

February 2019

The Rector writes:

‘THE LONG ARM OF THE LAW’



The seemingly interminable turmoil over the issue of Brexit continues to dominate newspaper headlines and television news bulletins. The law is not in question, Britain is leaving the European Union on 29th March 2019 – that is the law. Whether or not it happens is still unclear, as our politicians, business leaders and individual citizens try to argue about the process and the final deal that might be acceptable. If the decision is not to leave, that will require a new law from Parliament. The truth is that no one knows how it will all turn out!

In the 1970's Ronald Reagan once observed about the United States political system. 'I have wondered at times what the Ten Commandments would have looked like if Moses had run them through the US Congress'. The chances are that they might well have been watered down to only six, and that adultery and covetousness would almost certainly not have been included! Yet the Ten Commandments still form the moral basis of much of the modern law of the Western world.

The Books of the Law (or Pentateuch – it means five volumes) begin the Old Testament writings. We need to remember that these were neither written by nor for Christians. The Old Testament describes 'a people's relationship with God that was preparatory to and superseded by the New Testament relationship with Jesus Christ' as Nick Page puts it in his 'Bible Book'.

These first five books are traditionally associated with Moses (though probably not much was actually written by him).

- **GENESIS** – tells the story of the creation and the fall, and traces the origins of Israel through the stories of its Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. It ends in exile in Egypt. Genesis is a book of origins – the creation of the world, the origin of sin and rebellion, and of God's covenant with mankind. Written over a long period of time, scholars reckon that it was finally edited and published around the time of King Solomon (970–930 BC).

- **EXODUS** – relates the story of Moses and the escape (Exodus) from Egypt, and culminates in the giving of the Ten Commandments and instructions for the building of the Tabernacle. There are also several deep and mysterious insights into the nature of God and his relationship with people (Moses in particular). The text first appeared somewhere in the 15th century BC, and was edited at a later date.

- **LEVITICUS** – is almost exclusively a book of rules and regulations, the 'religious red tape' of the Law. It is not widely read, considered difficult and dull by modern readers. The book takes its name from the priestly tribe of Levites. The prime theme of Leviticus is holiness – which in the culture of its day is characterised by physical perfection. Though greatly concerned with rite and ritual (purification, worship and offerings etc), the book also contains examples of profound social justice (jubilee, Sabbath and harvest). Probably appeared in around 600BC. Along with the edited book of Numbers.

- **NUMBERS** – Contains a census of the people of Israel (lots of numbers), their failure to enter the Promised Land and their forty years in the wilderness. The Hebrew name for the book is 'bemidbar' which means 'in the desert'. As well as their bickering and squabbling it also tells of the development of Israel as an army.

- **DEUTERONOMY** – Moses' farewell speech, dated around 1400BC, is chiefly a summary of the other books, and ends with Moses death, just before the Promised Land is entered. It is a reminder looking back of all that God had done for Israel.

The Law – reminds the Israelites that God has saved them it is up to them to respond to his love. As Moses says in Deuteronomy 30:15-16, ' See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God... then the Lord your God will bless you in the land you are entering'. The long arm of the Lord still offers us the hope of salvation today – whether we face a hard, soft or no Brexit!

Yours in Christ

Reverend John.