

Covenant, Mosaic

Mosaic Covenant (Ex 20-23; Deut)

The parties of the covenant include God and Israel. Moses was the representative of Israel, but the covenant was with Israel (Ex 19:3-8). The covenant was not made with the Gentiles, or the Church, but with Israel only (Deut 4:7-8; Ps 147:19-20; Mal 4:4). The covenant was conditional, and was fulfilled through the ministry of Jesus Christ during His first advent (Matt 5:17; Eph 2:13-16). The people agreed to keep the terms of the covenant (Ex 24:3), and Moses sealed the agreement in blood (Ex 24:8).

This Covenant was designed to separate Israel from the rest of the nations, reveal the holiness of God and the righteous standard God demanded for a proper relationship with Him, and to teach Israel how they were to please God by living holy lives as His chosen nation. The measuring stick was to be the Law aspect of the Covenant. The Law was designed to govern every aspect of Israel's life: the spiritual, moral, social, religious and civil aspects. However, at no time is it taught in Scripture that the Mosaic Law was a means of salvation. No man was justified by works of the Law (Rom 3:20,28). The commandments were a "ministry of condemnation" and "of death" (2 Cor 3:7-9).

A critical part of this covenant was God's promise to dwell in Israel's midst. This is stressed several times in the latter half of Exodus (25:8; 29:45; 33:14-17; 40:34-38). Associated with God's presence are the instructions for constructing the ark and the tabernacle, the place where God would dwell (Ex 25-31,35-40). Leviticus is thus the natural sequence to the latter half of Exodus, for it addresses how Israel was to live with God in their midst. How should they approach Him? How should they deal with personal and national sin before a holy God who dwelt among them? How should they worship and fellowship with this holy, awesome God in their midst? Leviticus provides the answers to these questions, giving practical guidelines for living with God under the terms of the Mosaic Covenant.

The Church Age believer is not in any way, shape, or form under the obligations of the Mosaic Law, but under the Law of Christ and the Spirit (Rom 3:21-27; 6:14-15; Gal 2:16; 3:10,16-18,24-26; 4:21-31; Heb 10:11-17). The Law is tied to the Mosaic Covenant, which is integrally connected to Israel's life in the land and the conditional promises of blessing related to their living obediently in the land. Christians are not related to that land, nor are they related to the conditions for being blessed in the land. Also the Mosaic Covenant is obsolete, having been replaced by the New Covenant. Therefore the Mosaic Law, a critical component of the Old Covenant, is not valid as law over believers in the church age.

The Mosaic Covenant did not change the provision of the Abrahamic Covenant but was an addition to it for a limited time only—till Christ should come (Gal 3:17-19).

The key provision of the covenant was the Law of Moses...a total of 613 commandments. Involved in these provisions were blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. The covenant was signed and sealed by the Shekinah Glory in Ex 24:1-11, but signed in such a way that rendered the covenant conditional. Just as the rainbow is a sign of the Noahic Covenant and circumcision the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant, the Sabbath was the sign of the Mosaic Covenant.

Observations on the 613 provisions of the Mosaic Covenant:

1. The totality of the Law - of the 613 provisions, 365 were negative commands (things forbidden) and 248 were positive (instructions, things that should be done).
2. The blessings and judgments of the Law - since the covenant was condition, there would be blessings for obedience and judgment for disobedience (Ex 15:26; 19:3-8).
3. The blood sacrifice added - the blood sacrifice was a key element of the Mosaic Law (Lev 17:11). The five offerings outlined in Lev 1-7 were merely to cover sin (the Hebrew word for atonement means covering, not removal). While the blood of animals covered sins of OT saints, the blood of the Messiah removed sin (Heb 10:1-4). However, the blood sacrifice did provide for the forgiveness of sin and restoration of fellowship.
4. Dietary restrictions imposed - for the Jews, the Mosaic Covenant imposed some restrictions on dietary practices provided in the Noahic Covenant. For example, beasts had to be both cloven-hoofed and chew the cud; fish had to have both fins and scales, new birds of prey were allowed, and concerning insects, only one type of locust was permitted.
5. Death penalty expanded - death penalty was added for other sins (besides murder), including idolatry, adultery, cursing God, cursing parents, breaking the Sabbath, practicing witchcraft, among others.
6. Sign of the covenant - the Mosaic Covenant reaffirmed the practice of circumcision (Lev 12:3), but for a different reason. Under the Abrahamic Covenant, circumcision was the sign of the covenant and was mandatory for Jews only. Under the Mosaic Covenant circumcision was the means of submission to the Law of Moses, and it was mandatory for all Jews and any Gentiles who wished to become part of the Commonwealth of Israel. This is why Paul warned the Gentile believers in Galatia that if they submitted to circumcision, they would be obligated to keep the whole law, not just this one commandment (Gal 5:3).
7. Sabbath was token of covenant - there are 5 observations:

- a. The Sabbath was a sign that Israel had been set apart by God (Ex 31:12-17); a sign of the Exodus (Deut 5:12-15; Ezek 20:10-12); and, a sign that Jehovah was Israel's God (Ezek 20:20).
- b. The Sabbath was not a creation ordinance. Gen 2:1-3 only states that God rested on the seventh day, and never calls on people to do so. Sabbath is not used in Genesis. From Adam to Moses, there is no record of anyone keeping the Sabbath. Job, a pre-Mosaic saint, does not mention keeping the Sabbath as an obligation. Sabbath observance begins with Moses in Ex 16:23-30 and was made part of the Law in Ex 20:8-11.
- c. The Sabbath was a day of rest, not corporate worship. As the Sabbath law was developed in other parts of the Law, "resting" referred mostly to a list of prohibitions: no gathering manna (Ex 16:23-30); no traveling (Ex 16:29); no kindling of fire (Ex 35:3); no gathering of wood (Num 15:32). Outside the Law, other prohibitions for the Sabbath included: no bearing a burden (Jer 17:21); no trading (Amos 8:5); no marketing (Neh 10:31; 13:15,19). The Sabbath synagogue services of the NT originated with the Babylonian Captivity, not the Law of Moses.
- d. The Sabbath as a token of the Mosaic Covenant was intended only for Israel, not for Gentiles or the Church. As a sign of the Covenant, it is in force as long as the Covenant is in force.

Purpose of the Law

It should be stated categorically that the Law of Moses was not a means of salvation. This concept is rejected because that would make salvation by means of works. Salvation was and always is, and always has been, by grace through faith in the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ. ***While the content of faith has changed from age to age depending on progressive revelation, the means of salvation never changes.*** The Law was not given to serve as a means of salvation (Rom 3:20,28; Gal 2:16; 3:11,21). It was given to a people already *redeemed* from Egypt, not in order *to redeem* them. However, there were several purposes for the giving of the Law. As found in both testaments, there were at least 9 purposes for the Law of Moses:

1. To reveal the holiness of God and the standard of righteousness that God demanded for a proper relationship with Him (Lev 11:44; 19:1-2,37; 1 Pet 1:15-16). The Law itself was *holy, and righteous, and good* (Rom 7:12).

2. To provide the rule of conduct for the Old Testament saints. For example, Romans 3:28 makes it clear that no man was justified by the works of the Law. The Law always had purposes other than being a means of salvation. In this case, it provided the rule of life for the Old Testament believer (Lev 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7-8,26). For the OT believer, the Law was the center of his spiritual life and his delight, as stated in Ps 119, especially v77,97,103-104, and 159.
3. To provide occasions for individual and corporate worship for Israel. The seven holy seasons of Israel (Lev 23) is one example of this.
4. To keep the Jews a distinct people (Lev 11:44-45; Deut 7:6; 14:1-2). This was the specific reason for many of the laws, such as the dietary laws and the clothing laws. The Jews were to be distinct from all other people in a variety of ways, such as their worship habits (Lev 1,7,16,23), their eating habits (Lev 11:1-47), their sexual habits (Lev 12), their clothing habits (Lev 19:19), and even the way they cut their beards (Lev 19:27). Other passages for this point include Ex 19:5-8 and 31:13.
5. It served as *the middle wall of partition* as stated in Eph 2:11-16. The four unconditional covenants are Jewish covenants and God's blessings, both physical and spiritual, mediated through the four covenants, the *covenants of the promise* mentioned in v12. Because of the Jewish nature of these unconditional covenants, a conditional covenant was also added, the Mosaic Covenant, containing the Law of Moses, *the law of commandments contained in ordinances* of v15. The purpose of the Law, then, was to become *the middle wall of partition* to keep Gentiles, as Gentiles, from enjoying the Jewish spiritual blessings of the unconditional covenants. Because of this purpose, Gentiles were both *alienated from the commonwealth of Israel*, and *strangers from the covenants of the promise*. The only way Gentiles could enjoy the spiritual blessings of the Jewish covenants during the period of the Law was to take upon themselves the obligation of the Law, undergo the rite of circumcision, and then live like every Jew had to live. Gentiles, as Gentiles, could not enjoy the Jewish spiritual blessings, only Gentiles, as proselytes to Mosaic Judaism.
6. To reveal sin. Three passages in the Book of Romans point this out.
 - a. Rom 3:19-20 - Paul emphasized that there is no justification through the Law; by means of the Law no Jewish person will be justified. What is the Law then, if not a way of justification, a way of salvation? The Law was given to provide the knowledge of sin, to reveal exactly what sin is.
 - b. Rom 5:20 - the Law was given so that trespasses might be made very clear. How does one know he has sinned? He knows because the Law spelled out in detail what was permitted and what was not permitted. The Law with 613 commandments revealed sin.

- c. Rom 7:7 - Paul again emphasized the fact that the Law was given so that sin might be made known. Paul became aware of his sinful state by looking into the Law and knowing that, on the basis of the Law, he fell short.
- 7. To make one sin more.
 - a. Rom 4:15 states: *for the law works wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there transgression.*
 - b. Paul adds in Rom 5:20: *And the law came in besides, that the trespass might abound; but where sin abounded, grace did abound more exceedingly.* The picture Paul gives is that the Law came in to cause more sin, to actually make one sin more.
 - c. How this works is explained by Paul in Rom 7:7-13 and 1 Cor 15:56.
 - i. Basically, what Paul taught is that the sin nature needs a base of operation, and sin uses the Law for that purpose. When Paul said: *where there is no law, neither is there transgression* he did not mean that there was no sin before the Law was given. The term *transgression* is a specific type of sin: it is the violation of a specific commandment. Men were sinners before the Law was given, but they were not transgressors of the Law until the Law was given. Once the Law was given, the sin nature had a base of operation, causing the individual to violate these commandments and sin all the more.
- 8. To show the sinner that there was nothing he could do on his own to please God; he had no ability to keep the Law perfectly or to attain the righteousness of the Law (Rom 7:14-25).
- 9. To drive one to faith according to Rom 8:1-4 and Gal 3:24-25. The final purpose of the Law was to bring one to saving faith in the Messiah.

To summarize this section, the Law is a unit comprised of 613 commandments, and all of it has been rendered inoperative. There is no commandment that has continued beyond the Cross. The Law can be used as a teaching tool to show God's standard of righteousness and man's sinfulness and need of a substitutionary atonement. It can be used to teach many spiritual truths about God as a man. It can be used to point one to the Messiah (Gal 3:23-25). However, it has completely ceased to function as an authority over the individual. It is no longer the rule of life for believers.

Unity of the Law

The Mosaic Covenant was the basis for the Dispensation of Law. It was the one Jewish covenant that was conditional and ultimately came to an end with the death of the Messiah (Rom 10:4; 2 Cor 3:3-11; Gal 3:19-29; Eph 2:11-18; Heb 7:11-12,18). Hence, the Mosaic Law is no longer in effect. The Law of Moses did not terminate with the NT or the birth of Christ,

but rather with His death. As long as Jesus was alive on earth, He was under the Mosaic Law and had to fulfill and obey every commandment (not in the way the Pharisees interpreted it). Prophetically, it was already considered broken even before the Messiah died to free the Jew from the penalty of the Law (Jer 31:32).

It must be understood that the Mosaic Law is viewed in the Scriptures as a unit. *Torah*, meaning "law," is always singular when applied to the Law of Moses, although it contains 613 commands. The same is true of the Greek word *nomos* in the NT. The division of the Law into ceremonial, legal and moral parts is useful for study, but it's never divided as such in Scripture.

Two Myths of the Law

1. One is the practice of dividing the Law into "ceremonial," "legal," and "moral" commandments. On the basis of this division, many have come to think that the believer is free from the ceremonial and legal commandments, but is still under the moral commandments. These are arbitrary distinctions, not made in Scripture.
 - a. For example, "love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev 19:18) is followed in the next verse by "do not wear clothing woven of two kinds of material (19:19). Should v18 be applied as binding while v19 is dismissed as nonapplicable altogether? On what basis can one decide that one verse is universal and timeless, even for believers in the Church Age, while the commandment in the very next verse is rejected? Many of the so-called moral, civil and ceremonial laws occur together like this without any textual indicators that there are differences between them.
2. The second is the belief that the Ten Commandments are still valid today while the other 603 commandments are not. When confronted by a Seventh Day Adventist, the individual taking this approach runs into problems concerning the fourth commandment on keeping the Sabbath. At that point, fudging begins that results in inconsistency. It must be understood that the Mosaic Law is viewed by the Scriptures as a unit. The word *Torah*, meaning "law," is always singular when applied to the Law of Moses, even though it contains 613 commandments. The same is true of the Greek word *nomos* in the NT. The division of the Law of Moses into ceremonial, legal, and moral parts is convenient for the study of the different types of commandments contained within it, but it is never divided in this way by the Scriptures themselves. Neither is there any scriptural basis for separating the Ten Commandments from the whole 613 and making only the Ten Commandments perpetual. All 613 commandments are a single unit comprising the Law of Moses.

The principle of the unity of the Law is the point of James 2:10: "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is become guilty of all." So if someone

breaks a legal commandment, he is guilty of breaking the ceremonial and morals laws as well. For example, if someone eats bacon, according to the Law of Moses, he is guilty of breaking the Ten Commandments even though none of them says anything about ham. The Law is a unit, and to break one of the commandments is to break them all. In order to understand the Law, it is necessary to view it as a unit that cannot be divided into parts that have been done away with and parts that have not. Nor can certain commandments be separated in such a way as to give them a different status from other commandments.

Law Rendered Inoperative

The clear teaching of the NT is that the Law has been rendered inoperative:

- Rom 6:14-15 - not under the Law but under grace, but that is not a license to sin
- Rom 7:5-6 - the believer has been discharged (Gr. *katargeo*, "to render inoperative") from the Law
- Rom 10:4 - Christ is the end (Gr. *telos*, termination) of the Law
- 1 Cor 9:20-21 - we're not to ignore the Law, but we're to obey the Law of Christ
- 2 Cor 3:7-11 - the Law led to death; it has "passed away"
- Gal 2:16 - there is no justification through the Law
- Gal 3:19 - the Law was never meant to be permanent, but only until the Messiah
- Gal 4:1-7 - Christ bought our freedom from the Law
- Gal 5:18 - we're not under obligation to the Law of Moses
- Eph 2:13-16 - Christ's death ended the Law
- Heb 7:18 - the Law has been disannulled
- Heb 7:19 - there is no sanctification or perfection through the Law
- Heb 8:6-7,13 - Christ is a better Priest than Aaron; New Covenant is better than Mosaic Covenant; Law had faults, was replaced; New Covenant makes Mosaic "Old" Covenant obsolete.
- Heb 10:9 - the Mosaic Covenant was cancelled in order to put the New Covenant into effect

Even the 10 Commandments Inoperative?

2 Cor 3:2-11 zeros right in on the part of the Law that most people want to retain, the Ten Commandments. First of all, one needs to see what Paul is saying concerning the Law of Moses. In v3,7, the spotlight is on the Ten Commandments, since it is these that were *engraved on stones*. In v7, it is called the *ministration of death*. In v9, it is called the *ministration of condemnation*. These are negative, but valid, descriptions.

The main point, then, is that the Law of Moses, especially represented by the Ten Commandments, is a *ministration of death* and a *ministration of condemnation*. If the Ten

Commandments were still in force today, this would still be true. However, they are no longer in force, for it states in v7,11 that the Law has “passed away.” The Greek word used is *katargeo*, which means, “to render inoperative.” Since the emphasis in this passage is on the Ten Commandments, this means that the Ten Commandments have passed away. The thrust is very clear. The Law of Moses, and especially the Ten Commandments, is no longer in effect. In fact, the superiority of the Law of the Messiah is seen by the fact that it will never be rendered inoperative.

The Mosaic Covenant and the Promised Land

The Mosaic Covenant is closely associated with Israel’s conquest and occupation of the Promised Land. It provided the framework by which Israel was to occupy and live prosperously with God in the Promised Land. The close connection between the covenant and the land is stressed repeatedly in the Book of Deuteronomy. The Hebrew word for “land” occurs almost 200x in Deuteronomy. A representative selection of passages that directly connect the terms of the covenant with life in the land include 4:1,5,14,40; 5:16; 6:1,18,20-25; 8:1; 11:8; 12:1; 15:4-5; 26:1-2; 27:1-3; 30:5,17-18; 31:13.

The loss of the land in 587 BC has profound implications for the way the Law is to be viewed, precisely because the Law defined the terms for blessing in the land. In addition, when Israel was taken captive to Babylon, the Israelites lost the presence of the Lord in the temple (Ezek 10). Possession of the land and the presence of the Lord in the tabernacle and temple are two critical aspects of the Mosaic Covenant. When the exiles returned to their land, they did not return to the way things had been. The blessings described in Deut 28 were never again realized in any significant fashion—political independence, regional economic domination, regional military domination, and so forth—nor is there any statement about God’s returning to the temple, in contrast to earlier passages that focused on His presence in the tabernacle (Ex 40:34–38) and the temple (1 Kings 8:9–10; 2 Chr 7:1–2). Things were certainly not the same as they were before the Exile.

Blessings from the Mosaic Covenant Were Conditional

In Deuteronomy God informed Israel that obedience to the covenant would bring blessing, but that disobedience to the covenant would bring punishment and curses. Deut 28 is particularly explicit regarding the conditional nature of the Law. Verses 1–14 list the blessings for Israel if they obeyed the terms of the covenant (the Mosaic Law), and v15–68 spell out the consequences if they did not obey. Also the association of the covenant with the land and the conditional aspect of the covenant blessings are often linked in Deut 30:15–18.

The Mosaic Covenant is No Longer Relevant

The Mosaic Covenant is no longer functional or valid as a covenant. This has important implications for one's understanding of the Law. The OT Law specified the terms by which Israel could receive blessings in the land under the Old (Mosaic) Covenant. If the Old Covenant is no longer valid, how can the laws that make up that covenant still be valid? If the Old Covenant is obsolete, should not also the laws in that Old Covenant be seen as obsolete?

Paul stated repeatedly that Christians are not under the Law. For example in Gal 2:15-16 he wrote, "A man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ." In Rom 7:4 he stated, "You also died to the law through the body of Christ." In Gal 3:25 he declared, "Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law." Paul argued vigorously against Christians returning to the OT Law. If there was a distinction between civil, ceremonial, and moral laws, it was unusual that Paul ignored it. Furthermore, if the moral laws were to be understood as universally applicable, one would expect Paul at least to use them as the basis for Christian moral behavior. However, Paul does not base his moral teaching on this foundation but on the nature of the gospel, the guidance of the Spirit, and the practice of the churches.