

# THE LAW AND THE COVENANTS

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## Chapter 1 Introduction

In John 1:17, we read, "For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." In this passage, we see a great truth. In many ways, the Bible is the story of two great men and two important covenants: Moses, the mediator of the Old Covenant, and Jesus Christ, the mediator of the New Covenant.

This truth is illustrated in the table of contents of every Bible. The first 39 books of the Bible are commonly called the Old Testament, while the remaining 27 books are generally referred to as the New Testament.

The first five books of the Old Testament were written by Moses and are called the Torah or Pentateuch; the term "Torah" is a Hebrew word which simply means law or instruction. The term "Pentateuch" is a Greek term that means five books or five volumes; it refers to the first five books of the Old Testament: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, which together form the foundation of the Old Covenant. The remaining books of the Old Testament simply explain or amplify different aspects of the Old Covenant.

In a similar fashion, the first four books of the New Testament are called the Gospels, or good news; the books written by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John record the teachings of Jesus Christ, which forms the foundation of the New Covenant. All of the remaining books of the New Testament explain or amplify the meaning and significance of the New Covenant.

So, the doctrine of the Law and the Covenants is central to understanding the Bible. We could say that it is the backbone of the message of the Bible because it defines the foundation of Christianity and is connected to every major biblical doctrine.

This study designed to explain the doctrine of the Law and the Covenants. In this chapter, we will look at some introductory material and establish a basic theological framework for the rest of the study. In Chapter Two, we will explore the Patriarchal Era of the Bible and review the general laws that God gave to all mankind. In Chapter Three, we will look at the Mosaic Law and examine the different roles that Israelites had as part of the Old Covenant. In Chapter Four, we will compare the Old and New Covenants and see that they rest on a common theological foundation. In Chapter Five, we will look at the new laws that Jesus Christ gave as part of the New Covenant. In Chapter Six, we will study Israel's commission to be God's model nation during the Millennium. Chapter Seven will provide answers to some possible questions or objections to this material. And finally, in Chapter Eight, we will look at the importance of biblical truth and the consequences of rejecting that truth.

We will begin by looking at the theological foundations of several different religious systems. For example, Mosaic Judaism was the religion of the Old Testament, and it rested on a theological foundation of Scripture alone. Today, however, modern rabbinic Judaism is an amalgamation of Scripture and tradition; in other words, it rests on a combination of the teachings of the Old Testament and the so-called Oral Law, which is also known as the traditions of the elders.

The Oral Law developed during the inter-testamental period around 100-200 BC. The purpose of the Oral Law was to create a fence around the Law of Moses, which would eliminate any risk of people actually breaking God's Law. Eventually, the rabbis considered the Oral Law to have the same authority as the Old Testament.

In a similar fashion, modern Christianity is an amalgamation of Scripture and tradition. Many doctrines are a combination of New Testament teaching and the traditions of early theologians from the second, third and fourth centuries, the so-called "Early Church Fathers." However, a growing number of Christians now understand that Apostolic Christianity rested on a theological foundation of the Old and New Testament alone.

While modern Christianity accepts the Old Testament as inspired, it generally does not accept the Old Testament as either authoritative or normative for Christians today. If we accept the Old Testament as authoritative, what role does the Mosaic Law play in the life of Christians under the New Covenant?

To answer that question, we need to understand that what we see in Scripture depends, in large measure, on the interpretive lenses that we wear when we read Scripture. Theologians create interpretive frameworks to help them categorize and classify different passages of Scripture. These interpretive frameworks can help us understand Scripture more clearly, but they can also distort our view of Scripture if we're not careful.

Theologians have proposed two different frameworks to explain the Law and the Covenants; the first is called Dispensational Theology, and the second is Covenant Theology. These two systems have been around for centuries, and both have evolved over time, but it is still possible to make some general observations about them.

Dispensationalism teaches that God has two separate peoples, Israel and the church, and God has two separate and distinct plans for these peoples. This theological framework emphasizes discontinuity between the Old and New Testament. In Dispensational Theology, God works with humanity during different eras or "dispensations" to achieve His plans. Different theologians have proposed different ways of dividing time; most have proposed seven general time periods such as the Age of Innocence, Conscience, Government, Promise, Law, Grace and the Millennial Kingdom.

#### Dispensational Eras

Adam Innocence	Noah Conscience	Shem Government	Abram Promise	Moses Law	Jesus Grace	Jesus Kingdom
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Covenant theology says that God has only one people, believers in every generation, and God has one main covenant with His people, the Covenant of Grace. This theological system emphasizes continuity between the Old and New Testament. According to this view, God originally gave Adam a Covenant of Works, which he failed to obey. Afterward, God began to save people through a Covenant of Grace. Each successive generation merely amplified and clarified various aspects this covenant.

#### Covenant Theology



Dispensationalism began among the Plymouth Brethren Movement during the mid-19th century in Ireland and England. It became popular within the Bible Conference Movement during the late 19th century in the United States. Dallas Theological Seminary emerged as a major center of Dispensational thought and teaching during the twentieth century.

Dispensationalism teaches that the Law of Moses has been completely abolished; this would include all of the moral, civil and ceremonial aspects of the Mosaic Law. Instead, the Law of Moses has been replaced by a New Covenant Law code. No law from the past is binding on Christians today unless it has been repeated in the New Testament by Jesus or the apostles. Since much of the New Testament deals with moral issues, the practical effect is to restore most of the moral stipulations of the Law of Moses. So, Dispensationalism tends to exhibit moderate discontinuity regarding the Old Testament.

The early disciples of John Calvin developed Covenant Theology and incorporated these precepts into the Westminster Confession of Faith in the mid-17th century in England. The Christian Reformed Church promoted Covenantalism during the mid-19th century in America, and the Westminster Theological Seminary, in Glenside Pennsylvania, became an important bastion of Covenant Theology during the twentieth century.

Covenant theologians teach that the ceremonial aspects of the Mosaic Law have been abolished, but they also believe that the moral and civil aspects of the Law of Moses are still relevant because they contain useful instruction and godly principles. So, Covenantalism tends to exhibit more continuity between the Old and New Testament than Dispensationalism.

The early pioneers of Dispensationalism include John Nelson Darby (an important leader in the Plymouth Brethren Movement), Dwight Moody (founder of Moody Bible College) and Cyrus Scofield (author of the famous Scofield Study Bible). Other important dispensational theologians would include Louis Sperry Chafer, John Walvoord, Dwight Pentecost, Charles Ryrie, and Darrell Bock.

The early pioneers of Covenantalism were Zacharias Ursinus, Caspar Olevianus and Johannes Cocceus. Other important covenant theologians would include Charles Hodge, Gresham Machen, Louis Berkhof, George Eldon Ladd and Millard Erickson.

If we compare Dispensationalism side-by-side with Covenantalism, we see that they are actually two moderate positions that fall along a wide spectrum of opinion regarding the Old and New Testament.

The Theological Spectrum Regarding the Old & New Testament			
Greater Discontinuity	Dispensationalism (Moral Law)	Covenantalism (Moral & Civil)	Greater Continuity
Antinomians	Fundamentalist Bible Churches	Reformed Faith	Legalism
Libertine Gnostics	Independent Baptists	Theonomists	Judaizers
Left Ditch: Grace = License	Non-Observant Messianics	Torah Observant Messianics	Right Ditch: Saved by Works

Dispensationalism exhibits a moderate degree of discontinuity between the Old and New Testament. Fundamentalist Bible churches, independent Baptists, and non-Torah observant Messianics tend to follow Dispensational Theology.

However, there are groups that emphasize radical discontinuity between the Old and New Testament. This is the theology of antinomianism which teaches that the entire Old Testament has been abolished and that there are no law codes of any kind that Christians have to obey. In the second century AD, there were Libertine Gnostic heretics who believed that salvation came

through knowledge alone and that personal behavior was irrelevant. Groups like this fell into the theological ditch of turning grace into a license to sin.

In a similar way, Covenantalism exhibits a moderate degree of continuity between the Old and New Testament. Calvinistic churches of the Reformed faith, Theonomists, and Torah observant Messianics tend to follow Covenant Theology.

However, there are groups that emphasize radical continuity between the Old and New Testament. This is the theology of legalism, which completely negates the New Covenant. The Judaizers mentioned throughout the New Testament promoted this kind of theology. In their minds, the Old Covenant never ended; it was simply revived or renewed without any changes, and the nation of Israel replaces the church altogether. This is the theological ditch of salvation by works alone without any need for grace.

So, most theologians today either fall in the camp of Dispensational Theology or Covenant Theology, and most Christians are either somewhat to the right or left of center.

This brings us to an interesting truth that whenever you have two groups of people with strongly opposing points of view, the truth is usually somewhere in the middle. The goal is to combine the best of both views into a new position that fits all of the biblical data. From a dialectic point of view, what we want to do is take a thesis and its antithesis and combine them together into a synthesis, a new solution that can explain all of the data.

In many ways, solving a theological puzzle is a lot like solving a jigsaw puzzle. For example, if you have a 100-piece puzzle, you would dump the pieces on a table, turn them over so you can see the colors and begin finding the pieces that have a straight edge. You can fit the edge pieces together to build a frame, which forms the outer perimeter of the picture. Then, you can take all of the remaining pieces, group them by color, and begin to match them up with similar colors along the edges putting the pieces inside the picture one piece at a time.

In a similar fashion, theologians start out by trying to identify the key passages for a given doctrine, verses that provide the clearest information on a particular topic. People sometimes refer to these Scriptures as “chair passages” because of their authoritative nature in the development of doctrine. Chair passages help to establish the solid boundaries of a given teaching. The next task is to gather together all of the related Scriptures that are not as clear and try to fit them into this broad framework.

Another important point is that we need to be open-minded to new ideas but not gullible. For example, in Acts 17:11, Luke commended the Bereans because “they were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.” The Bereans were willing to listen to the gospel, but they also verified it in the Scriptures. Paul gave the same advice in 1Thessalonians 5:21, where he said, “...examine everything carefully, hold fast to that which is good.” And, that is certainly good advice.

Now, we need to compare the Old and New Covenants side-by-side to see how they were similar or different. First, the Old Covenant was a physical type of a greater covenant that was to follow. The New Covenant was the spiritual anti-type or fulfillment of the Old Covenant.

<b>Aspects</b>	<b>Old Covenant</b>	<b>New Covenant</b>
Purpose	Physical Type	Spiritual Antitype
Parties	God & Israel	God & Christians
Territory	Canaan, Kingdom of Israel	Earth, Kingdom of God
Benefits	Healing, Rain, Good Crops, Military Victory, Long Life	Healing, Fruit of the Spirit, Resurrection, Eternal Life
Stipulations	Law of Moses	Law of Moses, Christ
Administrators	High Priest, Elders	High Priest, Elders
Facilitators	Levites, Servants	Deacons
Atonement	Sacrifices (Works)	Calvary (Faith)
Sign & Seal	Circumcision	Baptism, Holy Spirit

A covenant is simply a contract or an agreement between two parties, and the Old Covenant was a contract between God and the people of Israel. The New Covenant, however, is a contract between God and Christians, those who are believers and followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Under the Old Covenant, God gave the children of Israel the land of Canaan as their inheritance, over which God established the kingdom of Israel. Under the New Covenant, God has promised to give Christians the entire earth as their inheritance when Jesus Christ returns to establish the kingdom of God.

The children of Israel enjoyed certain benefits under the Old Covenant which included healing of their diseases, rain in due season, good crops, military victory and a long and prosperous life. In a similar fashion, God promises certain benefits to Christians under the terms of the New Covenant which includes healing of their diseases, the fruit of God's Holy Spirit being manifested in their lives, resurrection from the dead and eternal life with Jesus Christ. So, we see that the benefits under the New Covenant are orders of magnitude better than the benefits promised to the children of Israel under the Old Covenant.

Under the terms of the Old Covenant, the Israelites had to obey certain stipulations and regulations in order to enjoy the benefits of the covenant. The Bible refers to these stipulations as the Law of Moses. As the mediator of the New Covenant, Jesus Christ incorporated the Law of Moses into the New Covenant and added additional commandments to them, which we will call the Law of Christ.

The Old Covenant was administered by the High Priest and the elders of the tribes of Israel. The High Priest carried out ceremonial laws and the elders handled the civil laws. In a similar fashion, the New Covenant is administered by a High Priest and the elders of the church; Jesus Christ is a High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek, and the elders manage the various operations of the congregations.

Certain individuals also assisted the administration of the Old Covenant; they served as employees or servants. Under the Old Covenant, the Levites and special servants performed various tasks in the Tabernacle and later in the Temple; under the New Covenant, the deacons perform the various functions to support the church.

Under the Old Covenant, the Israelites received atonement for their transgressions through a system of animal sacrifices until the Messiah came to pay their debt. So, this is a works-based system of atonement. Under the New Covenant, Christians are justified through faith in Jesus Christ who has paid the penalty for our sin through his death at Calvary; this is a faith-based system of atonement.

Under the terms of the Old Covenant, circumcision was a sign and seal of the covenant that existed between God and the sons of Israel. It was a permanent sign that Israel belonged to God and a visible seal of the contract that God made with Abraham. Under the New Covenant, baptism is a covenant ratification ceremony between God and Christians; this covenant is sealed when Christians receive God's Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands after baptism.

If we look at the history of God's plan of salvation, we see that, from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, God gradually gave humanity more and more laws, and He expected everyone to obey them. Then, God gave Moses an additional set of laws; under the terms of the Old Covenant, the Israelites had more obligations, and they received more blessings because they were full citizens in the Kingdom of Israel. Any Gentiles living among the Israelites had fewer obligations and fewer blessings; they were resident aliens in the land of Israel, so they were only required to keep certain general laws, which God had given to all mankind. When Christ came to establish the New Covenant, He retained the Law of Moses and added additional stipulations for Christians. So, Christians have new obligations and greater blessings under the New Covenant.

<u>Progressive Revelation of God's Law</u>			
	Patriarchs	Moses	Jesus
Applies to Christians			Church
Applies to Israel		Israel	
Applies to All Humanity	General Laws		

So, we can summarize the biblical teaching concerning the Law and the Covenants with the following four points. First, the Mosaic Law contains many stipulations that apply to all mankind; this represents continuity between the Old and New Testaments because God gave certain general laws that apply to all people everywhere all the time. Second, the Mosaic Law contains some stipulations that only apply to the nation of Israel living in the Promised Land; this represents discontinuity between the children of Israel and the Gentile nations. God gave Israel these additional laws to foreshadow the coming of Jesus Christ. Third, Jesus incorporated the Mosaic Law into the New Covenant; this represents continuity between the Old and New Testaments. Fourth, Jesus augmented the Mosaic Law with new commandments for His disciples; this represents discontinuity between the Old and New Testament.

## Chapter 2 General Laws for All Mankind

In this chapter, we are going to look at the history of the Patriarchs and the general laws that God has given for all mankind. Later, we will look at the Old Covenant during the Mosaic period, the New Covenant given by Jesus Christ, and finally Israel during the Millennium as God's model nation.

If we examine the Law of Moses, we see that it contains many stipulations that apply to all humanity in every age. This represents a degree of continuity between the Old and New Testament. Many of these laws are clearly general in nature, but others are not so clear. They might be general or they might not.

So, throughout this study, we're going to ask three basic questions to help us determine whether a particular law is general or not. First, was a particular law required prior to the Old Covenant? Second, was it required for resident aliens living in Israel under the Old Covenant? Third, was a particular law required for Gentile Christians under the New Covenant?

If the answer to one or more of these questions is yes, then we have some evidence that a particular law applies to all mankind. In this chapter, we are going to look at the first question in more detail. Was a particular law required prior to the Old Covenant?

Based on the biblical record, we know that God gave many laws to humanity long before the Old Covenant ever existed. For example, in Genesis 6:9, we read, "Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his time. Noah walked with God." If Noah was righteous and blameless, there must have been some objective standard of behavior that God expected of people.

Indeed, in Genesis 26:5, God commended Abraham saying, "Abraham obeyed Me and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws." So, long before the establishment of the Old Covenant, we see that God had given commandments, statutes, and laws to His servant Abraham.

Also notice Job 1:1, which says, "There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job; and that man was blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil". Many scholars believe that the Book of Job was written during the time of the Patriarchs because of various clues given within the story. If that is true and Job was blameless and upright, turning away from evil, there must have been an objective standard of behavior that God required of people. From these three Scriptures, we can see that general laws existed prior to the establishment of the Old Covenant.

The next point is that general laws developed gradually, over a period of time, through a process of progressive revelation. Initially, people were vegetarians; later God allowed them to eat meat. Initially, people were allowed to marry their near kin, but after the population of the earth increased, God did not allow marriage to near kin. Initially, God banished Cain when he murdered his brother Abel, but later, God established the death penalty as the punishment for murder. So, over time, God gave more and more laws as society developed.

The next point is that these laws applied to everyone, not just the Israelites. For example, in Genesis 6, God punished universal sin through a universal flood. The Bible says that every thought of every person was continually evil; only Noah walked with God. So, God erased human life and started over with Noah and his family. Clearly, God expected everyone to obey Him.

In Genesis 11, shortly after the Flood, God commanded humans to increase in number and spread abroad throughout the earth; when they rebelled against this command and built a tower (apparently to protect themselves from another flood), God broke up their scheme by dividing



the languages. When God gave a command, He expected it to be obeyed, and when the human race didn't obey, He punished them for it.

The third example comes from Genesis 18 and 19 where God obliterated the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah for their rampant immorality and wickedness. In each of these three examples, the nation of Israel did not yet exist; in fact, Jacob had not even been born. So, we can conclude that God's laws applied to everyone and not just to the Israelites.

The last point is that these general laws involved basic activities of human life. For example, the Sabbath day was established at Creation for all mankind; in Genesis 2:3, we read that "God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made." So, God set the seventh day apart as holy time and gave this command to Adam and Eve who in turn passed it on to their children.

Notice what Moses wrote in Exodus 12:37, "Now the sons of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, aside from children. (38) A mixed multitude also went up with them, along with flocks and herds, a very large number of livestock." This passage is describing the Exodus of the children of Israel from the land of Egypt, and it clearly says that a mixed multitude of non-Israelites also went along with them.

A few chapters later, in Exodus 16:27, Moses said, "It came about on the seventh day that some of the people went out to gather [manna], but they found none. (28) Then the LORD said to Moses, 'How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My instructions?'" So, some of the people went out to gather manna on the Sabbath, but they didn't find any. Why not? Because God had already given them twice as much manna on the sixth day, so they could rest on His Sabbath. In this particular story, the people had not yet reached Mount Sinai and the Old Covenant did not yet exist, but God expected Israelites and non-Israelites to keep His seventh day Sabbath. Clearly, the Sabbath day was made for all mankind.

Other general laws dealt with tithes and offerings. For example, in Genesis 4:3, we read, "So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the LORD of the fruit of the ground. (4) Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and for his offering." Later, in verse six, we read, "So the LORD said to Cain, 'Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? (7) If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.'" In this passage, humans clearly knew that they should worship God by bringing Him an offering. We also see that, long before the establishment of the Old Covenant, God must have given humans a basic law code because Cain was in danger of sin, which is the violation of God's law (Rom 4:15, 1John 3:4).

In Genesis 14:18-20, we also read, "And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest of God Most High. (19) He blessed him and said, 'Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; (20) And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand.' He [Abram] gave him [Melchizedek] a tenth of all." Once again we see that, long before the establishment of the Old Covenant, people knew that they should bring tithes and offerings to God as a form of personal worship.

Abraham must have passed this practice on to his sons and grandsons because, in Genesis 28:20, we read, "Then Jacob made a vow, saying, 'If God will be with me and will keep me on this journey that I take, and will give me food to eat and garments to wear, (21) and I return to my father's house in safety, then the LORD will be my God. (22) This stone, which I have set up as a pillar, will be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You.'" So, Jacob knew that he should give God a tithe of his increase as a form of personal worship.

Another example of general laws is the distinction between clean and unclean animals. In Genesis 7:1, we read, "Then the LORD said to Noah, 'Enter the ark, you and all your household, for you alone I have seen to be righteous before Me in this time. (2) You shall take with you of every clean animal by sevens, a male and his female; and of the animals that are not clean two, a male and his female.'" After the Flood was over, in Genesis 8:20, we read, "Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar." So, prior to the establishment of the Old Covenant, people knew the difference between clean and unclean animals, and they knew that they should use clean animals for their sacrifices.

The next two examples are related to the death penalty and the prohibition against eating blood. In Genesis 9:1, shortly after the Flood, we read, "And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. (2) The fear of you and the terror of you will be on every beast of the earth and on every bird of the sky; with everything that creeps on the ground, and all the fish of the sea, into your hand they are given. 3 Every moving thing that is alive shall be food for you; I give all to you, as I gave the green plant.'"

In Genesis 9:4, God says, "Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. (5) Surely I will require your lifeblood; from every beast I will require it. And from every man, from every man's brother I will require the life of man. (6) Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man." Prior to this time, God gave humans plants to eat; after the Flood, He allowed them to eat meat but prohibited the eating of blood. When Cain murdered his brother Abel, God banished him; after the Flood, God instituted capital punishment for the crime of murder.

The final example of a general law is the prohibition against adultery. In Genesis 20:1, we read, "Now Abraham journeyed from there toward the land of the Negev, and settled between Kadesh and Shur; then he sojourned in Gerar. (2) Abraham said of Sarah his wife, 'She is my sister.' So Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah. (3) But God came to Abimelech in a dream of the night, and said to him, 'Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is married.'" Clearly, God expected people not to commit adultery and this incident happened long before the establishment of the Old Covenant.

So, the Bible clearly teaches that general laws existed long before the Old Covenant was established. God revealed these laws gradually, over time, as society continued to develop, and these laws applied to everyone, not just to the Israelites. They regulated the basic activities of human life; they dealt with holy time and rest, tithes and offerings, clean and unclean animals, murder and adultery, as well as, the prohibition against eating blood.

These general laws existed before the Old Covenant; they continued to exist during the time of Moses and the Church Age. When we look at the Law of Moses, it is clear that many of those stipulations are general in nature and are intended for all mankind. If we study a particular commandment and it's not clear whether it is general or not, we can ask, "Was it required prior to the establishment of the Old Covenant?" If the answer is yes, there is some evidence that it is a general law for all mankind.

## Chapter 3 One Law, Different Roles

In this chapter, we will examine the Law of Moses and learn about the different roles and responsibilities that people had living in the land of Israel under the Old Covenant.

In particular, we are going to concentrate on two main points. First, the Mosaic Law contains many stipulations that apply to all humanity; this represents continuity between the Old and New Testament. Second, the Mosaic Law contains some stipulations that only apply to Israel; this represents discontinuity between Israelites and Gentiles. Under the terms of the Old Covenant, Israelites had more responsibilities and more blessings than resident aliens.

In Chapter Two, we developed a list of three questions to help us determine whether a particular law applied to all humanity or not, and we listed several examples of general laws that existed prior to the establishment of the Old Covenant. In this chapter, we will focus on the laws that were required for resident aliens.

To understand this material, we need to remember that a covenant is a social contract that exists between two parties. In the ancient Middle East, a covenant included a list of stipulations or obligations that the two parties had to obey as well as a list of benefits that were provided in exchange for this obedience. There were also penalties that had to be paid if one party failed to meet these stipulations and breached the contract.

When God brought the children of Israel out of Egypt, He offered to make them His chosen nation; therefore, the Old Covenant was the constitution of the nation of Israel. According to the terms of the Old Covenant, every Israelite enjoyed the full rights and privileges of citizenship within the nation of Israel; they had more responsibilities and obligations than resident aliens, but they also enjoyed greater blessings and benefits as a result.

Gentiles living in the land of Israel were resident aliens; they were not full citizens, so they had fewer rights and fewer blessings. These resident aliens may or may not have been interested in worshiping the God of Israel; they were prospective members of the nation of Israel. They were free to become full citizens or remain resident aliens.

The government of Israel was a theocracy; the nation was both a church and a state, and the Law of Moses defined the roles and responsibilities of the executive, judicial, and religious branches of government. Individual citizens also had duties that they had to perform. In general, men had far more stipulations to obey than women, but everyone had specific obligations within Israelite society.

While there was only one law in the land of Israel, different groups of people had different roles and responsibilities. For example, the King of Israel had the right to gather taxes, conduct military campaigns and render judgment in criminal cases. The priests and the Levites had the right to collect tithes from the people and the responsibility to offer animal sacrifices and teach the people the Law of Moses.

Israel was a patriarchal society, where each man was entitled to a portion of land as his family inheritance; so the sons of Israel were the landed gentry who served in the king's government and employed servants to work on the family plantation. Every Israelite had certain obligations that he had to obey if he lent money, harvested crops, purchased a slave or hired an employee.

The Law of Moses also provided resident aliens with fair labor laws, workman's compensation benefits, welfare benefits, religious obligations and laws regulating social justice. In many ways, the Law of Moses was centuries ahead of its time in protecting the rights of the poor and caring for the needy in society, which is exactly what we would expect from a merciful and loving Creator.

We also need to understand three key Hebrew terms used in the Bible for resident aliens. The first term is “*gēr*” (entry 1731 in the Dictionary of Biblical Languages), which refers to an alien, stranger or foreigner, someone who is of a different geographical or cultural group often with less rights than the reference group. A “*gēr*” does not refer to a Gentile proselyte who has already become a citizen of the nation of Israel; a “*gēr*” was an uncircumcised Gentile who was living among the Israelites.<sup>ii</sup>

The second term is “*naker*” (entry 5799), which refers to someone or something foreign or alien, that which is not in the same clan, land area or religion as the speaker. This is someone who has only a distant or limited association with another person.

The final term is “*toshav*” (entry 9369), which refers to a temporary resident, sojourner, or stranger; this is primarily an alien living in an area that is not one's normal country, a class of people with less social rights. However, the term can sometimes refer to a guest, a temporary resident with a family but still of the same ethnic class, so in this particular case, the meaning of the term depends on the particular context where it appears.

Now that we have carefully defined all these terms, we are ready to examine several different topics within the Law of Moses that illustrate the different roles and responsibilities that people had within Israelite society. In Chapter Two, we saw that God gradually revealed His laws to humans through a process of progressive revelation. As we cover each of these topics, we will see some similarities with this earlier material but also some interesting modifications or enhancements to these general laws.

The first topic deals with circumcision. The first time that circumcision is mentioned is in Genesis 17:9, where God said to Abraham, “As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. (10) This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised; (11) and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you.”

Although this commandment first appears during the Patriarchal Era, it is not a general law because it is limited in scope. Circumcision only applies to the male descendants of Abraham, which includes the Ishmaelites, the Israelites and the Edomites.

When God established the Old Covenant with Israel, He reiterated the commandment of circumcision; in Leviticus 12:2, God told Moses to “Speak to the sons of Israel, saying: ‘When a woman gives birth and bears a male child, then she shall be unclean for seven days, as in the days of her menstruation she shall be unclean. (3) On the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.’”

This commandment is not general; it specifically applies to the sons of Israel. Resident aliens were not forced to undergo circumcision in order to live in the land. Gentiles could travel freely throughout the land of Israel, conduct business with Israelites and even worship at the Tabernacle without being circumcised.

The next topic deals with the Sabbath and God's Holy Days. In Exodus 20:9, God told the Israelites, “Six days you shall labor and do all your work, (10) but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner (*gēr*) who stays with you.”

The Sabbath is a general law; it applies equally to Israelites and Gentiles. This is consistent with the material that we covered in part two related to the Sabbath. God sanctified the seventh day at Creation as a blessing for all mankind, and He reiterated that law here.

The next commandment is found in Exodus 12:48 where Moses said that “if a stranger (*gēr*) sojourns with you, and celebrates the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near to celebrate it; and he shall be like a native of the land. But no uncircumcised person may eat of it.”

The Passover is not a general law. This passage clearly shows that an uncircumcised Gentile was not part of the covenant community and was not allowed to eat the Passover. This passage also shows that the term “*gēr*” referred to an uncircumcised Gentile; a Gentile proselyte was an equal member of the covenant community like a native born Israelite; he was no longer a “*gēr*,” no longer a resident alien.

The next commandment deals with the Feast of Unleavened Bread; in Exodus 12:19, God told Moses, “Seven days there shall be no leaven found in your houses; for whoever eats what is leavened, that person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is an alien (*gēr*) or a native of the land.”

In this particular case, the Feast of Unleavened Bread is a general law. Resident aliens were required to remove leaven from their homes during the Feast of Unleavened Bread just like the congregation of Israel.

At this point, it should be clear that the Law of Moses placed different levels of responsibility on different groups of people living in the land of Israel. The context and scope of a commandment determines whether it is general or not; this distinction will become even more important when we examine the New Covenant.

The next commandment deals with the Feast of Weeks, also known as Pentecost. In Deuteronomy 16:10, we read, “Then you shall keep the Feast of Weeks to the LORD your God with the tribute of a freewill offering from your hand, which you shall give as the LORD your God blesses you. (11) You shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, the Levite who is within your gates, the stranger (*gēr*) and the fatherless and the widow who are among you, at the place where the LORD your God chooses to make His name abide.”

Again, we see that a resident alien was required to celebrate the feast of Pentecost and rejoice before the God of Israel at His designated sanctuary. While God did not force resident aliens to become proselytes, He did encourage these prospective members to learn about Him.

The next example deals with the Day of Atonement; in Leviticus 16:29, we read, “This shall be a permanent statute for you: in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall humble your souls and not do any work, whether the native, or the alien (*gēr*) who sojourns among you.”

The Day of Atonement was the most solemn day of the year because, on this day, the High Priest would offer a sacrifice for the forgiveness of all the sins of the entire nation. The Law of Moses required Israelites and resident aliens to fast and observe a solemn Sabbath rest.

The last festival of the year was the Feast of Booths, also known as Sukkot; in Deuteronomy 16:13, we read, “You shall celebrate the Feast of Booths seven days after you have gathered in from your threshing floor and your wine vat; (14) and you shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter and your male and female servants and the Levite and the stranger (*gēr*) and the orphan and the widow who are in your towns.”

The Feast of Booths was a thanksgiving festival; everyone was commanded to rejoice before God for providing an abundant harvest and share their blessings with the poor and needy. Since resident aliens didn't own land, they depended on Israelite farmers for jobs and a place to live, and God made sure that they shared in the bounty that He provided.

The Law of Moses also included another commandment about the Feast of Booths; in Leviticus 23:42, God told Moses, “You shall live in booths for seven days; all the native-born in Israel shall live in booths, (43) so that your generations may know that I had the sons of Israel live in booths when I brought them out from the land of Egypt. I am the LORD your God.”

So, God required native born Israelites to live in temporary shelters during the Feast of Booths to remind them that their forefathers lived in tents when they came out of Egypt. Clearly, this commandment did not apply to resident aliens, but it did teach them about the miraculous power of the God of Israel.

There is one more commandment associated with the Feast of Booths that we need to cover; in Deuteronomy 31:10, Moses said, “At the end of every seven years, at the time of the year of remission of debts, at the Feast of Booths, (11) when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God at the place which He will choose, you shall read this law in front of all Israel in their hearing. (12) Assemble the people, the men and the women and children and the alien (*gēr*) who is in your town, so that they may hear and learn and fear the LORD your God, and be careful to observe all the words of this law.”

So, every seven years, the leaders had to read the entire Book of the Law to everyone, native Israelites and resident aliens alike, so they would learn about God and carefully observe all of His laws. Although resident aliens did not have to obey every aspect of the Mosaic Law, God still wanted them to learn about His ways and understand their rights under the Law.

The next topic concerns tithes and offerings. In Numbers 18:21, God said to Aaron, “To the sons of Levi, behold, I have given all the tithe in Israel for an inheritance, in return for their service which they perform, the service of the tent of meeting. (22) The sons of Israel shall not come near the tent of meeting again, or they will bear sin and die. (23) Only the Levites shall perform the service of the tent of meeting, and they shall bear their iniquity; it shall be a perpetual statute throughout your generations, and among the sons of Israel they shall have no inheritance.”

In Chapter Two, we saw that Abram gave his tithes to Melchizedek, a priest of God Most High; however, in this passage, God appointed the entire tribe of Levi to be His ministers within the land of Israel, and He gave them all the tithe in Israel as their compensation. As a result, God did not give the Levites large tracts of farmland so they could support themselves; they were allowed to live in the surrounding towns and cities, but they were to earn their living by ministering to the people of Israel.

This is not a general law because it deals specifically with the tribe of Levi and their right to collect the tithe of Israel, but there is an interesting precedent here that we will see again when we study the New Covenant. The conclusion that we can draw here is that tithing is God’s basic method of providing for the servants that He calls to the ministry.

The next commandment deals with voluntary offerings; in Numbers 15:14, we read, “If an alien (*gēr*) sojourns with you, or one who may be among you throughout your generations, and he wishes to make an offering by fire, as a soothing aroma to the LORD, just as you do so he shall do.”

There are several interesting points that we can glean from this passage. First, God didn’t hinder Gentiles from worshiping Him. Although resident aliens were not required to offer sacrifices to the God of Israel, they were permitted to bring a voluntary offering just like native born Israelites.

Also, there were no double standards when it came to the worship of the God of Israel; the regulations concerning voluntary offerings applied equally to resident aliens and Israelites alike.

They offered the same kind of animals, the same amount of grain, and the same amount of wine with each sacrifice.

According to the Law, men did not have to be circumcised in order to enter the sanctuary courtyard to present their offerings, but they did have to be ritually clean. Resident aliens had to avoid touching anything unclean, wash their clothes and bathe before approaching the altar just like the Israelites. God wanted His people to be physically and spiritually clean before they worshipped Him (cf. Lev 7:20-21, Num 19:20).

The next commandment related to offerings is Leviticus 17:8, which says, “Then you shall say to them, ‘Any man from the house of Israel, or from the aliens (*gēr*) who sojourn among them, who offers a burnt offering or sacrifice, (9) and does not bring it to the doorway of the tent of meeting to offer it to the LORD, that man also shall be cut off from his people.’”

Resident aliens were not required to offer sacrifices to the Lord, but if they chose to do so, they had to bring their sacrifices to the Levitical priests at the sanctuary of the Lord. They couldn't just build an altar and offer a sacrifice anywhere in the land as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had done; this is a modification of an earlier, general law. However, Israelites and resident aliens alike had to be ritually clean in order to enter the sanctuary courtyard with their sacrifice. The same rules applied to both groups in that case.

The next commandment is found in Numbers 15:28, where God said, “The priest shall make atonement before the LORD for the person who goes astray when he sins unintentionally, making atonement for him that he may be forgiven. (29) You shall have one law for him who does anything unintentionally, for him who is native among the sons of Israel and for the alien (*gēr*) who sojourns among them.”

Once again, a resident alien who voluntarily chose to worship the Lord had to follow the same ceremonial laws and procedures as the native born Israelites. In the case of an unintentional sin, a resident alien or an Israelite had to offer the exact same sacrifice for atonement.

The general conclusion that we can draw from this series of commandments is that God expected everyone to worship him according to His regulations and specifications; God did not allow people to do their own thing or worship him according to the customs of other religions. God was very particular about the kind of worship that was acceptable to Him.

The next topic deals with the food laws; in Leviticus 17:10, God said, “And any man from the house of Israel, or from the aliens (*gēr*) who sojourn among them, who eats any blood, I will set My face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from among his people.”

In Chapter Two, we learned that God gave Noah and his sons this commandment against eating blood; here in the Law of Moses, God repeats the same command for both Israelites and resident aliens showing that this is a general law for all mankind. This is another example of continuity from one era to another.

The next commandment illustrates the discontinuity between Israelites and Gentiles that also exists within the Law of Moses. We need to remember that some resident aliens voluntarily decided to follow Yahweh while others did not, and God expected His covenant people to abide by a higher standard.

For example, in Deuteronomy 14:21, Moses told the Israelites, “You shall not eat anything which dies of itself. You may give it to the alien (*gēr*) who is in your town, so that he may eat it, or you may sell it to a foreigner (*nakerî*), for you are a holy people to the LORD your God....”

At this point in history, the human race had rejected God in the Garden of Eden and the tower of Babel; humanity was stumbling around in spiritual darkness and was not interested in seeking their Creator. The laws that God gave to Israel clearly would have prevented diseases and

fostered a long and happy life, but He did not force unbelievers to obey Him and reap the blessings.

Unfortunately, desperate people sometimes do desperate things in order to stay alive. So, in Leviticus 17:15, we read, "When any person eats an animal which dies or is torn by beasts, whether he is a native or an alien (*gēr*), he shall wash his clothes and bathe in water, and remain unclean until evening; then he will become clean."

Even though the Israelites were not permitted to eat an animal that died of natural causes, God gave Israel a general law to explain the consequences of breaking this commandment; anyone (Israelite or Gentile) who ate this meat had to bathe and remain ritually unclean until the next day. In addition to the risk of getting sick, the individual could not worship God at His holy sanctuary until he was clean again. Although the penalty was rather mild, God got the point across that He discouraged this behavior.

The next topic deals with laws against immorality; the first example is Leviticus 20:2, where God said, "You shall also say to the sons of Israel: 'Any man from the sons of Israel or from the aliens (*gēr*) sojourning in Israel who gives any of his offspring to Molech, shall surely be put to death; the people of the land shall stone him with stones.'"

While God did not force resident aliens to become part of His covenant community, He did not allow anyone to worship another god, such as Molech, in the land of Israel. This general law is consistent with God's earlier instructions to Noah that every murderer should be put to death because the worship of Molech involved human sacrifice. It is also an extension of the sixth commandment prohibiting murder. So, this is another example of continuity from one era to another as well as the gradual revelation of the general laws for all mankind.

The next commandment is found in Leviticus 24:16, where God said to Moses, "Moreover, the one who blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall certainly stone him. The alien (*gēr*) as well as the native, when he blasphemes the Name, shall be put to death."

This general law is an extension of the third commandment and another example of the death penalty being imposed for breaking one of the Ten Commandments. This also helps us to understand why God wanted the leaders to read the entire Law of Moses to all people; God required Israelites and resident aliens to obey His laws against immorality, and the penalty for violating them was very serious.

The next set of commandments deals with sexual immorality; in Leviticus 18:22, God told Moses, "You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination. (23) Also you shall not have intercourse with any animal to be defiled with it, nor shall any woman stand before an animal to mate with it; it is a perversion. (24) Do not defile yourselves by any of these things; for by all these the nations which I am casting out before you have become defiled. (25) For the land has become defiled, therefore I have brought its punishment upon it, so the land has spewed out its inhabitants. (26) But as for you, you are to keep My statutes and My judgments and shall not do any of these abominations, neither the native, nor the alien (*gēr*) who sojourns among you."

This set of general laws is an extension of the seventh commandment against adultery, but the truly interesting aspect of these laws is that God was about to destroy the Canaanites for breaking them. This suggests that God had revealed these laws to humanity long before the time of Moses; this is supported by the fact that God obliterated Sodom and Gomorrah for their widespread sexual perversion as well.



Throughout history, people have had strong incentives to get married and have large families because children would support the family business and take care of their parents in their old age. We need to understand the Law of Moses in this context.

Obviously, God prohibited sexual promiscuity and perversion because it would spread sexually transmitted diseases and threaten the well-being of the community. But, human beings didn't know about the microscopic organisms that caused these diseases until relatively recent times. The Law of Moses was clearly centuries ahead of its time and provided blessings to those who obeyed God.

The next topic deals with the civil laws that regulated Israelite society; the first example comes from Deuteronomy 17:15, where Moses said, "you shall surely set a king over you whom the LORD your God chooses, one from among your countrymen you shall set as king over yourselves; you may not put a foreigner (*nakeri*) over yourselves who is not your countryman."

This law is specifically limited to the government of Israel. The goal of this commandment is to prevent a foreign power from gaining control of the people; ironically, this was one of the reasons that the Jews in the first century didn't accept Herod as their king because he was an Edomite, a descendent of Esau.

Although this is not a general law, the underlying principle is sound and has found its way into the laws of other nations. For example, the Founding Fathers of the United States incorporated this principle into the Constitution in 1787 by precluding a naturalized citizen from becoming president or vice-president of the country.

The next commandment is found in Deuteronomy 15:1, which says, "At the end of every seven years you shall grant a remission of debts. (2) This is the manner of remission: every creditor shall release what he has loaned to his neighbor; he shall not exact it of his neighbor and his brother, because the LORD'S remission has been proclaimed. (3) From a foreigner (*nakeri*) you may exact it, but your hand shall release whatever of yours is with your brother."

Here we see one of the great advantages of being a full citizen in the nation of Israel. Every seven years, at the Feast of Booths, the Israelites had to cancel any outstanding debts owed by a fellow Israelite but not those of foreigners or aliens. So, if an Israelite borrowed money and then fell on hard times, God gave him a fresh start, an opportunity to get back on his feet.

The net effect was to encourage people to be cautious, thrifty and righteous. Israelites were probably very reluctant to lend any money for a risky business venture or to an untrustworthy individual. It also encouraged resident aliens to become full citizens of Israel and followers of Yahweh.

A similar law is found in Leviticus 25:39, where Moses wrote, "If a countryman of yours becomes so poor with regard to you that he sells himself to you, you shall not subject him to a slave's service. (40) He shall be with you as a hired man, as if he were a sojourner (*toshav*); he shall serve with you until the year of jubilee. (41) He shall then go out from you, he and his sons with him, and shall go back to his family, that he may return to the property of his forefathers."

This commandment prevented Israelites from falling into perpetual, chattel slavery. If an Israelite had very large debts, he could pay them off by becoming an indentured servant, essentially a contract worker, for a term of no more than fifty years. At the end of that time, every indentured servant in Israel was automatically released and any farmland that they had leased reverted back to their control.

By doing this, God taught the people to be responsible for their decisions and their debts, but He also taught them to extend mercy to the poor and needy. This was just one more incentive for resident aliens to become full citizens in the nation of Israel.

If that was not enough, the next commandment certainly would have made them think about it; in Leviticus 25:45, Moses wrote, “Moreover you may buy the children of the strangers (*toshav*) who dwell among you, and their families who are with you, which they beget in your land; and they shall become your property. (46) And you may take them as an inheritance for your children after you, to inherit them as a possession; they shall be your permanent slaves. But regarding your brethren, the children of Israel, you shall not rule over one another with rigor.”

Resident aliens did not enjoy the same protections as the native born Israelites; aliens could become poor and fall into permanent, chattel slavery. Even then, the Law of Moses provided several different ways for a foreign slave to obtain his freedom, but it was still much harder for him than for a native born Israelite.

The next commandment deals with the problem of manslaughter, in other words, accidental homicide; in Numbers 35:10, God said to Moses, “Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘When you cross the Jordan into the land of Canaan, (11) then you shall select for yourselves cities to be your cities of refuge, that the manslayer who has killed any person unintentionally may flee there. (15) These six cities shall be for refuge for the sons of Israel, and for the alien (*gēr*) and for the sojourner (*toshav*) among them; that anyone who kills a person unintentionally may flee there.’”

The Law of Moses never punished criminals by locking them up in prison cells for years at time; only Gentile nations practiced that kind of punishment. If an Israelite committed premeditated murder, he was tried and executed in relatively short period of time.

However, if an individual accidentally killed someone, he was exiled to one of six cities where he could rent a room, earn a living, and see his family occasionally until his exile was over. There was no need for a prison; if he left the city of refuge before his exile was over, the victim’s family could kill him without any penalty. That was strong incentive to stay put for a few years.

This was a general law that applied equally to Israelites and resident aliens alike. Whatever differences may have existed regarding debts or servitude, when it came to criminal activity, everyone was equal in the eyes of the Law of Moses.

Life in ancient Israel was very dangerous and often very short; this particular punishment was severe enough to discourage reckless behavior but not too severe to destroy a person due to an unintentional accident. It also gave the victim’s family time to grieve and let go of any desire for vengeance. A very wise combination of justice tempered with mercy.

We have seen several examples of laws that favored Israelites over resident aliens; the next law actually turned the tables a bit. In Deuteronomy 24:19, Moses told the Israelites, “When you reap your harvest in your field and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the alien (*gēr*), for the orphan, and for the widow, in order that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.”

The needy mentioned in this command were at a real disadvantage. A resident alien would not have owned land within Israel where he could grow his own food; he had to find work wherever he could in order to support himself. And, a widow or an orphan might be able to raise some sheep or goats, but they would not have been able to plow a large field to grow grain.

So, this particular law required the native born Israelites to show generosity to the poor and needy within society even if they were not Israelites. Although this particular command applies specifically to the Israelites, God clearly used Israel to set a general example to all nations about helping the poor and needy.

Notice also that God didn’t just give the needy all the food they wanted; they had to do some work to get it, even if these remnants were left there for them to find. This allowed the poor to

maintain a measure of dignity by working for their food. It also discouraged stealing and begging among those who were healthy enough to work; if you needed food but didn't have any land or money, you could gather the gleanings in a nearby field.

The last commandment that we will examine is found in Deuteronomy 26:12, where Moses wrote, "When you have finished paying all the tithe of your increase in the third year, the year of tithing, then you shall give it to the Levite, to the stranger (*gēr*), to the orphan and to the widow, that they may eat in your towns and be satisfied."

Like the previous law, God commanded the Israelites to provide assistance for the poor and needy even if they were resident aliens; however, in this particular case, the Israelites were supposed to take a tenth of their harvest in the third and sixth years and store it within the gates of their cities, where the leaders of the people would distribute it to the needy.

So, in addition to the gleanings, God established a social security fund to provide for those who could not support themselves. Once again, we see that the Law of Moses was centuries ahead of its time in terms of social justice and humanitarian compassion. While this command applied specifically to the Israelites, God clearly used Israel to set a general example to all nations about helping the poor and needy.

At this point, we have more than a couple dozen commands within the Law of Moses that discuss the rights and obligations of native born Israelites and resident aliens, and we are now in a position to draw some general conclusions.

First, we saw that the Law of Moses contains many stipulations that apply to all humanity; from the time of Adam to the Old Covenant at Mount Sinai, we have seen a growing body of general laws that God expected Israelites and Gentiles to obey. This represents not just continuity from one era to the next but also continuity between Israelites and Gentiles.

Second, we saw that the Law of Moses also contains many stipulations that only apply to native born Israelites living in the Promised Land under the terms of the Old Covenant; most of these laws dealt with the unique aspects of Israelite society such as laws regulating the monarchy, the priesthood, and duties of one Israelite to his fellow Israelite. God had one law for the land of Israel, but different people had different roles and responsibilities under that one law code.

This represents a fundamental discontinuity between what God expected of Israel and what He required of Gentiles. However, even in those unique situations where the Mosaic Law did not apply to resident aliens, God often used Israel to set a positive moral example to the surrounding Gentile nations, a fact that will become increasingly important as we go on.

And finally, we saw that even though God did not require resident aliens to become full-fledged citizens and converts to Mosaic Judaism, He did encourage Gentiles to learn about Him and required them to obey certain general laws that focused on a few core issues such as the Sabbath and the Holy Days, sacrifices and offerings, basic standards of morality and diet.

Some of these general laws were simply restated from the Book of Genesis, other laws were expanded and clarified from the Patriarchal Era, while still others appeared for the very first time in the Mosaic Law yet clearly applied to both Israelites and Gentiles equally.

## Chapter 4 Two Covenants, One Foundation

In this chapter, we will examine the claim that the Law of Moses is the common foundation for both the Old and New Covenants. In particular, we are going to concentrate on three main points.

First, Jesus inaugurated a New Covenant, not a renewed covenant. This is an example of discontinuity between the Old and New Testament. Jesus didn't just call the people of Israel back to the Old Covenant; He created a fundamentally new contract between God and His followers.

Second, Jesus incorporated the Mosaic Law into the New Covenant. This is an example of continuity between the Old and New Testament; the Mosaic Law is a fundamental revelation of God's moral and spiritual truth for humanity and a guide for proper Christian living.

Third, the Mosaic Law contains many stipulations that apply to all humanity. In Chapter Two, we developed a list of three questions to help us determine whether a particular law applied to all humanity or not. We also saw several examples of general laws that existed prior to the establishment of the Old Covenant. In Chapter Three, we saw more examples of general laws that were required for resident aliens living in the land of Israel. In this chapter, we will list additional examples of Mosaic Laws that were required for Gentile Christians.

We will begin by reviewing the fact that Jesus came to inaugurate a New Covenant, not just a renewed covenant. The term "New Covenant" implies that this social contract is fundamentally different than the previous one. A "renewed covenant" would simply restore everything to an original state or condition as it was at Mount Sinai, but that is not the case.

For example, the New Covenant is a social contract with different people. The Old Covenant was an agreement between God and the physical nation of Israel, while the New Covenant is an agreement between God and the followers of Jesus Christ. Although there can be some overlap between these two groups, faith in Christ is now the basic prerequisite to participation in the New Covenant community.

The New Covenant also has new stipulations and benefits. While Jesus retained the Law of Moses as the foundation for the New Covenant, He added new commandments for His followers, which we will call the Law of Christ. Jesus also retained many of the blessings of the Old Covenant, but He added new benefits and better promises to the agreement.

The New Covenant also has a new method of justification. The Israelites had to offer animal sacrifices whenever they broke the terms of the Old Covenant; this was a works based system of justification. But, Christians receive forgiveness through the death of Jesus Christ; this is a faith based system of justification.

God told Israel that He was going to replace the Old Covenant with a better covenant even before Jesus Christ was born. In Jeremiah 31:31, we read, "'Behold, days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, (32) not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,' declares the LORD."

The Hebrew term for New Covenant is "*berit chadashah*" where the adjective "*chadash*" always refers to that which is new. As a basic point of Hebrew grammar, Jeremiah 31:31 is talking about a new covenant. This is confirmed in verse 32, when God described this covenant as not like the covenant that He had made with their fathers; this second covenant will be different, therefore it must be new.

God also told ancient Israel that He would send a divine messenger to reveal this covenant. In Malachi 3:1, we read, “Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,” says the LORD of hosts.”

The first messenger in this passage refers to John the Baptist; however, the Messenger of the covenant was none other than Yahweh Himself. As predicted, Jesus Christ revealed Himself to the people of Israel in the courtyard of Herod's Temple, and then, shortly after His death, resurrection and ascension, both the Temple and the nation of Israel were destroyed.

Just as Malachi predicted, Jesus instituted the New Covenant as part of His ministry. In 1 Corinthians 11:25, the apostle Paul wrote, “In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.’” The Greek term for New Covenant here is “*kainay diathaykay*” which definitely is a new covenant.

So, the apostles understood that they were representatives of the New Covenant and not merely a restoration of the Old Covenant. In 2 Corinthians 3:6, the apostle Paul explained this commission from Jesus Christ “who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.” Here, Paul emphasized the superiority of the New Covenant over the Old Covenant because the New Covenant provides eternal life through the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit.

The author of Hebrews also echoed this sentiment; in Hebrews 8:6, we read, “But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises. (7) For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second.” A renewed covenant would restore everything to an original state, so a “renewed covenant” does not need a new mediator, and it can't become better. Jesus inaugurated the New Covenant that was far superior to the Old Covenant.

The author of Hebrews also commented on the meaning and significance of Jeremiah 31:31. In Hebrews 8:13, we read, “In that He says, ‘A new covenant,’ He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.” Again, the Greek term here is “*kainos*,” which refers to a new covenant, not a renewed covenant. The early Christian church also realized that the establishment of the New Covenant rendered the Old Covenant obsolete, but that does not necessarily mean that the stipulations are obsolete. The agreement has changed, but the Law of Moses has been augmented, not replaced.

This brings us to our second point; Jesus incorporated the Mosaic Law into the New Covenant. There are two basic lines of evidence to support this point. First, the New Testament explicitly says so, and second, the Jewish Christians who comprised the early New Testament church, continued to keep the Law of Moses.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus Christ clearly retained the Law of Moses as the basic standard of Christian behavior. In Matthew 5:17-20, Jesus said, “Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. 18 For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. (19) Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (20) For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Jesus clearly said that He didn't come to abolish the Torah and that the Torah would continue to be in effect until heaven and earth pass away. This will occur after the Millennium, when God

establishes the New Heavens and New Earth. The Law of Moses is God's basic moral standard for humanity and an important revelation of timeless spiritual truth that is the foundation of the Old and New Covenant.

This passage also rules out any possibility that Jesus was talking about the concept of justification by faith or imputed righteousness because He expects His disciples to keep and teach even the least of the commandments or risk the possibility of not entering the kingdom of heaven.

Another example appears in Matthew 19:16, where we read, "And someone came to Him and said, 'Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?' (17) And He said to him, 'Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is only One who is good; but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.' 18 Then he said to Him, 'Which ones?' And Jesus said, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER; YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY; YOU SHALL NOT STEAL...'"

The young man in this story wanted to know God's true standard for proper human conduct, and Jesus pointed him to the Law of Moses. We need to remember that by this time, the rabbis had developed an additional legal code, known as the Oral Law, which was supposed to be a fence around the Mosaic Law. Jesus never endorsed the traditions of the elders; in fact, He routinely condemned these commandments of men and deliberately broke these Pharisaical rules to make His point.

Jesus was not saying that people can earn salvation by obeying the law. Later in this story, Jesus encouraged this individual to follow Him and become His disciple. Wherever Jesus travelled, He told people to repent and believe the gospel, and repentance involves turning from sin to obey God's divine standard for human conduct found in the Mosaic Law.

Over and over, the New Testament upholds the on-going authority of the Mosaic Law as the standard of behavior for believers. In Luke 16:17, Jesus again affirmed that "it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter of the Law to fail." Clearly, Jesus didn't think that His death would abolish God's Law.

The apostle Paul repeatedly upheld the authority of the Mosaic Law. For example, in Romans 2:13, Paul said that "it is not the hearers of the Law who are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified." Notice that Paul still viewed the Mosaic Law as the proper standard for human behavior.

He was not suggesting that believers are justified by keeping the Law; he was simply saying that God will not justify people, will not forgive those, who are deliberately living in sin. Biblical faith involves conviction and whole-hearted devotion to God.

In Romans 3:31, Paul asked, "Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law." Again, Paul didn't believe that the death of Jesus abolished the Mosaic Law; in fact, throughout his ministry, he continued to practice and teach the Law of Moses.

Although Paul opposed the forced conversion of Gentiles as Jewish proselytes, he continued to uphold the value of a Torah observant lifestyle for Israelites. In Romans 3:1, he asked, "What advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? 2 Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God." Paul understood that God had called the nation of Israel for a special assignment; as a result, Israel had extra duties to fulfill and extra blessings in God's plan.

Paul explained that circumcision alone has no value apart from a Torah observant lifestyle; in Romans 2:25, he wrote, "For indeed circumcision is of value if you practice the Law; but if you

are a transgressor of the Law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision.” As we can clearly see, Paul did not teach that God abolished the Law of Moses; on the contrary, he felt that a Torah observant life style is of value for Israelites.

While many people in Paul’s day wanted to focus on a merely external sign, Paul focused on what was really important. In 1 Corinthians 7:19, he explained that “circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God.” For Paul, true faith is more than just conviction alone; it is a lifestyle of whole-hearted devotion to God and His ways.

Paul understood that Israelites and Gentiles had different roles and responsibilities under the Mosaic Law, but a Gentile proselyte became part of the nation of Israel and had to accept the responsibility to keep all of the Mosaic Law. In Galatians 5:3 he wrote, “I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law.”

In this passage, Paul is talking about circumcision in the context of becoming a proselyte. There are other cultures in the Middle East and Africa that practice various forms of circumcision, but not for the purpose of converting to Mosaic Judaism. However, Paul readily acknowledged that if a Gentile became a proselyte, he had to keep the whole Law of Moses. Once again, Paul didn’t teach that the Law of Moses had been abolished.

The reason Paul opposed Gentile circumcision is that the circumcision party focused on a works based system of justification. The net effect was to nullify the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and the principle of justification by faith. Paul rightly understood that the circumcision party was stuck in the past and perverting the gospel. Gentile Christians didn’t need justification by the works of the Law; they already had everything they needed for salvation. They were not second class Christians.

The next example comes from James 2:10, where we read, “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. (11) For He who said, ‘DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY,’ also said, ‘DO NOT COMMIT MURDER.’ Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. (12) So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty.”

In this passage, James simply assumes that the Law of Moses still exists as God’s righteous standard for human behavior. We know that James is discussing the Law of Moses because he cites two of the Ten Commandments as examples of keeping the whole Law. He does not claim that the Mosaic Law was abolished; in fact, he refers to it as “the law of liberty” and reminds his Jewish Christian audience that they will be judged according to it.

As we have seen, the New Testament explicitly and repeatedly teaches that the Mosaic Law has not been abolished; instead, Jesus incorporated it into the New Covenant as God’s divine standard for proper human conduct. As we saw earlier, Israelites and Gentiles have different roles and responsibilities under the Mosaic Law. While Paul opposed the wrong-headed efforts of some to convert Gentiles to Mosaic Judaism, he upheld the value of keeping God’s commandments and encouraged Israelites to follow a Torah observant lifestyle.

The next set of examples illustrates the fact that early Jewish Christians did not believe that the Mosaic Law had been abolished. They continued to keep the Law of Moses as they always had but with a greater level of understanding.

For example, in Acts 16:1, Luke wrote, “Then he (Paul) came to Derbe and Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father was Greek...” Timothy was half Jewish and half Gentile, so when he reached

adulthood, he had to choose which lifestyle and culture he would follow. He had to self-identify as either Jewish or Gentile.

In verse 3, we see which path Timothy decided to follow; Luke says that “Paul wanted to have him go on with him. And he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in that region, for they all knew that his father was Greek.” So, Timothy decided to embrace his Jewish heritage and all the duties that went with it.

As we can clearly see, Paul was not opposed to Israelites circumcising their sons; in fact, Paul circumcised Timothy as if he was his own son. Within Judaism, yeshiva students consider their rabbi to be their spiritual father because they imitate the lifestyle and teaching of their rabbi, so Timothy would have naturally come to view Paul as his spiritual father.

The next example comes from Acts 18:18; Luke continues his story in the city of Corinth, where “Paul, having remained many days longer, took leave of the brethren and put out to sea for Syria, and with him were Priscilla and Aquila. In Cenchrea he had his hair cut, for he was keeping a vow.”

At this time, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, but before he sailed out of the local Greek port of Cenchrea, he shaved his head because he was beginning a Nazirite vow (Numbers 6). While most Christians are probably unfamiliar with this Temple ritual, it is clear evidence that Paul continued to live a Torah observant lifestyle even after he became a Christian.

According to the Law of Moses, a Nazirite vow was a special period of dedication that lasted for an arbitrary number of days; during this time, a person abstained from eating or drinking anything made from grapes and no razor was to pass over his head. When vow ended, the individual had to offer a special sacrifice at the Temple, shave his head and burn the hair on the fire with his sacrifice.

According to Luke, this was not the only time that Paul underwent this procedure; several years later, Paul returned to Jerusalem to complete another Nazirite vow. In Acts 21:20, Paul met with the Jerusalem church to report his missionary success; Luke says, “And when they heard it they began glorifying God; and they said to him, ‘You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed, and they are all zealous for the Law (21) but they have been informed about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs.’”

This passage reveals several important points. First, there are thousands of Jewish Christians still living in Judea in spite of persecution from their unbelieving brethren. Second, these Jewish Christians are all zealous for the Law; clearly, they didn’t believe that the Mosaic Law had been abolished. And third, someone told these Jewish Christians that Paul was teaching Israelites not to circumcise their sons; sadly, after almost 2000 years, many people today still have this misperception about Paul.

The leaders of the Jerusalem church wanted to discredit these rumors, so in Acts 21:22, they said to Paul, “What, then, is *to be done*? They will certainly hear that you have come. (23) Therefore do this that we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; 24 take them and purify yourself along with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads; and all will know that there is nothing to the things which they have been told about you, but that you yourself also walk orderly, keeping the Law.”

This passage confirms what we have been learning all along. First, Paul did not teach Israelites to forsake the Law of Moses; in fact, he himself continued to keep the Mosaic Law. Second, Paul not only upheld the value of circumcision for Israelites, he even circumcised his own



disciple, Timothy. The inescapable conclusion is that Jewish Christians, Paul included, did not believe that the Mosaic Law was abolished; they continued to keep a Torah observant lifestyle long after the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Paul himself mentions another example; in Acts 22:12, he told the Jews about being struck blind by Jesus Christ while on the road to Damascus and then, “a certain Ananias, a man who was devout by the standard of the Law, and well-spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, (13) came to me, and standing near said to me, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight!’ And at that very time I looked up at him.”

Notice that Paul described this Jewish Christian as “devout by the standard of the Law” which clearly shows that early Christians did not believe that the Mosaic Law had been abolished. Although this event happened very soon after the resurrection, Paul was telling this story several decades later to prove to an angry Jewish mob that Jewish Christians, like Ananias, also walked orderly, keeping the Law.

Despite Paul’s claim that he had not broken the Law of Moses, the Jews insisted on dragging Paul into court; in Acts 23:3, the Jewish High Priest ordered his soldiers to strike Paul on the mouth during his testimony; then Paul said to him, “God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! Do you sit to try me according to the Law, and in violation of the Law order me to be struck?” (4) But the bystanders said, ‘Do you revile God’s high priest?’ (5) And Paul said, ‘I was not aware, brethren, that he was high priest; for it is written, ‘YOU SHALL NOT SPEAK EVIL OF A RULER OF YOUR PEOPLE.’”

The air in the courtroom must have been electrified with excitement; here was Saul of Tarsus, who decades earlier had persecuted Christians without mercy and had gone to Damascus with letters from an earlier High Priest to hunt down even more Christians; but now, the apostle Paul stood before a different man, and challenged the legality of his actions.

When Paul learned that this man was the new High Priest, did he tell his judges that the Law of Moses had been abolished? No, even in this unjust situation, Paul conceded that he had no right to revile a ruler of the people, which is a direct quote from Exodus 22:28. Paul upheld the authority of the Law of Moses even under these difficult circumstances.

This brings us to the third point; the Mosaic Law contains many stipulations that apply to all humanity. This is an example of continuity between the Old and New Testament.

One of the clues that we can use to determine if a Mosaic commandment was a General Law for all mankind is to see if it was required for Gentile Christians. In past lectures, we looked at examples of general laws during the time of the Patriarchs and the Kingdom of Israel; we saw that God gave laws regarding the Sabbath and the annual Holy Days, offerings and worship, general morality and diet. Now, we will consider some New Testament examples.

Many Christians would tend to agree that everyone should keep the Ten Commandments, although they might argue about Sabbath keeping. Most people know that the New Testament prohibits sins like polytheism, idolatry, blasphemy, dishonoring one’s parents, murder, sexual immorality, stealing, lying, and coveting; however, there is also clear support for keeping the seventh day Sabbath if one is willing to read the Bible honestly.

Using a topical Study Bible or concordance, it is relatively easy to cross reference Old Testament passages listing the Ten Commandments with corresponding New Testament passages. Based on what we saw earlier, it should come as no surprise that the apostle Paul frequently calls on Christians, Jews and Gentiles alike, to obey the Ten Commandments.

But, the authors of the New Testament go much further than just the Ten Commandments. One can create a similar list of apostolic teaching against reviling those in authority, uncleanness,

sorcery, enmity (hatred), taking vengeance, eating blood, kidnapping, and marriage with unbelievers all of which is rooted in Old Testament commandments. There are even New Testament instructions about testing prophets that are based on Mosaic statutes for determining false prophets. The New Testament is so full of Old Testament citations and allusions, that they truly appear to be twins; even though they were written in three different languages, the Bible reads like a single book with a single Author.

With the one exception of circumcision, the authors of the New Testament did not make any distinction between Jews and Gentiles when they gave instructions about proper Christian living. Over and over again, they cited the Law of Moses as the proper basis for a sanctified lifestyle. This evidence supports the general conclusion that the Law of Moses is an important revelation of moral and spiritual truth that was incorporated into the Old and New Covenants.

This would be an excellent time to review what the Jerusalem Council actually decided about Gentile Christians and the Law of Moses. In Acts 15:1, Paul and Barnabas were ministering in Antioch when “some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.’ (2) And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue.”

At this point, we need to understand the full process of Gentile conversion to rabbinic Judaism. A Gentile proselyte had to learn and promise to keep all of the Mosaic Law and the Oral Law before he was circumcised. Then, he had to undergo a complete, ritual immersion in a mikvah, which is a large pool of fresh water used for purification. After this, he had to offer a Temple sacrifice.

For the rabbis, Gentile conversion paved the way to eternal salvation. According to the Talmud, a man who teaches his neighbor to keep the Law, it is as if he had begotten him anew (Sanhedrin fol. 19b), and the Gentile proselyte who had been immersed was like a child that had been born again (Yebamoth fol. 22a)<sup>iii</sup>.

The key point is that the Jews would not allow an uncircumcised person to enter the Temple courtyard where the sacrifices for sin were offered. The Pharisees had built a fence around the Temple and the Law of Moses by their human traditions. When Paul visited Jerusalem, his enemies accused him of bringing a Gentile into the Temple courtyard, and the entire city was thrown into an uproar.

Now that we understand the issues involved, we can continue. In Acts 15:5, Luke wrote, “But some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up, saying, ‘It is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses.’ (6) The apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter.”

Circumcision was not part of the general laws, so the apostles rejected this teaching. They agreed with Paul that circumcising Gentile Christians would take them back to a works-based system of justification rather than forward to justification by faith in Jesus Christ.

Once the church decided that the Gentiles did not need to be circumcised, they had to determine how much of the Law of Moses they were required to keep. Jewish rabbis are notorious for arguing about complex questions, and this particular question has been the source of much debate for centuries.

Even the apostle Paul agreed that a Gentile who converted to Judaism had to keep the whole Law, but he also taught that much of the Mosaic Law was still applicable for uncircumcised

Gentile Christians. We should also note that Jesus adamantly opposed the Oral Law, and there is no indication that the early Christian church observed the so-called traditions of the elders.

The answer begins to take shape in Acts 15:13; Luke says, "After they had stopped speaking, James answered, saying, 'Brethren, listen to me. (14) 'Simeon has related how God first concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name...'" James was the leading elder in the Jerusalem church, where this controversy originated; his next words would be crucial because he had to contend with the pro-circumcision element within his ranks.

In Acts 15:19, James says, "Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles, (20) but that we write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood."

There are several important facts that we should take note of in this passage; first, the earliest Gentile converts to Christianity were individuals who already attended Jewish synagogues on a regular basis and had already adopted many aspects of Torah observance on their own. Biblical scholars refer to this group as the God-fearers. But, Paul and his other missionary companions were now successfully winning converts from the general population of Asia Minor who had no biblical education of any kind.

Second, the list that James proposed has a solid foundation in the Torah (Ex 34:12-16, Lev 18, Gen 9:4, Lev 17:10); Moses commanded the Israelites to avoid idolatrous banquets, which was consistent with God's general laws against polytheism and idolatry. Sexual immorality was a rampant problem in Hellenistic society, which the Book of Leviticus addressed in clearly general terms. The prohibition against eating strangled animals is related to not eating blood, which was a general regulation given to Noah and his family. The Law of Moses specified that animals should be bled to death, which greatly reduced the blood left in the meat.

The list that James proposed represented an initial set of biblical requirements for fellowship for Gentile converts and not a final, static list. If we examine Paul's epistle to the Galatians, which was written at about the same time as the Jerusalem Council, we see that Paul was willing to go much farther than this list in training his Gentile converts to follow a biblical lifestyle. So, this list was a minimum starting point.

The New Testament contains general laws about the Sabbath and the Holy Days, which is consistent with the earlier instruction during the time of the Patriarchs and the Exodus. For example, in Mark 2:27, Jesus to the Pharisees, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath." The Greek term for "man" is *anthropos*, which is a generic term for people; as the Lord of the Old Testament, Jesus Himself had established the Sabbath at Creation for all humanity, so He had the right to tell people how it should be kept.

Paul also taught Jewish and Gentile Christians to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread; in 1 Corinthians 5:7, he wrote, "Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. (8) Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."

He urged the Corinthians to put the leaven of sin out of their lives just as they had, literally, gotten rid of leaven. He exhorted them to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread in a physically and spiritually unleavened state. By combining literal and figurative language in this passage, we know that Christians were keeping the feast days. We should also note that Paul's use of this Old Testament analogy would make no sense at all to Gentile Christians unless they were actually keeping the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

The New Testament also contains general laws dealing with morality; for example, in Ephesians 6:1, Paul wrote, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER (which is the first commandment with a promise), 3 SO THAT IT MAY BE WELL WITH YOU, AND THAT YOU MAY LIVE LONG ON THE EARTH.”

Most Christians should know that this is a direct quote from the Ten Commandments, which would make no sense if the Mosaic Law had been abolished. Notice that Paul says that this is, not was, the first of the Ten Commandments with a promise; he deliberately used the present tense in the Greek, which the translators have correctly rendered. This citation not only verifies that the Law of Moses was not abolished, but it also demonstrates the overall trend that the moral aspects of the Mosaic Law tend to be general laws for all mankind.

The next example deals with marriage to unbelievers; in 1 Corinthians 7:39, Paul wrote, “A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.” This is consistent with the Law of Moses prohibiting the Israelites from entering into marriages with Gentiles who were not part of the covenant community (cf. Ex 34:12-16, Deut 7:1-4).

Later, in 2 Corinthians 6:14, Paul elaborates on the principle of only marrying within the faith; he told the Corinthians, “Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? (15) Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?”

Moses offered a similar reason for banning marriages outside the nation of Israel. There was a real danger that a believer would be pressured to forsake the Lord and adopt the religion of the unbeliever. The end result is not peace in the family but compromise, sin and apostasy.

Finally, in 2 Corinthians 6:16, we read, “Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, ‘I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.’ (17) Therefore, ‘COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST AND BE SEPARATE,’ says the Lord. ‘AND DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAR;’ and I will welcome you.”

In this passage, Paul quotes from a wide selection of Old Testament passages showing that Yahweh, the God of Israel, also dwells with Gentile Christians and that He expects all of His people to keep themselves separate from the physical and spiritual uncleanness of the world (cf. Ex 29:45; Lev 26:12, Deut 23:12-14, Isa 52:11).

Paul specifically told Christians not to touch anything unclean; that refers to physical objects, and the only place in the Bible that defines physical uncleanness is the Torah. This is consistent with the general laws that prohibited people from entering God’s sanctuary courtyard if they had come into contact with anything unclean. Paul’s endorsement of these Mosaic regulations also shows that the early Christian church was not eating unclean meat.

## Chapter 5 New Covenant, New Laws

In this chapter, we will explore the concept that Jesus and the apostles augmented the Mosaic Law with new stipulations, which we will call the Law of Christ. God expects all Christians, Jews and Gentiles alike, to obey these additional commandments as part of the New Covenant. This is another example of discontinuity between the Old and New Testament.

As we discussed earlier, the Old Covenant was merely a physical type of a greater covenant that was to come, and the kingdom of Israel was merely a physical shadow of the kingdom of God. As a result, we can draw many parallels between Israel and the Church.

For example, the Old Covenant was the constitution of the nation of Israel, while the New Covenant is the constitution of the Church. Israel and the Church are two distinct institutions, and they are governed by two different sets of regulations.

Under the Old Covenant, Israelites were citizens of the kingdom of Israel, while Christians are citizens of the kingdom of God. Christians are also heirs, but not yet inheritors, of the coming global empire that Jesus will establish at His return.

As a result, Christians have new obligations, but they also receive much greater blessings than God ever promised to the nation of Israel. God expects Christians to exhibit a higher standard of behavior, and the Holy Spirit transforms Christians so they can obey Him.

Finally, God gave the Israelites certain rituals to perform that foreshadowed the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. These rituals are still a useful tool for teaching unconverted people important spiritual lessons, but Christians have already graduated from this school. Under the terms of the New Covenant, Christians are justified by faith in Jesus Christ, not by the works of the Law.

Now that we have covered the basics, we will examine some of these concepts in greater detail. For example, the apostle Paul was a Roman citizen, which meant that he enjoyed certain benefits and legal protection wherever he travelled in the Roman Empire. Sometimes, the Roman Empire would sell citizenships as a way to raise money and ensure the loyalty of conquered peoples. People would spend large sums of money to purchase a Roman citizenship because it brought lasting benefits to them and their children.

Many of Paul's converts were Roman citizens, so we should not be surprised that he reminded them that they were citizens of the Kingdom of God. In Ephesians 2:19, Paul wrote, "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, (20) having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone..."

Roman citizens were part of Caesar's household, but Paul reminds us that Christians belong to an even higher power. He described them as fellow citizens with the saints, which means that Gentile Christians are part of a sanctified community set apart for service to God along with believing Israelites.

In Philippians 3:20, Paul reminded the Gentile Christians of this Roman colony that they had an allegiance to a power greater than Caesar; he wrote, "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." This is not a trivial point. Eventually, many Christians were charged with treason because they refused to acknowledge Caesar as Lord.

Jesus Christ created a New Covenant assembly and gave His followers the Great Commission. After the Jewish leaders rejected Jesus as the Messiah, He began to teach His disciples that He would create an independent organization for His followers that was separate from the scribes

and their synagogues. In Matthew 16:18, Jesus said, "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it."

After His resurrection, Jesus also gave the disciples a clear mission statement for the church. In Matthew 28:19, He told the apostles, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, (20) teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Unlike rabbinic Judaism, which tends to focus only on the people of Israel, Jesus always intended the Gospel of the kingdom of God to go to every nation.

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the apostles laid out the organizational structure and qualifications for various officers within the Church. For example, in 1 Timothy 3:1, Paul wrote, "It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. (2) An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach..." Essentially, an overseer is also called an elder in other passages; and an overseer was responsible for the teaching and overall administration within a congregation.

In addition to overseers, Paul also gave instructions about the qualifications for deacons. In 1 Timothy 3:8, Paul wrote, "Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain..." Apparently, deacons would assist the elders with various ministries such as helping the widows and needy within the congregation.

Although there are similarities between the Church and the synagogue, there are also subtle differences in both the structure and order of service laid out in the New Testament. Most Old Covenant offices were hereditary, and there were no qualifications like those listed here; New Covenant officers, on the other hand, are appointed by the Church. Paul's instructions show that a typical church service alternated between liturgical music and biblical instruction or exhortation with each segment being uniquely Christian in character (1Cor 14:26-33).

God used circumcision as the identifying mark of the Old Covenant, while baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit are the corresponding sign and seal of the New Covenant. In each case, an individual became part of the covenant community through a covenant ratification ceremony.

For example, in Acts 2:38, Peter said to his fellow Israelites, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Also, in Ephesians 1:13, we read, "In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise."

Although there are some similarities between Jewish ritual immersion and Christian baptism, there are significant differences as well. Under the Law of Moses, Israelites had to bathe in fresh water to become ritually clean, but this had nothing to do with repentance or justification. Also, under the Old Covenant, Israelites would immerse themselves, but the New Covenant requires an agent of the Church to immerse a proselyte in the name of the Jesus Christ. And finally, the Old Covenant did not provide a promise of receiving the Holy Spirit.

All of the Israelites who heard Peter's call to repentance were keeping the Law of Moses, but that was not enough to wash away their sins and provide the gift of the Holy Spirit. Something more was needed, and just as God had promised, Jesus provided the New Covenant.

In addition to the new sign of the New Covenant, Jesus and the apostles also instituted a New Covenant Passover. In 1 Corinthians 11:23, Paul gave the following instructions, "For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; (24) and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'This is My

body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' (25) In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, 'This cup is the New Covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.'"

Once again, although there are similarities here to the Old Testament Passover, this memorial service is significantly different and uniquely Christian in character. Paul's instructions show that only Christians could participate in this service; this fact is confirmed in the Didache, a second century manual of church policies and practices.

According to early church historians, the apostle John taught his disciples to observe the Lord's Supper on the fourteenth day of the first Jewish month to coincide with the Old Covenant Passover, and the early Christian church continued to refer to the Lord's Supper as Passover for centuries after John's death. This practice continued until the Church of Rome outlawed it in the fourth century and excommunicated faithful Christians from their midst.

As the Mediator of the New Covenant, Jesus explicitly augmented the Mosaic Law several times in the Sermon on the Mount. Instead of abolishing the Law of Moses, as many people believe, Jesus actually levied a stricter code of conduct on His disciples.

The first example deals with anger and the spirit of murder. In Matthew 5:21, Jesus told His disciples, "You have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' (22) But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell."

The second example deals with lust and the spirit of adultery. In Matthew 5:27, Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY'; (28) but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

In both examples, He is moving beyond the letter of the law into the heart and mind where sin begins. This is why the Christian life is impossible without the transforming power of the Holy Spirit to change people on the inside. Again, Jesus is not abolishing the Mosaic Law; He is actually adding a stricter code of conduct to the New Covenant.

The third example from the Sermon on the Mount deals with divorce. In Matthew 5:31, Jesus said, "It was said, 'WHOEVER SENDS HIS WIFE AWAY, LET HIM GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE'; (32) but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery."

The Pharisees were divided on the issue on divorce; some were very strict while others were more liberal. The Law of Moses clearly permitted divorce, but the school of Shammai taught that a husband could only divorce his wife for sexual immorality while the school of Hillel taught that a man could divorce his wife for any reason at all.

Jesus clearly agreed with the school of Shammai in laying down a stricter code of conduct for His disciples. Jesus spent so much time criticizing the Pharisees that people might be surprised to learn that Jesus did occasionally acknowledge the fact that they were right about a particular issue. Jesus had some deep philosophical differences with the Pharisees, but not all of them were hypocrites. In fact, many Pharisees accepted Jesus as the Messiah and became members of the early Christian church. One of them was Saul of Tarsus.

In addition to augmenting the Mosaic Law, Jesus gave His followers completely new stipulations as well. For example, in Matthew 23:8, Jesus told His followers, "But do not be called Rabbi; for

One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. (9) Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven.”

According to Jewish tradition, a young man would attach himself to a particular rabbi who would become his teacher and spiritual father. The boy would copy every aspect of the rabbi's teaching and lifestyle until the student became just like his teacher.

The Hebrew term “rabbi” means “my master,” and Jesus is not willing to share that kind of devotion or title with anyone. Within the Christian Church, there can be no substitute for Jesus Christ.

In John 13:14, Jesus also instituted the ordinance of foot washing. During the Last Supper, Jesus washed the feet of His disciples and said, “If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. (15) For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you.” Since that time, many congregations have followed this practice, in one form or another, each spring around the time of Passover.

Jesus and the apostles also taught the Church to give financial support to the ministry. In 1 Corinthians 9:13-14, the apostle Paul wrote, “Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the food of the temple, and those who attend regularly to the altar have their share from the altar? (14) So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel.” In this passage, Paul drew an important parallel between the Levitical priesthood and Christian ministers. Under the terms of the Old Covenant, the priests who offered various sacrifices for the nation of Israel also received a portion of the food as payment for their ministry.

Paul said that the Lord Himself authorized Christian ministers to receive a full salary for preaching the gospel. This command is similar to the example given in Gen 14:20, where Abram gave a tithe to Melchizedek. It is also similar to the instructions in Numbers 18:21, where God authorized the Levites to collect tithes from the assembly of Israel in exchange for their ministry in the tabernacle.

The general principle is that God's servants in every age have been supported by contributions from His people. However, the new application of this principle is that Christian ministers are now authorized to receive financial support in exchange for their ministry as well.

Now that we have seen several examples of new laws given to Christians, we will look at a couple of New Testament passages to see if the apostles were teaching Gentiles to follow general laws from the Old Testament or new stipulations.

For example, in 1 Corinthians 6:9, Paul wrote, “Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor (catamites), nor homosexuals, (10) nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.” Based on what we have covered up to this point, which of these stipulations are new?

If you check the cross references in your Bible, you can easily see that most of these behaviors were already capital offenses under the Law of Moses, and therefore, should be considered general laws. The one exception in this list is drunkenness, which is discouraged in the Book of Proverbs, but not explicitly prohibited in the Law of Moses.

The next example is Galatians 5:19-21, where Paul again said, “Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, (20) idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, (21) envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told



you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” How many of these stipulations are truly new?

Again, many of these sins were already prohibited under the Law of Moses, but there are some notable exceptions such as jealousies, outbursts of wrath, and selfish ambitions. Often, these new stipulations deal with source of sin in the mind and heart of a person. But, we also see that Paul was usually following the Law of Moses as a guide for a proper conduct.

In this chapter, we have seen that Jesus augmented the Mosaic Law within the New Covenant. Christians have been given new stipulations to follow and, in many cases, God has greatly increased the penalty for certain sins.

We have also seen that the New Covenant serves as the constitution of the Church, regulating the various offices and operations that are carried out to accomplish the Great Commission. All of this is very different than the Old Covenant, which was the constitution of the nation of Israel.

We have also seen that, under the terms of the New Covenant, Christians are citizens of the Kingdom of God. They have new obligations to perform but they also receive greater blessings than the Israelites did under the Old Covenant. One of the key differences is that Christians are justified by faith rather than works; the sacrifice of Jesus Christ has ushered in a new and better system of justification.

For centuries, Christians have been trained to think that the Hebrew Scriptures are for the Jews, the Greek Scriptures are for Christians, and the two Testaments have nothing in common, but that is the wrong mental picture. The Old Covenant was just the first step in the process of revealing God’s plan of salvation to the world, but the Old Covenant was incomplete without the additions that Jesus brought.

We need to think of the New Covenant as the Hebrew Scriptures and the Greek Scriptures together; the whole Bible is the New Covenant. Jesus retained the earlier foundation and added to it by greatly expanding and magnifying every aspect of the Old Covenant.

But, God is not yet finished with the nation of Israel; God called Israel to carry out a special mission, and the gifts and calling of the Lord are irrevocable. In Chapter Six, we will examine the biblical teaching concerning Israel as God’s Model Nation during the Millennium.

## Chapter 6 Israel, God's Model Nation

In previous chapters, we saw that God gradually revealed a system of laws for all humanity from the very beginning. He also gave Israel a specific set of laws when He called them as His chosen people and gave them the Promised Land. Next, Jesus Christ gave His followers new laws and the transforming power of the Holy Spirit when He established the New Covenant.

In this chapter, we will examine Israel's special calling as God's model nation. After the Exodus, God established Israel as His chosen people so they could be a light to the world. However, under the terms of the Old Covenant, Israel did not receive the gift of the Holy Spirit to change their hearts. As a result, from the time of Moses until the birth of Jesus Christ, Israel failed to achieve their mission because they were never able to obey God. Even though they failed, God is not yet finished with the nation of Israel.

When Jesus Christ returns, He will bring the entire nation of Israel under the New Covenant, and they will finally succeed in becoming God's model nation. During the Millennium, God will gather the tribes of Israel in the Promised Land and give them His Holy Spirit so they can obey him. The converted nation of Israel will become a living example of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The second point that we will cover is that the Mosaic Law is God's special tool for global evangelism and discipleship. Originally, God gave Israel the Law of Moses as a graphic illustration of the Gospel; the various laws and ceremonies of the Mosaic Law foreshadowed the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ and the establishment of the kingdom of God.

During the Millennium, God will re-establish the temple and the Levitical priesthood in Jerusalem. The symbolic aspects of the Law of Moses will become living memorials of death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ, while the moral and civil aspects of the Law of Moses will teach the nations how to behave.

Unbelievers from every nation will learn about Christ's finished work at Calvary through the sin offerings of Israel's priests. If they choose to accept Christ as their Lord and Savior, they will come under the terms of the New Covenant and graduate to justification by faith.

We will begin by reviewing God's original commission to Israel to become His chosen people. In Exodus 19:5, God made the following proposal to Moses, "Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; (6) and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel." Note that Israel was to become a kingdom of priests; they had a commission to live holy lives.

Every Israelite had a role to play in society that illustrated the Gospel of the Kingdom of God to other nations. The food they ate, the festivals observed, and the tithes they gave all reflected some aspect of holiness and grace to the Gentile nations around them. This is emphasized even more clearly in Deuteronomy 4:5, where Moses wrote, "See, I have taught you statutes and judgments just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do thus in the land where you are entering to possess it. (6) So keep and do them, for that is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.'"

God wanted the Gentiles to notice Israel and emulate them. He wanted Israel to shine the light of His Laws and His Truth to a lost and deceived world. From the beginning, God intended to use the Law of Moses as His special tool to teach the world about the Gospel and the Kingdom of God. This truth appears again and again throughout Israel's history.

For example, when Solomon dedicated the Temple in Jerusalem, he specifically mentioned the impact this would have on the surrounding nations. In 1 Kings 8:41-43, Solomon said, “Also concerning the foreigner who is not of Your people Israel, when he comes from a far country for Your name’s sake (42) (for they will hear of Your great name and Your mighty hand, and of Your outstretched arm); when he comes and prays toward this house (43) hear in heaven Your dwelling place, and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to You, in order that all the peoples of the earth may know Your name, to fear You, as do Your people Israel, and that they may know that this house which I have built is called by Your name.”

This passage clearly shows that God wanted Israel to be a light to the world and messengers of His truth. We also see that the Temple in Jerusalem and the Levitical priesthood were an integral part of that program for evangelism and discipleship.

Over and over, throughout Israel’s history, there were many Gentiles who saw that Israel had something special, and they wanted a part of that blessing. We see examples of this in the story of Rahab who helped the two spies at Jericho and Ruth, the Moabitess, who married Boaz and became part of the lineage of King David and Jesus Christ.

And, God promised to accept the Gentiles who sought Him. Notice what Yahweh said in Isaiah 56:6, “Also the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to Him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be His servants, everyone who keeps from profaning the Sabbath and holds fast My covenant; (7) Even those I will bring to My holy mountain and make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be acceptable on My altar; For My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples.”

Clearly, God used Israel to build His temple so the whole world could come to Jerusalem and worship Him on His Sabbaths and Holy Days. God is not the God of Israel alone; He welcomes foreigners who follow His laws and promises to bless them.

So, Jerusalem was to be the global headquarters for the worship of Yahweh, and Israelites were supposed to be God’s evangelists and missionaries. Notice what is written in Psalm 96:1, “Sing to the LORD a new song; Sing to the LORD, all the earth. (2) Sing to the LORD, bless His name; Proclaim good tidings of His salvation from day to day. (3) Tell of His glory among the nations, His wonderful deeds among all the peoples.” Also in verse 10, “Say among the nations, ‘The LORD reigns; Indeed, the world is firmly established, it will not be moved; He will judge the peoples with equity.’”

The Torah contains the basic story of God's plan of salvation. After Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, God promised that one day a descendant of Eve would crush the head of the evil one; many years later, God promised Abram that He would bless all the families of the earth through one of Abram’s descendants. Here in Psalm 96, we see that God wanted Israel to tell the whole world “good tidings of His salvation” and of a coming global judgment. In other words, God wanted Israel to be His evangelists and missionaries to the whole earth.

Jesus and the early church also understood that God wanted Israel to be a light to the Gentiles. For example, in John 4:21, Jesus said to the Samaritan woman at the well, “Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. (22) You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. (23) But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.”

Jesus clearly stated that God had revealed His plan of salvation to Israel and that He wants to share that salvation with those who truly seek Him. The Samaritans are a group of Gentiles living in northern Israel who accepted the Torah but also established an illegitimate temple and priesthood. Jesus acknowledged that the Samaritans were sincere but misguided; like many

Christians today, they only understood part of the message and worshipped God according to their own ideas and their own ways. That kind of worship is unacceptable to God.

The apostle Paul also taught this truth. In 2Timothy 3:14, he wrote, “You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned *them*, (15) and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.”

Paul said that Timothy had studied “the sacred writings” when he was still a child and that these sacred writings were able to impart the wisdom that leads to salvation. But, the only sacred writings available to Timothy were the Hebrew Scriptures that we call the Old Testament.

This explains what Jesus meant when He said that “salvation is of the Jews.” God revealed His truth to Israel and gave them the task of carefully preserving the Hebrew Scriptures. By studying the Old Testament, Timothy was able to learn about God’s standard of proper behavior and the coming of the Messiah to bring about salvation and universal judgment.

Next, we need to understand that ancient Israel, living under the terms of the Old Covenant, failed to fulfill God’s commission. For example, in Jeremiah 31:31, God said, “‘Behold, days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, (32) not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,’ declares the LORD.”

From the time that God brought Israel out of Egypt until the day that they went into exile, the Israelites continually worshipped other gods, broke the Sabbath, shed innocent blood, engaged in sexual immorality and persecuted God’s messengers. Finally, God sent the Assyrians and the Babylonians to conquer them and destroy their cities. After 70 years of exile and captivity, the Jews finally started to obey God, but even then, they continued to struggle.

God told Jeremiah that His people needed a new covenant to heal their backsliding. In Jeremiah 31:33, He said, “‘But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,’ declares the LORD, ‘I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.’”

The reason that Israel failed to obey God is that they did not receive the gift of the Holy Spirit as part of the Old Covenant. The unconverted mind cannot obey God (Rom 8:7), but the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit transforms the mind and heart of a Christian making obedience possible (Gal 5:22-23). Instead of abolishing the Law, God actually planned to put it within His people and write it on their hearts.

This passage also shows that God fully intended to make this New Covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. But, when Jesus came the first time, His own people rejected and crucified Him, so this prophecy will be fulfilled at some point in the future.

The prophet Isaiah tells us when Israel will finally succeed in their mission to be God’s model nation. In Isaiah 2:2, we read, “Now it will come about that in the last days The mountain of the house of the LORD Will be established as the chief of the mountains, and will be raised above the hills; And all the nations will stream to it. (3) And many peoples will come and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, To the house of the God of Jacob; That He may teach us concerning His ways and that we may walk in His paths.’ For the law (*torah*) will go forth from Zion and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.”

His prophecy gives us several important facts about God’s plan of salvation. First, this prophecy will be fulfilled in the last days, which is a reference to God’s Millennial Kingdom. Second, people from all over the earth will travel to Mount Zion, the mountain of the house of the Lord, to

learn about God and His ways. Third, they will go to the house of the God of Jacob, which implies that a third temple will be built in Jerusalem sometime in the future. And finally, we see that God will use Jerusalem as His headquarters to teach the Torah, the Law of Moses, to the whole world.

The Book of Ezekiel contains a lengthy description of Jerusalem during the Millennium. This vision begins in Ezekiel 40:1, which says, "In the twenty-fifth year of our exile, at the beginning of the year, on the tenth of the month, in the fourteenth year after the city was taken, on that same day the hand of the LORD was upon me and He brought me there. (2) In the visions of God He brought me into the land of Israel and set me on a very high mountain, and on it to the south there was a structure like a city."

Throughout several chapters, Ezekiel measures and describes a massive temple complex that could handle millions of visitors from all over the earth. Based on the context, this appears to be the same temple that Isaiah mentioned in his prophecy.

After describing the size and shape of this third, Millennial temple, God gave Ezekiel a solemn warning. In Ezekiel 43:10, He said, "As for you, son of man, describe the temple to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities; and let them measure the plan. (11) If they are ashamed of all that they have done, make known to them the design of the house, its structure, its exits, its entrances, all its designs, all its statutes, and all its laws. And write it in their sight, so that they may observe its whole design and all its statutes and do them." Some might say that this passage is merely allegorical in order to avoid the obvious implications of what Ezekiel saw, but God clearly predicted that this vision would be literally fulfilled because the house of Israel was to learn its statutes and do them.

Ezekiel's vision also foretells the re-establishment of the Aaronic priesthood. In Ezekiel 40:45, he wrote, "This is the chamber which faces toward the south, intended for the priests who keep charge of the temple; (46) but the chamber which faces toward the north is for the priests who keep charge of the altar. These are the sons of Zadok, who from the sons of Levi come near to the LORD to minister to Him."

God has promised the Levitical priests that they have a perpetual calling to offer grain offerings and burnt offerings before Him, and this calling is irrevocable. God singled out the sons of Zadok in this passage because they had remained faithful to God when the rest of Israel had gone into apostasy. As a reward, they will serve God throughout the Millennium in this temple.

Ezekiel's vision also foretells the restoration of animal sacrifices during the Millennium. In Ezekiel 42:13, we read, "Then he said to me, 'The north chambers and the south chambers, which are opposite the separate area, they are the holy chambers where the priests who are near to the LORD shall eat the most holy things. There they shall lay the most holy things, the grain offering, the sin offering and the guilt offering; for the place is holy.'" The Law of Moses stipulated that the Israelites should give the priests a portion of the meat and grain from their sacrifices as payment for their ministry; it is also interesting to note that sin offerings are included in the list of holy things presented to the priests.

Some might insist that this must be figurative language, but God told Ezekiel that a literal altar will be built in this Millennial temple. In Ezekiel 43:18, Ezekiel wrote, "And He said to me, 'Son of man,' thus says the Lord GOD, 'These are the statutes for the altar on the day it is built, to offer burnt offerings on it and to sprinkle blood on it. (19) You shall give to the Levitical priests who are from the offspring of Zadok, who draw near to Me to minister to Me,' declares the Lord GOD, 'a young bull for a sin offering.'"

Many people find this passage hard to understand because they believe that God abolished the sacrificial system after the death of Jesus Christ, but this passage does not present an

insurmountable paradox. Prior to the death of Jesus, the sin offerings were a prophecy that foreshadowed the sacrificial death of the Messiah for the forgiveness of sins; after His death and resurrection, these same offerings are a memorial of what He has done.

God called Israel to perform these rituals as a vivid and graphic reminder of the seriousness of sin and the terrible price that Jesus paid for our forgiveness. God is going to use this system as a tool to teach unbelievers about His plan of salvation. The New Testament indicates that unbelievers will graduate from this system of education to justification by faith when they accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

Ezekiel's vision also describes some of the duties that the Levitical priests will perform during the Millennium. In Ezekiel 44:23, we read, "Moreover, they shall teach My people the difference between the holy and the profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean. (24) In a dispute they shall take their stand to judge; they shall judge it according to My ordinances. They shall also keep My laws and My statutes in all My appointed feasts and sanctify My Sabbaths."

Ezekiel's vision clearly shows that the Mosaic Law was not abolished by the death of Jesus Christ. The Levitical priests will teach God's people, Israelites and Gentiles alike, the various laws that they need to obey as part of God's covenant community, including the laws related to clean and unclean animals; they will also render judgments in various legal matters based on God's Laws. We should also note God's people will observe the biblical feasts and Sabbaths during the Millennium.

Isaiah also predicted that a special highway will exist in the land of Israel during the Millennium. In Isaiah 35:8, he wrote, "A highway will be there, a roadway, and it will be called the Highway of Holiness. The unclean will not travel on it, but it will be for him who walks that way, and fools will not wander on it. (9) No lion will be there, nor will any vicious beast go up on it; These will not be found there. But the redeemed will walk there, (10) And the ransomed of the LORD will return and come with joyful shouting to Zion, With everlasting joy upon their heads..."

Isaiah 35 is clearly Millennial because it describes a time when God will provide an abundance of fresh water in the wilderness around the Arabah, in the Jordan rift valley; there will be pools of water and lush vegetation will grow in the desert. The ransomed of the Lord refers to the Israelite refugees who will come out of the Gentile nations after the Great Tribulation and settle in the Promised Land once again.

Notice that God will establish a sacred road for these people and that no one who is ritually unclean can travel on it. As we have already learned, the Levitical priesthood will teach people the difference between what is clean and unclean according to the Law of Moses if they want to walk on that road, which includes the Gentiles who will go up to worship the Lord in Jerusalem. This is further evidence that the Law of Moses has not been abolished.

Ezekiel's vision also describes some of the duties that Israel will have during the Millennium. In Ezekiel 45:16, we read, "All the people of the land shall give to this offering for the prince in Israel. (17) It shall be the prince's part to provide the burnt offerings, the grain offerings and the drink offerings, at the feasts, on the new moons and on the Sabbaths, at all the appointed feasts of the house of Israel; he shall provide the sin offering, the grain offering, the burnt offering and the peace offerings, to make atonement for the house of Israel."

One of Israel's tasks, as God's model nation, is to sustain the various ministries of the Temple. This passage says that a prince, perhaps one of David's descendants, will collect an offering from the people of Israel to provide sacrifices in the Temple throughout the year. While Gentiles are allowed to give voluntary offerings, they are not required to provide the regular sacrificial offerings that God commanded throughout the year. That responsibility falls on Israel alone.

And, Israel will continue to observe the weekly and annual Sabbaths during the Millennium. This is, once again, further evidence that the Law of Moses has not been abolished.

Ezekiel specifically mentions some of the festivals that people will observe in this Millennial temple. In Ezekiel 45:21, he wrote, "In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, you shall have the Passover, a feast of seven days; unleavened bread shall be eaten. (22) On that day the prince shall provide for himself and all the people of the land a bull for a sin offering." And, in verse 25, we read, "In the seventh month, on the fifteenth day of the month, at the feast (of Tabernacles), he shall provide like this, seven days for the sin offering, the burnt offering, the grain offering and the oil."

As we saw in earlier presentations, God expected resident aliens living in the Kingdom of Israel to observe God's annual festivals, and Gentile Christians in the early New Testament also kept these festivals with their Jewish brethren. Here, we have evidence that God's people will observe these festivals in the Millennium as well.

Israelites and Gentiles will keep the weekly Sabbath during the Millennium. In Ezekiel 46:1, we read, "Thus says the Lord GOD, 'The gate of the inner court facing east shall be shut the six working days; but it shall be opened on the Sabbath day and opened on the day of the new moon.'" Based on the context of this passage, this must refer to the seventh day Sabbath that God established at Creation for all mankind. The "six working days" are Sunday through Friday.

In Ezekiel 46:3, we read, "The people of the land shall also worship at the doorway of that gate before the LORD on the Sabbaths and on the new moons." The Law of Moses required the Israelites and resident aliens to rest on the weekly Sabbath and gather for worship at God's sanctuary. The Law of Moses required the Levitical priests to offer special sacrifices when the new moon occurred to mark the start of each new month; this was the basic method of determining when the annual Holy Days would occur. Although the new moon was not a Sabbath day, not a day of rest, it was a regular part of Israel's liturgy.

Isaiah also discussed the observance of the new moon and the weekly Sabbath during the Millennium. In Isaiah 66:23, he wrote, "'And it shall be from new moon to new moon and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all mankind will come to bow down before Me,' says the LORD." In this passage, we see that the Gentiles who come up to Jerusalem to learn God's laws will join the Israelites in worshipping God on the new moon and weekly Sabbath days. This prophecy confirms the general nature of weekly Sabbath for all mankind.

God will also require the Gentiles to observe the annual Holy Days during the Millennium. In Zechariah 14:16, we read, "Then it will come about that any who are left of all the nations that went against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths. (17) And it will be that whichever of the families of the earth does not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, there will be no rain on them."

This prophecy clearly confirms the general nature of God's annual festivals and the enduring permanence of the Mosaic Law. At the end of the Great Tribulation, many nations will fight against Jesus Christ when He returns from heaven and stands on the Mount of Olives, but they will be destroyed. Afterward, God will require representatives from every nation to worship Him, in humble submission, at His sanctuary in Jerusalem. If they do not submit, God will send drought and famine to force them to comply.

## Chapter 7 Answering Possible Objections

In this chapter, we will address specific questions and objections that people might have based on prior exposure to either Dispensational or Covenant Theology. For centuries, church leaders have taught that the Mosaic Law has been abolished, so it is not surprising that people are somewhat confused to hear that many of their favorite Bible passages have been misinterpreted or mistranslated based on erroneous theological assumptions.

First, someone might ask, “Didn’t Jesus abolish the food laws in Mark 7:19?” This passage deals with a controversy that broke out between the Pharisees and the disciples of Jesus. In Mark 7:2, we read, “Now when they saw some of His disciples eat bread with defiled, that is, with unwashed hands, they found fault. (3) For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands in a special way, holding the tradition of the elders” (NKJV).

Jesus rejected the criticism of the Pharisees, but His disciples still didn’t understand His point, so, in Mark 7:18, Jesus asked them, “Are you thus without understanding also? Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him, (19) because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated, *thus* purifying all foods” (NKJV)? Other translations of this passage are even more liberal, saying, “Thus He declared all foods clean” (NASB, ESV, NRSV).

Many people carelessly assume that Jesus came to abolish the Law of Moses, and they try to read that meaning back into the passage, but Jesus wasn’t talking about pork chops and shrimp cocktail. According to the rabbis, any food that the disciples touched became defiled, not because their hands were dirty, but because they didn’t follow a particular religious ritual established by men. Therefore, in their eyes, anyone who ate that food also became ritually defiled. But, this ritual was part of the Oral Law, the so-called traditions of the elders, and not the Law of Moses.

Jesus never recognized the authority or validity of the Oral Law, so He ruled that all the food that the disciples had touched was still biblically clean. Since many people aren’t familiar with the difference between the Oral Law and the Law of Moses, they jump to the wrong conclusion.

We should also note that, in this context, the term “food” did not include unclean animals and cannot legitimately be redefined to include them. Jesus and His disciples followed the dietary laws, so they would not have called pork or catfish “food” since that was considered inedible. It is not proper to read modern ideas about food into a story with a first century, Jewish context.

We can be certain that this is the correct interpretation because, decades later, Paul taught Gentile Christians to avoid physical uncleanness. In the midst of an admonition to his Greek converts, he drew on several Old Testament passages to make his point. For example, in Deuteronomy 23:14, Moses said to Israel, “For the LORD your God walks in the midst of your camp, to deliver you and give your enemies over to you; therefore, your camp shall be holy, that He may see no unclean thing among you, and turn away from you.” Paul combined this concept with citations from Leviticus 11:8 and Isaiah 52:11 to make the following point.

In 2 Corinthians 6:16, Paul warned, “Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, “I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE. (17) Therefore, COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST AND BE SEPARATE,” says the Lord. “AND DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAN; And I will welcome you.” Paul is clearly talking about physical uncleanness because he says not to touch it, and the only place where the Bible defines what is, or is not, unclean is in the Torah, the Law of Moses. We can be certain that the Corinthians were not dining on lobster or oysters at the church picnic.



Next, someone might ask, “Didn’t God declare that all animals are now clean during Peter’s vision in Acts 10?” The story of Peter’s vision is part of a larger story that begins in Acts 10 and continues half way through Acts 11. In this story, God spoke to a Roman centurion named Cornelius living in Caesarea telling him to send messengers to Joppa, about 35 miles to the south, to contact a man named Simon Peter. When the Gentile messengers from Cornelius arrived in Joppa at noon the next day, God sent Peter a very strange message.

In Acts 10:10, Luke describes Peter’s vision this way, “Then he (Peter) became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance (11) and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth. (12) In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air.”

At this point, God tells Peter something completely unexpected; in Acts 10:13, we read, “And a voice came to him, ‘Rise, Peter; kill and eat.’ (14) But Peter said, ‘Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean.’ (15) And a voice spoke to him again the second time, ‘What God has cleansed you must not call common.’”

If you only read this much of the story, you could easily come to the wrong conclusion. It is important to read the entire story to understand the correct, biblical interpretation of the vision.

We should also note that although this story took place about a decade after the resurrection, Peter had continued to observe the Mosaic dietary laws without any notion that the Mosaic Law had been abolished. The fact that Peter was puzzled about this request is clear evidence that something else was going on.

According to the Bible, Peter later realized that the vision was symbolic; therefore, the command that he heard was not to be taken literally. The Romans had ruthlessly oppressed and persecuted the Jews for decades, and the Jews, in turn, fiercely hated all Gentiles and looked down on them with utter contempt. They were also fairly certain that no Gentile would ever inherit eternal life in God’s holy kingdom. In their eyes, the Gentiles were little more than subhuman beasts.

Since Gentiles did not usually obey the Law of Moses, the Jews assumed that all Gentiles were ritually defiled all the time; as a result, they created a standing rule that no Jewish man should ever associate with a Gentile for fear of becoming ritually defiled. This rule was not part of the Mosaic Law; it was a tradition that the Jews added on their own.

God used the vision to show Peter that he had been guilty of racial prejudice, which would hinder the preaching of the Gospel throughout the world. Notice what Luke wrote in Acts 10:28, “Then he said to them, ‘You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common (*koinos*) or unclean.’” In this passage, the term “common” comes from the Greek word *koinos*, which refers to a clean item that becomes ritually defiled by touching something unclean. This is the same word that was used in Acts 10:13; as a result, Peter now understood that God had cleansed these Gentiles who had previously been *koinos*, that is, defiled.

We also know that this is the correct interpretation because God still considered some animals to be unclean long after Peter’s vision. At the end of the first century, decades after Peter’s death, the apostle John saw another vision while exiled on the isle of Patmos; in Revelation 18:2, John saw an angelic messenger, “And he cried out with a mighty voice, saying, ‘Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird.’” Clearly, God still considers some animals to be unclean and loathsome creatures, so we can be sure that He has also not abolished the dietary laws against eating unclean animals.

Someone also might ask, “Didn’t Paul say that Christ is ‘the end the Law’”? Let’s dig a little deeper to see what Paul was really saying.

In Romans 10:4, Paul said, “For Christ is the end (*telos*) of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.” In this particular passage, the English term “end” comes from the Greek term *telos*, which refers to the termination or goal of a particular action. If you didn’t look any further, it would be easy to see how someone might conclude that the Law of Moses was abolished.

The answer is that this translation is based on misguided theological assumptions. Since most seminaries teach either Dispensational or Covenant Theology, translators assume that the Mosaic Law has been abolished when they do their work. Their theological framework is like a pair of glasses that actually distort their vision; when they translate a passage, this assumption is like a pair of mental blinders that excludes other possible translations.

We know that this is the correct answer, because Paul himself, in the Book of Romans, explicitly said that faith in Christ does not abolish the Law of Moses. In Romans 3:31, Paul wrote, “Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law.” Paul can’t uphold the Law in one passage of the Book of Romans and then flatly contradict himself a few chapters later. That would be completely illogical and inconsistent.

In fact, two other legitimate translations are possible for Romans 10:4. In chapters 9 and 10 of the Book of Romans, Paul is discussing the fact that although the Jews were seeking the Messiah, they did not recognize Him because they were busy trying to earn their own salvation by obeying the Law through their own efforts. They couldn’t accept the righteous that comes through faith in Christ; ironically, they were wearing theological blinders and couldn’t see the truth that was right in front of them.

So, one possible translation is that Christ is the end of *using* the Law for righteousness; in other words, Christians know that they can’t earn their salvation through perfect obedience by their own strength. Everyone sins, except for Jesus Christ, the divine Son of God, so no other human will ever stand before God and claim to be perfectly righteous.

The second possible translation is that Christ is the goal of the Law for righteousness. Jesus taught that the Law and Prophets, all of the Old Testament, foreshadowed His life and ministry in both His first and second coming. The Law of Moses and the heroes of the Old Testament are illustrations or silhouettes pointed toward the coming of Jesus Christ. If we want to know how to obey God and do what pleases Him, we only have to ask, “What would Jesus do?” The life of Jesus shows us how we should live; it is the goal the Law.

Either way, the Law still serves as a guide for proper Christian living. The purpose of the Law is to define sin. The law can’t take away our sins, only the death of Jesus can do that. And, the Law can’t change our hearts; only the Holy Spirit can transform us and generate the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. We need all three in order to complete God’s plan of salvation.

The next question is this: “Doesn’t Romans 14 say that Sabbath days and food laws are matters of personal choice?” In chapter 14 of the Book of Romans, Paul discussed the problem of dealing with a brother who has a weak conscience. Everything that follows is related to the conscience of the weak brother.

Paul was offering practical advice on how to deal with several different topics that might come up within a congregation. For example, in Romans 14:5, he wrote, “One person regards one day above another, another regards every day *alike*. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind.” Then, in Romans 14:14, he also said, “I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.”

If you didn't have any additional background information and didn't dig any deeper, you might think that Paul was discussing Sabbath days and food laws. But, what was Paul really saying?

The first part of the answer is that Paul wasn't discussing the Sabbath at all; in fact, the term "Sabbath" does not appear anywhere in the Book of Romans. Based on the context, it is much more likely that Paul was discussing fast days; in Romans 14:6, Paul specifically mentions people choosing not to eat unto the Lord. We know from history, that religious Jews specifically fasted on Mondays and Thursdays, but fast days are a matter of personal choice while the Sabbath day is not.

The second part of the answer is that Romans 14:14 has been mistranslated. Translators have used the English term "unclean" but the actual Greek word is *koinos*, which refers to a clean item that becomes defiled by coming into contact with something common like the floor or a garbage can.

Romans 14:14 is not discussing meat from unclean animals, it is discussing biblically clean food items that have been defiled in some way. In Romans 14:21, Paul specifically mentions meat and wine; both of these items were often used as offerings in pagan temples, and the leftovers were then sold in the local market, but strict Jews avoided buying meat from Gentile markets in case it was defiled (*koinos*) as an idol offering. Paul felt Christians could eat such meat as long as it didn't cause a scandal or offense.

Paul was probably discussing the issue of sacrificial meat in Romans 14, not unclean animals. We know that meat sacrificed to idols was a major issue in the early church, and Paul's comments in 1 Corinthians 10 are remarkably similar to his advice in Romans 14.

Notice Paul's advice on this subject in 1 Corinthians 10:27, "If any of those who do not believe invites you *to dinner*, and you desire to go, eat whatever is set before you, asking no question for conscience' sake. (28) But if anyone says to you, 'This was offered to idols,' do not eat it for the sake of the one who told you, and for conscience' sake; for 'the earth *is* the LORD'S, and all its fullness.'"

Someone might also ask, "Didn't Jesus abolish the Mosaic Law by nailing it to the cross?" This question is based on a misunderstanding of Colossians 2:13-14, where Paul said, "When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, (14) having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross." This passage is clearly addressed to Gentile Christians, and it is talking about nailing something to the cross of Christ. But, what is Paul really saying?

The answer is that when the Romans executed criminals, they nailed the list of crimes onto the cross with the prisoners. In fact, the Bible actually describes this practice in Matthew 27:37, where we read, "And above His head they put up the charge against Him which read, 'THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.'"

So, Paul taught that we have been forgiven because our list of crimes (our sins) was also nailed to the cross of Christ. Paul calls this a "certificate of debt" because criminals owe a debt to society, and he also says that it consists of "decrees against us" because the judge decrees the sentence against a convict.

In our case, God told Adam and Eve that, on the day that they touched the forbidden fruit, they would surely die, and that penalty was passed onto the whole human race. We have been dead in trespasses and sins ever since.

Someone might also ask, “Doesn’t Colossians 2:16-17 say we shouldn’t judge one another regarding food laws and Sabbath days?” In this passage, Paul wrote, “Therefore no (man) is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day— (17) things which are a *mere* shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.” In this case, Paul is clearly talking about biblical festivals and Sabbaths along with eating and drinking. But, what is he really saying?

The answer is that false teachers had come among the Colossians and had begun to criticize them based on Greek philosophical concepts that were outside the Bible. These false teachers practiced asceticism and were often hostile to the Old Testament. In the second century, a famous Gnostic heretic named Marcion actually removed all of the Old Testament from his Bible and fostered hatred against anything Jewish. Sadly, this anti-Jewish prejudice has remained within much of Christianity ever since.

But, Scripture alone is our final authority regarding matters of faith and practice; so Paul told the Colossians not to heed the dubious criticism of these heretical men. In Deuteronomy 8:3 and Matthew 4:4, the Bible clearly teaches that we are to live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God, not from the mouths of Greek philosophers. God alone judges what is and is not acceptable behavior; a minister or a biblical scholar has no authority apart from explaining the meaning of the Word of God. We conform our lives to the Bible, not the opinions of men.

Please note that, in Colossians 2:17, Paul uses the present tense (are) and not the past tense (were) showing that the Sabbath and biblical festivals have not been abolished. We should also note that the term “*mere*” is NOT in the original; this is yet another example of anti-Jewish prejudice sneering at anything related to the Old Testament.

Paul also states that the Sabbath and feasts days are still relevant because they foreshadow future events in God’s plan of salvation. The Bible clearly teaches that the Law and Prophets foreshadowed the first coming of Jesus, but more and more people are coming to see that the Sabbath and the biblical feast days also point to future events in God’s plan of salvation such as the Second Coming, the binding of Satan, and the Millennial Sabbath rest of God’s people.

The last question is this: “Doesn’t 1Tim 4:3-5 say we can eat anything?” In order to understand the question better, we need to start reading from the beginning of the chapter. In 1 Timothy 4:1, Paul wrote, “But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, (2) by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, (3) *men* who forbid marriage *and advocate* abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. 4 For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude; 5 for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer.”

Some people focus on parts of this passage and conclude that Christians are free to eat anything they want. Based on the assumption that Jesus came to abolish God’s Law, they say that unclean animals have been sanctified by the Word of God and that anyone who forbids the eating of unclean animals is preaching the doctrines of demons.

But, this interpretation is based on flawed theological assumptions. As we have already seen, Jesus and the apostles did not abolish God’s Law, and many of the passages that people cite as evidence have been lifted out of context and twisted.

This interpretation is clearly wrong because it leads to illogical conclusions. First, it implies that the Mosaic Law is a doctrine of demons. Second, it also implies that the Bible contradicts itself. Since Christians must reject both of these possibilities, we must examine the text again.

What Paul actually said is that the doctrines of demons would include abstaining from biblically clean food items for those “who believe and know the truth.” In this passage, the English term “food” comes from the Greek term *broma*, which always refers to items that comply with the biblical food laws.

God has revealed the truth to His people through His Word, the Bible, and the Bible defines what is and is not food. So, God’s people did not consider unclean meat to be food because it could not be eaten.

Furthermore, Paul described this food as “sanctified by means of the word of God.” The term “sanctify” means to set something apart for divine use or purpose; it is the essence what it means to be holy. And, there is only one place in the Bible where God talks about setting food apart for a holy purpose and that is in the Torah, specifically in Leviticus chapter 11 and Deuteronomy chapter 14.

So, Paul is clearly limiting the context in this passage; he is talking specifically about people who know the truth and eating things that have been set apart by the biblical food laws. If “everything created by God is good and nothing is to be rejected” without any qualification or limitation whatsoever, try eating potassium cyanide and see what happens.

In this chapter, we have looked at several questions that people might ask during this study and we have provided answers for these questions based on this new framework. In many cases, people have either failed to understand the Hebraic mindset of the original author or they have mistranslated the passage based on erroneous theological assumptions.

There are certainly more passages that we could explore, but these verses provide adequate examples of the main problem. Dispensationism and Covenant Theology have actually distorted our understanding of the Bible which has led to mistakes in both interpretation and application.

## Chapter 8 Truth and Consequences

In previous chapters, we established a basic framework for discussing the Law and the Covenants, and we examined the revelation of God's Law from the time of the Patriarchs to the Millennial Kingdom. We saw that different laws apply to different groups of people based on their role within God's plan of salvation. We also addressed a variety of questions that people might ask about this material.

In this final chapter, we will examine the importance of accepting biblical truth and the consequences of rejecting that truth. Now that we have explained the framework for understanding the Law of Moses and the Old and New Covenant, we need to consider the practical aspect of this truth. We will do this by covering two main points.

First, we will see that God holds people accountable for what they know. Learning divine truth is a serious matter because it always carries with it a certain measure of responsibility. As a result, God's blessing is always proportional to our level of obedience, and His punishment for sin is also proportional to our level of knowledge and understanding.

Second, we will also see that some sins are more serious than others. All law breaking is sin, but some sins carry greater penalties than others. This has practical consequences for both believers and non-believers, so we will examine the range of punishments that God levies on sinners from the lightest penalty to the worst case scenario.

Next, we will consider several biblical illustrations of God's justice in action. We will examine what the Bible says about God's judgment on the world during the Great Tribulation and God's judgment on the churches mentioned in the Book of Revelation.

Our first point is that God holds people accountable for what they know. People sometimes think that God is a harsh Judge waiting for us to mess up so He can toss lightning bolts at us, but the truth is that God is very generous, and He blesses His people to the degree that they learn His ways and obey Him. Notice what Jesus told His disciples during the Last Supper; in John 13:17, Jesus said, "If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them."

In addition to being generous, God is also merciful and just. In the Torah, God revealed to Moses that He would forgive unintentional sins as long as the people repented after they realized that they had done something wrong, but God made no exceptions for presumptuous sins. There was no forgiveness for an intentional and willful violation of God's Law.

So, God's people should always follow their conscience and do what they think is right. In 1521, when the Emperor of Germany demanded that Martin Luther recant all of his teachings, Luther famously replied, "...my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe."<sup>iv</sup> On this particular point, Luther was standing on solid, biblical ground.

For example, notice Paul's advice to Christians about not eating meat sacrificed to idols; in Romans 14:23, he said, "But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin." So, if you aren't sure about a particular commandment, even after careful study, it is better to observe it now and find out later that it was unnecessary than disobey it while in doubt. At least your conscience will be clear when you stand before Jesus Christ in the judgment.

On the other hand, if you are sure that a particular commandment applies to you, then God will certainly hold you accountable. In James 4:17, we read, "Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin." The more we learn about God's Laws, the more responsibility we have before God to change our ways and conform to His will.

The Bible also reveals that God grants a measure of mercy and patience toward those who are spiritually blind. Notice what Jesus said to the Pharisees in John 9:41, "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but since you say, 'We see,' your sin remains." Clearly, the Pharisees knew what they were doing, so they were guilty of sin, but Jesus identified another category here: the spiritually blind who have not sinned. A few chapters later, in John 15:22, Jesus also said, "If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin."

The fact that God is merciful and patient with the spiritually blind doesn't mean that He plans to leave people in that condition, but it does open up the possibility of leniency for some. Ironically, Paul had persecuted the early church and thought that he was serving God; later, God opened Paul's eyes to the error of his ways and forgave him because he had sinned out of ignorance.

As we will see shortly, God is aggressively revealing His truth to the world. Ultimately, everyone will have to make a decision for or against Jesus Christ, and passive inaction toward the Gospel is a form of rejection.

So, the Bible clearly teaches that God holds people accountable for what they know. We have also seen two corollaries to this point. On the positive side, God's blessing is proportional to our level of obedience, and on the negative side, His punishment for sin is also proportional to our level of knowledge.

The Bible also teaches that some sins are more serious than others. In the Torah, violations of the 10 commandments often resulted in the death penalty, while other sins only resulted in a fine. In the New Testament, Paul listed several sins that would prevent a Christian from inheriting the Kingdom of God, which implies that they lead to eternal damnation.

The apostle John clearly taught that some sins are more serious than others. In 1John 5:16, we read, "If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask and God will for him give life to those who commit sin not leading to death. There is a sin leading to death; I do not say that he should make request for this. (17) All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not leading to death."

Jesus also explained this point in one of His Kingdom parables. In this story, He compared Himself to the master of a great estate who went on a journey and put His chief steward in charge of His business. In Luke 12:45, He warned His disciples, "But if that slave says in his heart, 'My master will be a long time in coming,' and begins to beat the slaves, both men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk; (46) the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him in pieces, and assign him a place with the unbelievers."

As the parable unfolds, each servant received a different punishment based on his circumstances. In Luke 12:47, Jesus said, "And that slave who knew his master's will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, will receive many lashes, (48) but the one who did not know it, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few. From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more."

So, this parable teaches two different but important lessons. First, one of the guilty servants was put to death while others were not because some sins are more serious than others. Second, some of the guilty servants received less punishment for the same offense because they did not know their master's will. In each case, the master expected more from those who had more responsibility and more knowledge.

The Bible clearly describes what God will do in the best case scenario with Christians who are trying to obey God's Law. In Hebrews 12:4, we read, "You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; (5) and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, 'MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM; 6 FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES'" (cf. Prv 3:11-12).

Some might wonder if God would actually flog His children, but the Bible clearly says that every Christian should expect to receive painful correction from our heavenly Father. God is very diligent in rooting out sin from His people, and we should be no less diligent in rooting it out of our lives knowing that God will not turn a blind eye toward our guilt.

Jesus had a similar warning for church leaders and Christian teachers who are trying to obey God. In Matthew 5:19, Jesus told His disciples, "Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (20) For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven."

As we have already seen, God holds the leaders of His people to a higher standard of behavior and a greater level accountability because "from everyone who has been given much, much will be required" (Luke 12:48). Jesus clearly upheld the Mosaic Law as God's basic standard of behavior; any minister who relaxes one of the least of God's commandments runs the risk of losing most of his reward in the Kingdom or even of losing his salvation altogether.

The Bible also describes what God will do in the worst case scenario with sinners who are not trying to obey God's Law. In 1 Peter 4:18, the apostle Peter, quoting the Septuagint version of Proverbs 11:31, tells his readers, "AND IF IT IS WITH DIFFICULTY THAT THE RIGHTEOUS IS SAVED, WHAT WILL BECOME OF THE GODLESS MAN AND THE SINNER?" This is obviously a rhetorical question that expects a negative answer; if it is very difficult for the righteous to be saved, then the ungodly and the sinner cannot be saved.

Those who knowingly persist in sin will face the terrible judgment of eternal damnation in hell fire. In Hebrews 10:26, we read, "For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, (27) but a terrifying expectation of judgment and THE FURY OF A FIRE WHICH WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES." During the Millennium, Jesus will execute those who rebel against Him and incinerate their bodies in the fires of Gehenna. Then, after the Millennium, during Judgment Day, He will cast all of the wicked into the Lake of Fire.

Many Christians believe that their salvation is eternally secure no matter how much they sin, but Jesus has a very different message for them. In Matthew 7:21, Jesus warned His followers, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. (22) Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' 23 And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'"

Contrary to popular opinion, the vast, overwhelming majority of Christians today are not saved; they have been deceived into following an apostate system of false Christianity. They have not been forgiven of their sins, they have not received the Holy Spirit, they are not part of the body of Christ, and they are not going to inherit eternal life in the Kingdom of God. The only way to



avoid this fate is to leave this false system and seek the true body of Christ among those who teach and obey God's Law.

The Bible gives us two clear illustrations of the severity of God's judgment. The first involves His coming judgment on the world for failing to repent and believe the Gospel. The second is His judgment on the churches listed in the Book of Revelation for failing to live up to His teachings. The former tells us what will happen to unbelievers, while the latter shows us that Christians are not immune from God's wrath.

Since God holds people accountable for what they know, He is currently delaying His judgment until the church has delivered the Gospel to the nations of the earth. Notice what Paul said to the Greeks in Athens about the Gospel in Acts 17:30, "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, (31) because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man Whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."

From the time of Adam and Eve until the birth of Jesus Christ, God allowed the world to go astray and grope around in spiritual darkness. He exercised a measure of patience and mercy in the past because they were spiritually blind, but He does not plan to leave people in this condition forever.

After the church has proclaimed the Gospel to the nations, God will judge the world in righteousness for refusing to repent and believe the Gospel. The apostle John saw a vision of this future judgement when God will send plagues on the earth during the Great Tribulation to punish humanity; in Revelation 9:15, we read, "And the four angels... were released, so that they would kill a third of mankind."

Throughout the Great Tribulation, God will urge the world to repent but humanity will refuse. Notice what John wrote, a few verses later, in Revelation 9:20, "The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, so as not to worship demons, and the idols of gold and of silver and of brass and of stone and of wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk; (21) and they did not repent of their murders nor of their sorceries nor of their immorality nor of their thefts."

The Book of Revelation tells us that shortly after Jesus Christ returns, the final plagues of God's wrath will kill nearly every person on the planet except for God's people who are walking in His ways. The world as we know it is headed for oblivion; the only hope that people have for life and salvation is to repent of breaking God's Laws and believe the Gospel.

Some might think that Christian churches don't need to worry about God's wrath, but God is also very diligent about punishing sin among His people. For example, consider what Jesus Christ said to the church in the city of Thyatira. In Revelation 2:20, we read, "But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. (21) I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality. (22) Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds. (23) And I will kill her children with pestilence, and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds. (24) But I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them—I place no other burden on you. (25) Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come."

In this passage, we see both the mercy and severity of Jesus Christ. When the church went astray, Jesus gave them time to repent, but after a while, He applied stronger measures to

encourage repentance. At this point, we have to wonder how much suffering in the churches today is caused by ministers who teach that Jesus came to abolish God's Law and then lead their people into immorality and pagan festivals.

Jesus has an equally chilling message for the church in the city of Laodicea. In Revelation 3:15, we read, "I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. (16) So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. (17) Because you say, 'I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,' and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked."

Based on the context, the Laodicean's were physically wealthy and spiritually self-satisfied, but Jesus viewed them as spiritually poor. Notice what He said next in verse 18, "I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. (19) Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore, be zealous and repent."

Some people might be shocked at the notion that Jesus would flog His own people or put them to death. They have a tendency to view Jesus as a cute, soft Teddy Bear that would never hurt anyone. They don't understand that, during the Great Tribulation, Jesus Christ is going to kill more people than any other person in history and, after the Millennium, He is going to condemn the majority of the human race to hell fire on Judgment Day.

That is why it is vital to know God's definition of sin as revealed in the Bible. Without this knowledge, people are doomed to a life of suffering and eternal damnation. With this knowledge, God's people can change how they live with the power of the Holy Spirit and receive the great blessings that God has promised to those who obey Him.

We have now reached the end of our study. We are now in a position to summarize the material we have covered and offer some final conclusions.

At the beginning, we laid out a basic theological framework for explaining the Law and the Covenants and summarized this position into four main points. Throughout this study, we have seen biblical evidence that the Mosaic Law contains many stipulations that apply to all humanity everywhere all the time; these general laws represent a strong degree of continuity between the Old and New Testament.

We saw that the Mosaic Law also contains some stipulations that only apply to the children of Israel living in the Promised Land; this represents discontinuity between Israel and the Gentiles. God called Israel to be His model nation; as part of that ministry, they have special responsibilities that belong to them alone.

We saw that Jesus incorporated the Mosaic Law into the New Covenant; this also represents a strong degree of continuity between the Old and New Testament. We saw that although there are two distinct covenants, Jesus used the Mosaic Law as the foundation for the New Covenant.

And finally, we saw that Jesus augmented the Mosaic Law within the New Covenant; this represents a degree of discontinuity between the Old and New Testament. We saw that Jesus gave new laws for His followers and access to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit to be able to obey God's Law.

The Bible teaches that the Mosaic Law is an important revelation of moral and spiritual truth that was incorporated into the Old and New Covenants. While many stipulations apply only to Israelites living in the Promised Land, others are binding on all humanity. Therefore, the Mosaic Law has abiding significance as a guide to proper living for God's people.

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<sup>i</sup> Scriptures are from the New American Standard Bible Updated Edition unless otherwise noted.

<sup>ii</sup> The rabbis later altered this biblical definition in the Minor Tractates (*Gerim*) to limit their duty to outsiders. Joachim Jeremias writes, “The humane social legislation of the Old Testament always demanded that the stranger (gēr) in need should have a share in the poor relief; but rabbinic exegesis restricted the original meaning of ger by seeing it as a designation of the proselyte” (*Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, page 239).

<sup>iii</sup> See also T. Bab. Yebamoth fol. 48b, 62a and 97b.

<sup>iv</sup> Cited from <http://www.luther.de/en/worms.html>, accessed 1 September 2016.