.

Paul used this Old Testament principle that every worker should be fed and supported. Then he presented a New Testament principle: that vocational ministers should be financially supported by the churches (see 1 Corinthians 9:8 and especially 1 Timothy 5:17-18).

Fifth, the reader should apply the universal principle to life today. Believers and churches can apply this principle today through their financial support of their vocational ministers.

Follow-up Question:

Beyond the passages used in this lesson, what is an Old Testament law that reveals a universal principle we can apply today?

The Making Disciples curriculum is a gift from Southwestern Seminary to those who, for the glory of the Father and in the power of the Spirit, will spend a lifetime embracing the full supremacy of the Son, responding to His kingly reign in all of life, inviting Christ to live His life through them, and joining Him in making disciples among all peoples.