

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
FOR
SINAI AND THE SAINTS



I have designed these discussion questions for small groups or classes who are reading *Sinai and the Saints* together. If a small group desires to use the book as the basis for a study, I have included suggested Bible readings for each chapter and recommend the following six-session study:

Session 1: Introduction–Chapter 1

Session 2: Chapters 2–3

Session 3: Chapters 4–5

Session 4: Chapters 6–7

Session 5: Chapters 8–9

Session 6: Conclusion and Appendixes

Introduction

SUGGESTED BIBLE READING

LEVITICUS 19

1. Todd begins his book by giving several reasons why Christians often struggle with the Old Testament laws. Have you experienced any of these struggles? If so, which one do you find the most difficult to overcome?
2. Can you give examples of Old Testament laws that you have struggled to understand and/or apply to your life?
3. Todd gives two examples of challenges from American culture regarding Christians and their inconsistent handling of old covenant laws (4-6). How would you respond to these challenges?
4. Todd argues that the Old Testament laws play a significant role in the biblical story. Why do you think many Christians fail to read the laws in the context of the larger biblical story? What makes this type of reading difficult?

CHAPTER ONE

SUGGESTED BIBLE READING

EXODUS 20-23; LEVITICUS 11-15

1. Todd discusses the importance of identifying the specific laws under consideration. When Christians use phrases such as “God’s laws” or “biblical laws,” what laws come to your mind? How might these general expressions hinder productive dialogue regarding Christians and their relationship to Old Testament laws?
2. In his excursus on page 15, Todd highlights the similarities between the old covenant and ancient Near Eastern vassal treaties. How does understanding Yahweh as a suzerain and Israel as his vassal enhance your understanding of God’s relationship to his people in the Old Testament?
3. Todd argues that the term *Old Testament* carries some negative connotations. Do you think that this term causes some Christians to view the Hebrew Bible as outdated and unnecessary? Why or why not?
4. Many Christians struggle reading through the old covenant laws because the laws do not seem to have any logical progression. Discuss specific ways Todd’s overview and grouping of the laws has helped you understand the content of the old covenant laws.

CHAPTER TWO

SUGGESTED BIBLE READING

ROMANS 7; GALATIANS 3;
EPHESIANS 2:11-18; COLOSSIANS 2:11-19

1. Todd asserts, “Many believers do not see the benefit of exploring interpretive options and simply refuse to make the effort” (31). How do you typically respond to controversial topics or biblical passages that have multiple interpretations? More specifically, how do you typically respond to different Christian approaches to the old covenant laws?
2. Todd overviews the three most common Christian approaches to the old covenant laws. Which approach has most influenced your thinking on this topic? Do you agree with the strengths and weaknesses Todd outlines for the approach you selected?
3. How much have you interacted with the other approaches to the old covenant laws? How has Todd’s overview of these different approaches helped you understand why Christians view the old covenant laws differently?
4. In outlining his own approach, Todd argues that although Christians are not under the jurisdiction of the old covenant laws, the Hebrew Bible is still Christian Scripture and stands in continuity with the message of the New Testament. Why is it difficult for Christians to see the continuity between the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament?

CHAPTER THREE

SUGGESTED BIBLE READING

ROMANS 3:19-26; GALATIANS 4:21-31

1. Todd begins chapter 3 by underscoring the importance of context when interpreting a passage of Scripture. Have you witnessed someone (maybe yourself) misinterpret a biblical passage because he or she ignored the passage’s context? Why is it difficult to keep the context of the old covenant in view when interpreting the laws?
2. In his discussion of the Pentateuch, Todd uses the example of Leviticus to demonstrate the importance of interpreting the laws in light of the Pentateuch as a whole. Do you think most Christians try to read Leviticus as an isolated book? How does reading Leviticus as part of a larger book help us understand its message?
3. How does understanding the multiple referents of the word *law* help us better understand the Bible’s teaching on this topic (e.g., Rom 3:20-22; Gal 4:21)? In what ways is this concept confusing?
4. Turn to Romans 3:21 and Galatians 4:21 in your Bible. Does your translation distinguish between the referents of the word *law* by capitalizing any of its occurrences?

CHAPTER FOUR

SUGGESTED BIBLE READING

EXODUS 19; 24; 32-34

1. Many Christians believe that the Old Testament is Israel's story and not their own. How does a proper understanding of Israel's role under the old covenant help us understand the relationship of the Old Testament to all the nations of the world? Does Todd's analogy of the quarterback in football help you better understand Israel's role?
2. Todd argues that Christians should assume that "the legal requirements" of the old covenant "were to govern Israel, not all nations" (62). Why do many Christians feel an obligation to live under the old covenant's legal requirements?
3. Todd explains the golden calf as Israel's attempt to represent Yahweh. He states that such an understanding makes the Israelites "appear less foolish," which is a common way modern Christians view Israel (64). If we were to examine our own lives and the idols we are tempted to worship, do you think the ancient Israelites would think we were foolish? Why or why not?
4. Todd explains the significance of the Sinai-rebellion narratives by showing how Yahweh gave additional laws in response to each rebellion. What does this pattern teach us about God's character?

CHAPTER FIVE

SUGGESTED BIBLE READING

NUMBERS 10-21

1. Some Christians are familiar with Israel's rebellions recorded in the book of Numbers, but very few Christians read them in conjunction with the Sinai covenant. How has Todd's discussion of this "before and after picture" helped you better understand the meaning of the laws in their context?
2. At the end of this chapter's first section, Todd states that the old covenant increased Israel's rebellion, but the laws themselves were not evil (77-78). Is it difficult to understand how the old covenant could be at fault (as Hebrews 8:7-8 implies) without the laws themselves being evil? Why do you think Yahweh would give Israel this covenant if it were not sufficient to produce righteousness?
3. The book of Numbers emphasizes God's wrath toward Israel's sin. Does reading Numbers' judgment passages in light of Israel's agreement with Yahweh at Sinai "soften" the picture of God's wrath in the Old Testament?
4. In his section entitled "Is Moses' Hope in the Old Covenant?," Todd discusses how Moses predicts Israel's rebellion in their land of promise (82-87). How does this negative expectation force us as later readers to look for a different means of attaining righteousness?

CHAPTER SIX

SUGGESTED BIBLE READING EXODUS 20; DEUTERONOMY 5; ROMANS 14

1. Were you raised in a tradition that emphasized the Ten Commandments as the primary guide for living? If so, what reasons did those in your tradition give for such an interpretation of the Ten Commandments?
2. Many Christians do not live as though they are required to keep the Sabbath day. Do you think these Christians are motivated by their biblical convictions (i.e., they do not believe the Bible teaches Christians to keep the Sabbath) or by cultural compromise (i.e., they think Christians should keep the Sabbath, but they do not do so for various reasons)?
3. Although he argues that Christians do not have to obey the Sabbath command, Todd emphasizes the importance of rest for Christians (101-2). Can you think of any biblical passages that support Todd's emphasis on rest? What are some practical reasons for incorporating regular rest in your life? Discuss some specific ways you can be intentional about resting.
4. Do you agree with Todd's assertion that holding the Ten Commandments as our guide for living could harm our witness? Can you think of other examples besides the three Todd gives on pages 104-5?

CHAPTER SEVEN

SUGGESTED BIBLE READING DEUTERONOMY 28; ROMANS 8:1-14; 1 PETER 2:9-10

1. Before reading Todd's chapter, what laws (other than the Ten Commandments) would you have identified as the basic laws for Christian living?
2. Todd states, "One could obey all ten of the Ten Commandments and never come close to the sacrificial love demanded in the law of Christ" (112). Discuss how the law of Christ requires more from us than each of the last six commandments.
3. Does the concept of natural law help you better understand the overlap between the ethical requirements of the old and new covenants? Between Christianity and other religions?
4. Do many Christians live their lives like Israel under the old covenant, believing that their obedience results in God's blessing and their disobedience results in God's cursing? How does the truth that God blesses us with every spiritual blessing in Christ affect our daily lives? How might you understand this in light of 1 Peter 2:9?
5. Many churches neglect the New Testament's emphasis on the Spirit's role in our sanctification (growth in holiness). If, as Todd states, "the phrase 'living by the Spirit' is an apt summary of the Christian life" (125), how does such a neglect prevent us from living the lives God desires for us?

CHAPTER EIGHT

SUGGESTED BIBLE READING

DEUTERONOMY 17:14-20; ROMANS 12:1-2;
EPHESIANS 2:11-22; HEBREWS 13:15-16;

1. How does the New Testament's application of tabernacle/temple and sacrificial imagery to the church help you better understand your relationship to God and your role in the world today?
2. In his discussion of holiness, Todd connects God's desire for Israel's holiness to his desire for the church's holiness. What are some specific ways that modern Christians should look "strange" in the eyes of the world (see 1 Pet 4:1-5)? In Todd's words, "How can we reflect our 'set apartness' to God in how we live our lives?" (143).
3. Todd uses an example of a Honda Super Bowl commercial to demonstrate how later biblical authors used the Pentateuch (144-45). Can you think of other cultural examples wherein a writer or producer assumed their readers' or viewers' knowledge of another cultural event? When it comes to our understanding of the Bible, why could it be dangerous for Christians to be ignorant of the Old Testament and, in particular, the old covenant laws?
4. Have you heard Solomon's story taught in light of the laws for kings? How has Todd's discussion of Solomon's reign helped you understand how later biblical authors assume the reader's knowledge of earlier laws and stories?

CHAPTER NINE

SUGGESTED BIBLE READING

GENESIS 49:8-12; DEUTERONOMY 30:1-6;
JEREMIAH 31:31-34; EZEKIEL 36:24-38

1. Todd highlights the biblical pattern of God offering his people hope in the midst of judgment. What does this pattern teach us about God's character?
2. Jesus taught that "out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander" (Mt 15:19). Compare Jesus' teaching to Moses' teaching on the heart in Deuteronomy. How are the two similar? Different?
3. In what ways does Todd's discussion of the Pentateuch's teaching on the coming king enhance your understanding of Jesus and his work? Does Todd's discussion help you better understand the beliefs of many first-century Jews?
4. At the conclusion of this chapter, Todd emphasizes how similar the messages of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament are. Do you agree with Todd's assessment? Why is it sometimes difficult to see the similarities between the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament?

CONCLUSION AND APPENDIXES

SUGGESTED BIBLE READING

GENESIS 19; LEVITICUS 18;
DEUTERONOMY 4:11-24; ACTS 15:1-21

1. What are some of the gray areas that Christians in your specific context have? What are some practical ways that believers can apply the law of Christ to those specific areas?
2. Todd entitled his first appendix “How Should Christians Use the Hebrew Bible to Address Homosexuality?” (183-92). How would you have answered this question before reading Todd’s chapter? Has Todd’s chapter helped you better articulate your position on homosexuality?
3. Todd concludes his first appendix by reminding his readers to keep a Christ-centered perspective when discussing homosexuality in the public square. How can Christians in the Western world avoid falling into an us-versus-them mentality when addressing issues of homosexuality?
4. What does your denomination or church tradition believe regarding the use of images in worship? What do they believe about portrayals of the Father or the Son? How has Todd’s chapter helped you think about these issues?
5. Why is it important to understand the Bible’s use of anthropomorphisms? What does the presence of this literary device teach us about God’s desire to make himself known to us?