

THE GRAND ESCAPE.

No. 10. The Commonsense of God.

The irony of commonsense is that it is extremely uncommon, and rated unfairly as lower than academic intelligence. A study of the Bible will show God using supreme commonsense, and a look at the laws He gave Israel as His chosen nation will convince us of their surpassing wisdom. It will be fascinating for us to look at just a few of them.

Leviticus chapter 19 begins with God's charge to all Israel – "Be holy, because I, the Lord your God, am holy." The rest of the chapter sets out how this holiness was to be worked out in everyday life, embedded in this highest code of civil laws. Respect for parents will ensure stability of the nation. Each person is to be respected, with special consideration given to the physically handicapped. Stand up for the elderly! Don't take advantage of women. Servants must be treated with dignity and released at the end of 7 years. (Exodus 21:2) Punishment for social crimes must not be excessive. Property must be respected. Ensure that everyone receives the fruit of his labours. No-one is above the law and all must receive a fair trial. Marriage must be kept inviolate and sexual perversion must be punished severely. All must be allowed to share in the Sabbath rest, servants and even animals, because God Himself is concerned for their welfare. (Poultry farmers will tell you hens lay on average 6 eggs in 7 days!) Wages must not be held back overnight: a poor man's cloak must be returned to him to give him warmth for the night. The edges of grain fields must be left unharvested, for the poor to glean freely, and vineyards must be harvested only once per season, so that the poor and the alien may gather any grapes that are left. Sown land must be left fallow in the 7th year, as any good gardener knows.

Laws are laid down in more detail in Exodus chapters 21, 22 and 23; they make interesting reading. Chapter 21 covers the treatment of servants and personal injuries. Chapter 22 covers the protection of property and social responsibility, concluding in chapter 23 with laws of justice and mercy and laws for the Sabbath. The uniquely superior standing of these laws has never been seriously questioned; a closer study reveals their outstanding standards of justice and mercy.

Exodus 21:2-11 - reasonable demands on Hebrew servants including wives and children involved. Verses 12-36 - personal injuries. Intentional murder must be punished by death but merciful judgement applies for accidental killing. Anyone who attacks or curses his parents, or kidnaps another, must die. Injury through a quarrel or through beating a slave, must be redressed. The owner of an animal that causes injury must recompense the injured in full.

Chapter 22:1-15 - protection of property. A thief must restore 5- and 4-fold for cattle or sheep taken, or he must be sold to pay for the theft. Restitution must be made if stock are allowed to graze in another's field or vineyard. An arsonist must make restitution for crops destroyed by fire. Fair rules must apply when animals or property are damaged while in the hands of a minder.

Verses 16-31 lay out social responsibility. Unmarried women must be respected and not treated as playthings, while advantage must never be taken of widows or orphans. Aliens must not be mistreated but sorceresses must not be allowed to live! A person lending money to a needy person must not charge interest. A cloak taken as a pledge must be returned to the owner at nightfall to give him warm sleep. Newborn cattle and sheep must stay with their mothers for 7 days. Don't eat the meat of an animal torn by wild beasts - any infection from the beast could be transmitted to the eater of the stock animal.

Chapter 23 has more laws of justice and mercy, mostly ignored today! Verses 1-9 - don't be a malicious witness; no false reports! Don't follow the crowd in doing wrong. Don't pervert justice by siding with the crowd and don't show favouritism in lawsuits. If a donkey of someone who hates you has fallen under its load, help him with it! ("Love your enemies," says Jesus.) Don't deny justice to the poor in their lawsuits. Have nothing to do with a false charge and don't put an innocent or honest person to death, for God will not acquit the guilty. (How come they did all that to Jesus and got away with it?!) Don't accept a bribe, and don't oppress an alien.

More Sabbath laws come in verses 10-12. Your land must have its own Sabbaths, lying unploughed and unused each 7th year, so that the poor, and the wild animals, may get food from it. This applies also to your vineyards and olive groves. Do your work on 6 days and rest on the 7th, so that your ox and your donkey may rest as well as the slave in your household, and even the alien can be refreshed! During the French Revolution an attempt to change the week to 10 days to give more working time, had to be abandoned as the animals were collapsing under the strain of only 1 rest day in ten !

Honesty must be paramount in all social interaction: no lying, fraud, partiality, bribery or perversion of justice. The poor must receive justice as much as the rich. Use honest scales and weights, and no dishonest standards when measuring lengths. No gossip or anything that would endanger your neighbour; if he has transgressed, rebuke him frankly to his face. Do not hate your neighbour, bear a grudge or seek revenge; love your neighbour as yourself. And one that anticipates what Christ lay down in Matthew 5:44 on loving your enemy, in verse 33 – "When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God." "Hate your enemy" is nowhere in the written law given to Moses – it was an oral law, added by ungodly men for their convenience. And this love had to result in practical helpfulness: Exodus 23:4 bluntly says, "If you come across your enemy's ox or donkey wandering off, be sure to take it back to him".

The laws that Jesus laid down for his disciples were not in fact revolutionary; as he said himself in Matthew 5:17, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets: I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them." ***The motivation for the Israelites was success and prosperity promised by God as a reward for obedience to Him and above all, love for Him in response to the love He had shown for them. This is set out clearly in Deuteronomy 10:12,13 – "And now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the Lord's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good."*** ***This is echoed by Jesus in Matthew 22:37 where he cites love to God and man as the basis for the rest of the Law. The motivation for us, in the light of God's love demonstrated by Christ on the Cross, is similarly our love for Him in response to His great love for us. In both cases the vital ingredient that God requires is our whole-hearted love and trust in Him.***

If that first section was interesting for lawyers, this next one will fascinate any health freaks. With 2 million people wandering around in the desert and living at close quarters in tents, with no doctors, ambulances or hospitals, it was of paramount importance that they be kept free of disease. Strict laws of hygiene were necessary to prevent an outbreak that could ravage the entire community. The laws God gave to guarantee this are unsurpassed in their effectiveness. In Exodus 15:26 He had said to Moses, "If you listen carefully to the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in His eyes, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord who heals you." And as long as Israel obeyed the laws, God kept His promise.

Leviticus chapter 11 starts off with the right diet. There were do's and don'ts that must be strictly adhered to. Far from being pedantic these rules embodied the peerless commonsense of God. Above all, the purpose was to instil in the minds of the Israelites that they were chosen by God to be a holy nation and therefore their sanctification was to be the essence of their whole way of life. In Leviticus 11:44 God instructs them, "I am the Lord your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy." It is up to us to keep ourselves healthy in order to more ably serve both God and man.

The second reason was just as vital; it was imperative for this nation's development and continuity that it remain healthy. Leviticus 7:22-27 forbids the eating of animal fat or blood: the harmful saturated fat had to be burned up completely in the temple sacrifices and worshippers ate only the lean meat that was left. Olive oil could be used for its versatility and healing properties: the unsaturated fat would not harm them. We know now that blood can be a vehicle for spreading infectious diseases and to this day the kosher preparation of Jewish food ensures the thorough draining of blood before an animal is cooked.

Leviticus chapter 11 lists the "clean" and "unclean" animals, fish, birds and insects in God's diet for Israel. It is interesting to note that the permissible animals were all herbivores; they are safer to eat than carnivores, which are more likely to carry germs from the animals on their own diet. This would apply particularly to pigs, which are scavengers and can carry the deadly trichinosis infection. For the same reason an animal that dies of itself must not be eaten – who can tell what germs caused its death?! Carnivorous marine life was also forbidden, centuries before science uncovered the fact that shrimp and shellfish, which are "bottom feeders" consuming the dregs of animal and vegetable litter on the ocean floor, retain heavy metals – mercury or lead – in their flesh. Forbidden too were birds of prey, scavengers or carnivores, for the same reason. All insects were forbidden except crickets, grasshoppers and locusts, which are wholly vegetarian and high in protein and carbohydrates.

Medical and health circles today have shown a great interest in the diet of Middle Eastern people as listed in the Bible. One name given to this group of foods, which have shown to prevent and help to cure disease, is the "Mediterranean Diet"; it is remarkably similar to the food laws God gave to Moses. It includes olive oil, bread (dark, chewy and crusty), grains such as wheat and barley, grapes and wine, cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic, figs, pomegranates and honey, nuts, vegetables, cheese and yoghurt. Of secondary importance, and not to be eaten in excess, are clean lean meat, fish, eggs and poultry.

The renowned physician Dr. Reginald Cherry,¹ has made an exhaustive study of diet in the Bible, and has prescribed such diet for his patients as outlined in his book, The Bible Cure. As a result he has seen healing of cancer, heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, fatigue, genetic defects, arthritis and allergies. So in God's nutrition laws He shows His love for His people!

Coupled with the dietary laws were the equally important rules of hygiene, as set down by God Himself in Leviticus chapters 12 to 15. Without the artificially rapid cures of antibiotics, cleanliness was a "must" at all stages of life. Touching any animal, even of the clean category, that died of natural causes, brought uncleanness to the person, who had to wash himself and his clothes and quarantine himself until the following day. And any contaminated pot had to be broken, as there was no way to purify clay.

In all these laws the priests were designated as judges as to the extent of the isolation needed to prevent the spread of disease. Any clothing showing mildew had to be examined by the priest, and if the mildew had spread after a 7-day isolation, the garment was considered unclean and had

to be burned. Mildew in houses was treated just as severely; after inspection by the priest and a 7-day isolation period, if the mildew had spread the stones had to be torn out of the wall and thrown into an unclean place out of town. If the mildew still spread, the whole house had to be demolished.

Any natural discharge was considered unclean, sending the man or woman into isolation and a bout of thorough cleansing before he or she could be re-admitted into society. In Deuteronomy chapter 23 even toilet hygiene was set out: one had to go outside the camp to relieve oneself, taking a spade to dig the appropriate hole!

Leviticus chapter 14 deals with infectious skin diseases, including leprosy. The priest had to examine any infected person to ascertain whether or not they were cured, and after a short quarantine the person had to wash his clothes, bathe himself with water and shave off every skerrick of hair including head, beard and even eyebrows, before he could return home. One wonders if the poor man's wife would recognise this virtual stranger walking into the tent; would she gather him to her grateful arms or flee screaming from the place?

It is significant that these detailed rules were set out right in the middle of the rules set down by God for worship. He was teaching His chosen nation that worship of God is not an isolated action kept for one day of the week: if we are committed to our God, worship of Him should permeate the whole of our lives. The rules He gave us are not from some cantankerous despot; they are sensible, do-able, ethical and supremely beneficial. Above all, they are just one of the ways of showering His love over us His children. Psalm 33 verse 12 puts it exactly, "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord."

¹ ***"The Bible Cure", Reginald Cherry, MD, Creation House,***