

to face in the mount out of the midst of the ^bfire,

5 (I stood between the LORD and you at that time, to ^ashew you the word of the LORD: for ye were ^bafraid by reason of the fire, and went not up into the mount;) saying,

6 ¶ ^aI am the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.

7 Thou shalt have none other gods before me.

8 Thou shalt not make thee *any* graven image, or any likeness of *any thing* that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the waters beneath the earth:

9 Thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God *am* a jealous God, visiting ^athe iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth ^bgeneration of them that ^chate me,

10 And shewing ^amercy unto thousands of them that ^blove me and keep my commandments.

11 Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain: for the LORD will not hold *him* guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

12 Keep the ^asabbath day to sanctify it, as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee.

13 Six days thou shalt labour, and do all thy work:

14 But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: *in it* thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thine ox, nor thine ass, nor any of thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; that thy man-

servant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou.

15 And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and *that* the LORD thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the LORD thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day.

16 ¶ Honour thy father and thy mother, as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee; that thy days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with thee, in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.

17 Thou shalt not ^akill.

18 Neither shalt thou commit ^aadultery.

19 Neither shalt thou ^asteal.

20 Neither shalt thou bear ^afalse witness against thy neighbour.

21 Neither shalt thou ^adesire thy neighbour's wife, neither shalt thou ^bcovet thy neighbour's house, his field, or his manservant, or his maidservant, his ox, or his ass, or any *thing* that is thy neighbour's.

22 ¶ These words the LORD spake unto all your assembly in the mount out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of the thick darkness, with a great voice: and he added no more. And he ^awrote them in two ^btables of stone, and delivered them unto me.

23 And it came to pass, when ye ^aheard the voice out of the midst of the darkness, (for the mountain did burn with fire,) that ye came near unto me, *even* all the heads of your tribes, and your elders;

24 And ye said, Behold, the LORD our God hath ^ashewed us his ^bglory and his greatness, and we have heard his ^cvoice out of the midst of

4b Ex. 3: 2 (2-4); 19: 18.
5a HEB declare to.
b Ex. 3: 6; 20: 18 (18-21); Matt. 17: 6 (5-7).
6a Ex. 20: 2 (2-17);
Moshiah 13: 12 (12-24).
9a IE the effects of sin.
b D&C 124: 50.
c TG Accountability;
Hate.
10a TG Mercy.

b TG God, Love of.
12a TG Sabbath.
16a TG Honoring Father
and Mother.
17a TG Murder.
18a TG Adultery.
19a TG Stealing.
20a TG Lying.
21a TG Covetousness.
b HEB desire.
22a TG Scriptures, Writing.

b TG Law of Moses.
23a Ex. 19: 9 (7-13); Deut.
4: 10 (10-12), 33 (33,
36).
24a TG Jesus Christ,
Appearances, Ante-
mortal.
b TG Glory.
c TG God, Manifestations
of.

Teachers have a duty to understand the spiritual purposes of Old Testament laws and to help students discover modern applications of underlying principles.

Teaching Old Testament Laws

Robert E. Lund

Robert E. Lund (LundRE@ldschurch.org) works in college curriculum for the Church Educational System.

Why is it important to study Old Testament laws? Although some people dismiss them as lesser laws with no modern application, the Lord declared that there is a spiritual purpose for every law given (see D&C 29:34). Further, modern revelation commissions the gospel teacher to “teach the principles of my gospel, which are in the Bible” (D&C 42:12). In addition, the law of Moses contains many elements currently found in the gospel of Jesus Christ. I believe that teachers have a duty to understand the spiritual purposes of the law of Moses as well as the other laws in the Old Testament and to help students discover modern applications of underlying principles (see 1 Nephi 19:23).

One of the primary objectives of a gospel teacher is to help the learner have a successful experience studying the scriptures. This can be a particular challenge when students are studying the Pentateuch. After becoming accustomed to the narrative of Genesis, a teacher may be tempted to look only for the well-known stories in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, or Deuteronomy and completely avoid any of the laws. With some effort, however, gospel principles can be distilled from these laws, enhancing the scriptural experience of the learner.

This article offers assistance to teachers faced with the task of teaching Old Testament laws and finding relevant principles for their students. It also provides a few suggestions in an effort to help both the teacher and the learner be edified and rejoice together (see D&C 50:22).

Moses Was the Head of the Church and the Government

Moses was both the prophet and the chief government leader for the people. It is often difficult for modern readers of the Old Testament to keep in mind that, at this time, the children of Israel had a theocratic form of government—a stark contrast to the democratic environment of many nations today. The modern learner is prejudiced to keep civil and religious affairs separate. The Prophet Joseph Smith explained, however, that during Moses’s time, there was no distinction between civil and ecclesiastical affairs: “When the children of Israel were chosen with Moses at their head, . . . their government was a theocracy. . . . [Moses] taught the people, in both civil and ecclesiastical affairs; they were both one, there was no distinction.”²¹

The theocracy of the Old Testament is often a stumbling block for people when they are analyzing Old Testament laws. They usually read the Old Testament with the idea that all laws were purely religious in nature. To overcome this hurdle, the modern reader should sort through the Old Testament laws to determine whether a particular law was civil, religious, or both. Moses and the priests, who were also the judges, were required to put all Old Testament laws into effect, regardless of the civil or religious application. Some Old Testament laws were not part of the gospel of Jesus Christ but were given for civil purposes only. However, all the Old Testament laws were given to improve the condition of the people. President Joseph Fielding Smith comments that Moses was an instrument for God to help the children of Israel temporally and spiritually: “It is verily true that through [Moses] the Lord gave many laws and commandments for their government and spiritual development.”²² Moses not only instructed the priests to assist the people in their religious conduct but also taught them how to administer civil laws in equity and justice.

Classify Each Law and Identify Its Underlying Principle

The laws, commandments, rules, and teachings in the Old Testament can be understood better when classified into one of the following categories: (1) *eternal laws*, basic gospel truths that are in full force during any dispensation; (2) *preparatory or carnal laws*, commands that were done away with or fulfilled by the Atonement of Jesus Christ (see 3 Nephi 9:19; D&C 84:23–27); (3) *criminal or civil laws*, laws with penalties of death or monetary fines attached; or (4) *health or social laws*, laws designed to prevent the spread of diseases and govern dietary restrictions. Keep in mind that the law of Moses primarily

consists of the basic gospel truths and the preparatory or carnal commandments that were fulfilled by Jesus Christ.³ In addition, as their chief governmental leader, Moses instructed the people not to violate the criminal/civil laws or the health/social laws.

The advantage of organizing each law into a general category allows the learner to discover more easily its underlying principle. Yet classifying these laws poses some challenges. First, they are scattered throughout the Pentateuch. In addition, some laws overlap and fit into more than one classification. Notwithstanding these challenges, the following criteria will help determine a general category for each law. Once determined, it is easier for the teacher and the learner to understand the general purpose for the law and then discover relevant principles.

Eternal Commands Contained in the Law of Moses

Eternal laws are commandments that have been in force in all dispensations and are the basic laws of the gospel of Jesus Christ. These teachings predate the law of Moses, were emphasized during Jesus Christ's mortal ministry, and are mentioned in modern revelation. These commandments are usually considered more spiritual in nature because they deal with our relationship to God and the treatment of others. Eternal laws are generally identifiable to Latter-day Saints because they are emphasized as part of the gospel in our day.

Some examples of eternal laws include loving God with all our heart (see Deuteronomy 6:5), loving our neighbor (see Leviticus 19:18), obeying the Ten Commandments⁴ (see Exodus 20:3–17; Deuteronomy 5:7–21), caring for the widows and fatherless (see Exodus 22:22–24; Deuteronomy 10:18; 14:29), caring for the poor (see Deuteronomy 15:7–11), being chaste (see Leviticus 20:10), teaching the gospel to children (see Deuteronomy 6:7), being honest in dealings with others (see Leviticus 19:11), studying and pondering the scriptures (see Joshua 1:8), and becoming holy and pure (see Leviticus 19:2).

The following example shows how to analyze Mosaic laws to determine if they are eternal truths. Then, suggestions are provided on how to extract relevant gospel principles.

Consider the Ten Commandments. Are they eternal laws, or were they done away with after the Atonement of Jesus Christ? Are these Mosaic laws repeated in modern revelation? What have modern prophets said concerning the Ten Commandments?

When answering these questions, the learner will quickly realize that the Ten Commandments are in full force today and thus are likely eternal laws. Modern prophets, including President Gordon B. Hinckley,

have often referred to the eternal nature of the Ten Commandments, declaring they were given for “the salvation and . . . happiness of the children of Israel and *for all of the generations* which were to come after them.”⁵ Another reason the Ten Commandments are easily identifiable as eternal laws is that they have all been emphasized by the Lord in the Doctrine and Covenants.⁶ A brief analysis of the Ten Commandments reveals they were not unique to the Mosaic dispensation only, but they are eternal laws and the expected conduct for Saints in any age.⁷ Once Mosaic laws are identified as eternal or as part of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the underlying principles can be identified and applied.

Modern scripture and the statements of latter-day prophets are some of the best tools to extract relevant principles couched in Mosaic laws. For example, the commandments “Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not commit adultery” (Exodus 20:13–14) are repeated in modern revelation with the following addition: “nor do anything like unto it” (D&C 59:6). This additional wording goes to the underlying principle of these eternal Mosaic laws. The command not to kill nor do *anything like unto it* teaches the principle of honoring life in all its stages, including the gestation period of the unborn. Mosaic laws also recognize the value of the gestation period as follows: “If men strive, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart from her, . . . he shall be surely punished” (Exodus 21:22). The eternal law to not commit adultery *nor anything like unto it* emphasizes the law of chastity, including a ban on inappropriate touching or other such activities.⁸ Again, Mosaic laws also prohibited moral sins that were *like unto* adultery, showing the eternal nature of the law of chastity.⁹

Another method of extracting relevant gospel principles from Mosaic laws is to restate “thou-shalt-not laws” into affirmative obligations. This technique can help reveal the underlying eternal principle in a Mosaic law. For example, the Mosaic law that sets forth a person’s duty to care for the widows and fatherless reads as follows: “Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in any wise, . . . I will surely hear their cry; and my wrath shall wax hot” (Exodus 22:22–24).

James, the brother of the Lord, validates this same principle as an affirmative duty: “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction” (James 1:27; see also D&C 83:5–6). Other examples of “thou-shalt-not” Mosaic laws are “Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image. . . . Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain” (Exodus 20:3–4, 7).

The restated affirmative duty is to “love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might” (Deuteronomy 6:5; see also Luke 10:27–28). Many Mosaic laws were written in a negative manner as a prohibition, making the gospel principle less apparent. However, as shown above, when a law is restated as an affirmative duty, the gospel principle becomes clearer.

Excluding the ceremonial and carnal laws, much of the law of Moses is affirmed and practiced in our day as part of the fulness of the gospel and is applicable to Saints in any dispensation. By highlighting the eternal laws in the Pentateuch, teachers can help students have a more successful experience studying them.

Preparatory and Carnal Laws Contained in the Law of Moses

Some of the Mosaic laws that pertained to the many ceremonies and rituals were given to the children of Israel because of their failure to live the higher law.¹⁰ Abinadi explains: “And now I say unto you that it was expedient that there should be a law given to the children of Israel, yea, even a very strict law; for they were a stiffnecked people, quick to do iniquity, and slow to remember the Lord their God; therefore there was a law given them, yea, a law of performances and of ordinances, a law which they were to observe strictly from day to day, to keep them in remembrance of God and their duty towards him” (Mosiah 13:29–30).

These laws were temporary and were done away with or fulfilled by Jesus Christ.¹¹ Preparatory or carnal laws included animal sacrifice,¹² ritual feasts, and some ceremonies that, although spiritual in nature, were fulfilled or ceased to be required after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.¹³ Many of these strict daily laws came as a result of ancient Israel’s failure to accept and obey the higher law (see D&C 84:17–28; Joseph Smith Translation, Exodus 34:1–2). Therefore, the Lord revealed to Moses a series of laws that included feasts, ceremonies, and rituals to remind the people more frequently of their covenants with God (see Mosiah 13:27–33). The feasts included the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks, the Feast of Tabernacles¹⁴ (see Exodus 23:14–17; Deuteronomy 16:16), and the Feast of the Passover¹⁵ (see Exodus 12: 27; Exodus 13:15).¹⁶ Animal sacrifices¹⁷ included the burnt offering¹⁸ (see Leviticus 1:9; Deuteronomy 33:10), sin offering,¹⁹ the trespass offering, and the peace offerings.²⁰

Rather than identify sundry minutiae for the learner when teaching these portions of the law of Moses, a teacher can focus on the symbolism of the ordinance and look for modern application. For example, when teaching Leviticus 1, the teacher could ask questions that would

facilitate learner discovery to the symbolic connection between the Savior and the animal being offered (male, without blemish, and so on). Or when teaching the Passover in Exodus 11–12, the teacher can help students find the symbolic similarities between the sacrament and the Passover meal, focusing on how Saints today can offer the sacrifice of a broken heart and a contrite spirit (see 3 Nephi 9:19–22).

Although these Mosaic laws would end after the Savior's mortal mission was complete, they were always accompanied by a reverential attitude of worship still applicable in our day: "Sacrifices were . . . accompanied by prayer, devotion, and dedication, and represented an acknowledgment on the part of the individual of his duty toward God, and also a thankfulness to the Lord for his life and blessings upon the earth."²¹ Although many of these types of laws are complex and describe in detail the procedure of the ordinance, they convey an attitude of dignity in worship that can be readily identified. For example, anciently the location of the sacrificial ordinances was the temple; the temple itself is a symbol of dignity and reverence (see D&C 109; Leviticus 1).

Even though the Mosaic laws that pertained to animal sacrifices, offerings, feasts, and festivals were eventually done away with, the righteous were obedient to them. Nephi and Jacob practiced these temporary laws. For them, the instructive and spiritual purpose underlying each law was easy to identify. The heart of all these laws was the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Nephi says, "We keep the law of Moses, and look forward with steadfastness unto Christ, until the law shall be fulfilled. For, for this end was the law given" (2 Nephi 25:24–25).

Jacob says: "[The holy prophets] believed in Christ and worshiped the Father in his name, and also we worship the Father in his name. And for this intent we keep the law of Moses, it pointing our souls to him" (Jacob 4:5). All animal sacrifice symbolized the "great and last sacrifice" that would be made by the Lamb of God (Alma 34:13; see also Moses 5:4–8). Amulek teaches that after this event, "it is expedient there should be, a stop to the shedding of blood; then shall the law of Moses be fulfilled" (Alma 34:13).

Criminal and Civil Laws Contained in the Old Testament

Not every law recorded in the Old Testament was part of the law of Moses, nor did all Old Testament laws become the required religious practice in the dispensation of the fulness of times. Some laws pertained only to the criminal/civil code of Moses's time.

Often, Old Testament laws combined the function of church and state. For instance, sexual misconduct was a sin before God but

also carried criminal penalties from the government. Moses not only restored the gospel to the children of Israel but also put in place a new legal system substantially different from what they had lived under for approximately four hundred years in Egypt. This means that Old Testament laws not only included some of the basic laws of the gospel (previously noted above as eternal laws) but also contained all the associated criminal and civil code required to govern a large nation. The criminal and civil code would certainly be needed given the many conflicts the people would have while in the wilderness and later in the promised land. Moses established a new government for the children of Israel, along with many religious, civil, and criminal laws.²²

When identifying principles underlying this category of Old Testament laws, a teacher should establish the need for every society to have and maintain civil and criminal laws. The following explanation given in modern revelation will help learners understand the purpose for these types of laws and their underlying principles: “[Governments should] secure to each individual . . . the right and control of property, and the protection of life. . . . All governments necessarily require civil officers and magistrates to enforce the laws of the same” (D&C 134:2–3). The purpose for a civil and criminal code could be stressed above the specific penalties of an Old Testament law.

Assisting the learner to recognize civil and criminal laws is generally not difficult, as these laws usually contain a monetary/property penalty or capital punishment. Explaining the rationale and seemingly harsh penalties of such laws, however, is usually more difficult. For a gospel teacher, class time may be better spent identifying relevant principles. For example, “He that smiteth his father, or his mother, shall be surely put to death” (Exodus 21:15). Rather than focus on the penalty,²³ teachers could invite the learner to identify the basic principle this law teaches, which is (restated as an affirmative duty) to love and honor our parents and, of course, never smite them.

Another law states: “If an ox gore a man or a woman, that they die: then the ox shall be surely stoned, and his flesh shall not be eaten; but the owner of the ox shall be quit. But if the ox were wont to push with his horn in time past, and it hath been testified to his owner, and he hath not kept him in, but that he hath killed a man or a woman; the ox shall be stoned, and his owner also shall be put to death” (Exodus 21:28–29).

Discussions about animal cruelty or the severity of capital punishment miss relevant principles. Rather, teachers could simply classify a particular law as part of the civil or criminal code of that time and move

on or, if needed, help the learner to identify a relevant principle. In this case, property owners have a duty to monitor their livestock. In addition, once the owner has been placed on notice that his ox has attacked others previously and fails to keep it tied up or fenced in, the owner will be held accountable for the actions of that animal (his property). There is no need to overanalyze this law in an attempt to find some deeply meaningful application. This often leads to conjecture and speculation.

Examples of civil and criminal laws are plentiful in the Pentateuch. They include negligence, murder, manslaughter, abortion, stealing, witchcraft, idol worship, adultery, homosexuality, and speech laws, such as blasphemy and cursing or reviling parents or the king. Some of these laws also overlap with the eternal laws. For example, murder is a violation of not only criminal law but also eternal law.

As teachers focus on building faith in the classroom when teaching these laws, it is often best to classify a law generally, help students understand the basic principles taught in the law, and then move on. The chapter headings often give the broad category, allowing learners to more easily discover general principles.

Health and Social Laws Contained in the Laws of Moses

Another set of laws closely associated with dispensational laws are the health and social regulations that made up a sizable portion of the Pentateuch. When faced with a health or social regulation, consider the basic reasons for the law, such as preventing the spread of disease or caring for the body. In addition, emphasize the spiritual blessings that come from obeying them, such as the companionship of the Holy Ghost, protection, revelations, and goodly appearance (see Daniel 1:13–17; D&C 89:17–21).

These laws or guidelines covered dietary restrictions in Moses's day as well as social diseases, such as leprosy. For example, the ancient dietary restrictions detailed in Leviticus 11 set forth the clean and the unclean animals. At that time, the eating of swine was prohibited. Yet in our day, swine, along with several other animals formerly banned, are not prohibited under the current health code (see D&C 89).²⁴ Both ancient and modern health codes, however, command a person to take good care of and honor the mortal body God created.

Social laws included such things as purification after childbirth²⁵ (see Leviticus 12), leprosy (see Leviticus 13–14), and other potential diseases (see Leviticus 15).²⁶ These purification laws encouraged the outer cleanliness of the woman and were always concluded with an offering unto the Lord (see Leviticus 12).²⁷ Requiring the couple to go

before the Lord after childbirth placed a divine sanction on procreation as part of God’s plan. Given the principle that “children are an heritage of the Lord” (Psalm 127:3), a teacher could help students understand the reverence and holiness that attend birth and delivery.

The prevention of spreading disease and infection is the underlying basis of the laws. Consider the professional and prophetic commentary of Elder Russell M. Nelson, a medical doctor and member of the Quorum of the Twelve, concerning health standards set forth in Old Testament laws:

For centuries, lives of innumerable mothers and children were claimed by “childbirth fever”—infections unknowingly transmitted among the innocent by unwashed hands of attendants. . . .

“Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When any man hath a running issue out of his flesh, because of his issue he is unclean.

“And this shall be his uncleanness in his issue. . . .

“Every bed, whereon he lieth that hath the issue, is unclean: and every thing, whereon he sitteth, shall be unclean.

“And whosoever toucheth his bed shall wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water. . . .

“And he that toucheth the flesh of him that hath the issue shall wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water” (Leviticus 15:1–5, 7; italics added.) . . .

“And when he that hath an issue is cleansed of his issue; then he shall . . . wash his clothes, and bathe his flesh in running water, and shall be clean” (15:13).

Thus our loving Heavenly Father had clearly revealed principles of clean technique in the handling of infected patients more than three thousand years ago! These scriptures are in complete harmony with modern medical guidelines.²⁸

As teachers help students classify Old Testament laws into general categories (eternal, preparatory or carnal, civil or criminal, health or social), learners will find relevant principles and be inspired as they study the Old Testament. Even with this classification system, however, some laws don’t seem to fit cleanly into any category.

Be Content Saying, “I Don’t Know”

Even after a diligent preparation to understand the scriptures, identifying difficult areas, and anticipating possible questions, a gospel teacher should not be afraid to respond, “I don’t know why this or that particular law was recorded.” The teacher who feels compelled to give a reason why every Old Testament law was given may be susceptible to conjecture. In addition, teaching every Old Testament law may

violate the counsel of Paul, who warned gospel teachers not to stray off the main path of basic gospel principles (see Hebrews 5:12–14; D&C 19:22).

Classroom speculation is unproductive concerning the purposes of some rules and laws such as unusual health laws, the plurality of wives, servitude, male-controlled divorces, priestly prohibition on not marrying women previously married, the trial of jealousy,²⁹ and differences in purification time between male and female babies. If the particular law or practice raises troubling questions for learners, given their current spiritual maturity, speculation may lead to further confusion.³⁰

When teachers encounter laws they are unfamiliar with and cannot readily identify the underlying principle, “I don’t know” is an acceptable response. When the learner can see the teacher is comfortable in the gospel and still doesn’t know all the answers to all questions, it helps the student learn patience and to wait upon the Lord for further light and knowledge.

Avoid Being Critical of Old Testament Laws

Sometimes teachers intentionally or unwittingly criticize Old Testament laws. Some wrongly assume that these laws held people back spiritually. Others claim Jesus Christ was critical of the law when He gave the Sermon on the Mount. Any downplaying of the scriptures or God-given laws, however, is spiritually dangerous and can diminish the influence of the Spirit. Further, criticizing scriptural verses places the teacher and the learner in a precarious position. It sends the message that students can pick and choose the scriptures they agree with rather than accept the scriptures as divine.

Those who believe that Old Testament laws prevented spiritual progression fail to understand the purposes of God and deny the spiritual capacity of the Saints who lived before Christ. It is difficult to conceive that Nephi, Jacob, Abinadi, Alma, or countless others were spiritually less mature or kept back in some way by living under Old Testament laws.

Some people have a negative perception of the Old Testament laws because of the Sermon on the Mount. In that sermon, Jesus Christ restored the original intent of these laws, correcting those who had distorted or attempted to justify ungodly behavior. For example, when Jehovah commanded, “Thou shalt not commit adultery,” the original command applied to both the mind as well as the physical act. The idea that the Savior was critical of the law often comes from misinterpreting the wording, “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, . . .

but I say unto you . . . ” (Matthew 5:27–28). The antecedent to *them of old* is not Moses but those who sought to excuse their sinful conduct allowed under the oral law or rabbinical tradition.³¹ In the Sermon on the Mount, the Savior did not come to “destroy the law” but rather to restore the original intent of the law and the underlying principles with each commandment (Matthew 5:17).³²

Another mistake sometimes made by a teacher is to superficially compare our modern legal system to the civil and criminal laws in the Old Testament. For example, many speculate that “free speech” rights were very limited in the Old Testament as compared with rights under the U.S. Constitution or some other form of democracy. Teachers should avoid merely pointing out a few verses that emphasize the severity of the punishment with speech violations. The flaw of highlighting one or two obscure passages creates a distorted view of the ancient laws and often leads to criticism. Demeaning Old Testament laws by comparing them to modern laws will not motivate the learner to study this portion of the scriptures.³³

Conclusion

Teachers and students of the gospel can delve into the laws of the Old Testament and enjoy finding many relevant principles that will inspire them to understand and appreciate these laws. Rather than avoid or fear teaching Old Testament laws, teachers can have confidence that they will have a successful experience teaching the laws contained in the Pentateuch. Hopefully, teachers will help their students succeed in discovering modern principles that are applicable to students’ lives as they study the laws of the Old Testament. **RE**

Notes

1. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph F. Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book), 252.

2. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Answers to Gospel Questions*, 5 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979), 3:152.

3. See Bible Dictionary, “Law of Moses,” 722.

4. Referring to the eternal nature of the Ten Commandments, President Joseph Fielding Smith observes, “The Ten Commandments were in existence long before Moses’ time, and the Lord only renewed them in the days of Moses, just as he has done in our day” (*Answers to Gospel Questions*, 3:155).

5. Gordon B. Hinckley, in Conference Report, October 1991, 71; or *Ensign*, November 1991, 51; emphasis added.

6. All Ten Commandments have been revealed again in modern scriptures. The following table is adapted from the *Old Testament Student Manual: Genesis–2 Samuel* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2003), 135, showing the importance of the Ten Commandments in our day as part of the fulness of the gospel.

Commandment	Mosaic Reference	Modern Reference
1. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.	Deuteronomy 5:6-7	D&C 76:1-4
2. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image.	Deuteronomy 4:15-19	D&C 1:15-16
3. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.	Deuteronomy 5:11	D&C 63:61-62
4. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.	Deuteronomy 5:12-15	D&C 59:9-13
5. Honor thy father and mother.	Deuteronomy 21:18-21	D&C 27:9
6. Thou shalt not kill.	Deuteronomy 5:17	D&C 42:18-19, 79
7. Thou shalt not commit adultery.	Deuteronomy 5:18	D&C 42:22-26, 74-81
8. Thou shalt not steal.	Deuteronomy 5:19	D&C 42:20, 84-85
9. Thou shalt not bear false witness.	Deuteronomy 5:20	D&C 42:21, 27, 86
10. Thou shalt not covet.	Deuteronomy 5:21-22	D&C 19:25-26

7. In President Hinckley’s book, *Standing for Something: Ten Neglected Virtues That Will Heal Our Hearts and Homes* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), he extracts several gospel principles from the Ten Commandments for modern application (see 20, 23, and 137).

8. Modern counsel confirms the eternal nature of the law of chastity: “Before marriage, do not do anything to arouse the powerful emotions that must be expressed only in marriage. Do not participate in passionate kissing, lie on top of another person, or touch the private, sacred parts of another person’s body, with or without clothing. Do not allow anyone to do that with you. Do not arouse those emotions in your own body” (*For the Strength of Youth* [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2001], 26).

9. Other activities “like unto adultery” identified in the law of Moses included the forbidden practices of homosexuality, prostitution, and bestiality.

10. See Bible Dictionary, s.v. “Law of Moses,” 722; see also D&C 84:23–27.

11. The Lord said, “And ye shall offer up unto me no more the shedding of blood; yea, *your sacrifices and your burnt offerings shall be done away*, for I will accept none of your sacrifices and your burnt offerings” (3 Nephi 9:19; emphasis added).

12. It should be noted that animal sacrifice did not begin with the law of Moses but with Adam (see Moses 5:5–8). The law of Moses likely codified the specifics of animal sacrifice and clarified the role of the priests.

13. Circumcision was also eventually done away as a formal law; see also note 26.

14. The Feast of Tabernacles (see Leviticus 23:34), or sometimes called Ingathering (see Exodus 23:16), was a joyous feast. See Bible Dictionary, s.v. “Feasts,” 673.

15. The Feast of Pentecost began fifty days (see Leviticus 23:16) after the Feast of the Passover. See Bible Dictionary, s.v. “Feasts,” 673.

16. See Bible Dictionary, s.v. “Feasts,” 674.

17. See Bible Dictionary, s.v. “Sacrifices,” 766–67.

18. See Bible Dictionary, s.v. “Sacrifices,” 766.

19. See Bible Dictionary, s.v. “Sacrifices,” 767.

20. See Bible Dictionary, s.v. “Sacrifices,” 766.

21. See Bible Dictionary, s.v. “Sacrifices,” 766.

22. Moses was a prophet and king to the people, unlike Joseph Smith. During the Restoration, the Lord had already raised up and established a government to enforce civil and criminal rights. To the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Lord said, “According to the laws and constitution of the people, which I have suffered to be established, and should be maintained for the rights and protection of all flesh, according to just and holy principles” (D&C 101:77; see also vv. 78–80; D&C 109:54).

23. A learner may, however, want to conduct a deeper analysis of this criminal or civil law. If so, the key to interpreting this law rests on the word *smiteth*. If *smiteth* means murdered, then this law is no different than the previous law: “He that smiteth a man, so that he die, shall be surely put to death” (Exodus 21:12). If, however, *smiteth* was interpreted to mean a physical assault, then Exodus 21:15 acts as a guide for the ancient civil/criminal judge to consider capital punishment during the sentencing phase.

24. “Physical health laws” in our day restrict various dietary substances that were not prohibited anciently. The modern Word of Wisdom bans any alcoholic substance, including “any drug, chemical, or dangerous practice that is used to produce a sensation or ‘high’ can destroy your physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. These include hard drugs, prescription or over-the-counter medications that are abused, and household chemicals” (*For the Strength of Youth*, “Physical Health,” 37).

25. “In regard to the practice in Israel of purification of mothers when children were born and the offering of sacrifice of doves it should be remembered that this was a part of the law given to Moses. It was more a practice of a sanitary nature, not the cleansing of the mother because a sin had been committed. . . . Practices, such as the ‘purification’ of a mother did not exist before the time of Moses and ended when Christ fulfilled the law. We have never been commanded in this day to revive them” (Joseph Fielding Smith, *Answers to Gospel Questions* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979], 3:17).

26. Some scholars include circumcision as a health law. Because it is generally considered part of the covenant of Abraham, however, it should also be considered greater than a health law with deeper religious symbolism. The Apostles in Jerusalem discussed why the law of circumcision should be done away with after the Atonement and no longer required for new converts (see Acts 15).

27. Modern revelation confirms the sanctity of childbearing and requires parents to bring their children before the Lord and bless them (see D&C 20:70).

28. Russell M. Nelson, in Conference Report, October 1992, 6; or *Ensign*, November 1992, 7.

29. The trial of jealousy is contained in Numbers 5:11–31. It involves a unique function of the priest to administer bitter water to a wife accused by her husband of committing adultery.

30. If, however, discussion of the trial of jealousy or some other law becomes unavoidable, then we should follow the guidance of modern revelation: “Of tenets thou shalt not talk, but thou shalt declare repentance and faith on the Savior” (D&C 19:31). For example, the teacher could focus on how the trial of jealousy highlights the need for honesty and repentance in the marriage relationship. In the end, the trial shows how forgiveness and faith in the Atonement can heal the marriage relationship and cleanse sin.

31. See Bible Dictionary, s.v. “Law of Moses,” 723.

32. Like Abinadi before the priests of King Noah, the so-called spiritual leaders in Jesus Christ’s day were living in sin, claiming their understanding of the law of Moses would save them. These apostates worshiped the law above the Lord. Abinadi identifies this error and warns: “Now ye have said that salvation cometh by the law of Moses . . . ; but I say unto you, that the time shall come when it shall no more be expedient to keep the law of Moses. And moreover, I say unto you, that salvation doth not come by the law alone; and were it not for the atonement, which God himself shall make for the sins and iniquities of his people, that they must unavoidably perish, notwithstanding the law of Moses” (Mosiah 13:27–28). Likewise, Jesus Christ restored the original intent of the law that was meant to point their worship toward God.

33. Like most legal codes, the laws in the Old Testament contained the maximum punishment for any given crime—thus allowing judges to use wisdom and discretion when examining the facts to determine the severity of the penalty. Although some procedural rules may have changed on bringing forth evidence, many of the laws and their associated punishments are the same today as for ancient Israel.