

**Divine Covenants...the Law...**  
**A Series on Divine Covenants: Part 2**

1. What is the association of the Mosaic Covenant with the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen 15:13-14; Ex 3:7-8)?

At the ratification of the Abrahamic Covenant, God affirmed that Abraham's descendants would be given the land between the Nile and Euphrates rivers (Gen 15:17-21). However, He mentions that the land will not be given right away, and will be received by later generations:

Then God said to Abram, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed for four hundred years. But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions." (Gen 15:13-14)

From the very beginning, with Abraham's first descendant, Isaac settles in Gerar, a land, though part of the Promised Land, was controlled by Abimelech king of the Philistines (Gen 26:1-2).

Roughly 400 years later, when Moses is called to lead God's rescue of the nation of Israel from Egypt, God explains:

And the Lord said, "I have certainly seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their outcry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings. So I have come down to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite." (Ex 3:7-8)

2. What has happened to the Hebrews so far (Ex 12:29-39)? What challenges do they face?

Enslaved and governed by Egypt, the nation of Israel is suddenly free from captivity and they have to govern themselves as a group of nomadic people without any land. Consider the challenges of a new inexperienced government responsible for administering and enforcing civil and religious laws, and maintaining military readiness and discipline. Consider also that this form of government, government of a state by direct administration by God through Moses (a theocracy), was unique and had no precedent. Now, 430 years after His covenant with Abraham (Gal 3:16-17), God makes a covenant with Abraham's descendants, the children of Israel.

3. Examine carefully the Mosaic Covenant (Ex 19-24; Lev 17-26, Deut 1-28; Josh 24). In general terms what was it? Where do the Ten Commandments fit in this? What was its function?

Before the Mosaic Covenant is made, God presents an offer, which at its core is the definition of faith.

"You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I carried you on eagles' wings, and brought you to Myself. 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; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." (Ex 19:4-6)

When the nation of Israel agrees, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do!" (Ex 19:8), God comes down to Mt. Sinai and introduces them to the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:1-17).

By establishing the Ten Commandments, God provided the Law that would govern His people.

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The Mosaic Covenant had three sections: a) commandments that refer to **moral** laws (personal holiness), b) judgments that refer to **social** laws, and c) ordinances that refer to the Tabernacle and **worship** laws. It is important to note that the Law of Moses is singular and refers to all 613 laws as one unit. Breaking just one of 613 laws was the same as breaking the **whole** Law.

The Mosaic Covenant was a conditional promise by God. It promised blessing for obedience and curse for disobedience. The Mosaic Law, all 613 commands (365 negative and 248 positive), elaborated on the Ten Commandments and directed how the Israelites were to live for the purpose of being holy, pleasing, and enjoying God's favor.

Exodus focuses on building the Tabernacle, a sanctuary where God may dwell among His people.

Leviticus focuses on the first 4 Commandments:

- 1) You shall have no other gods before me.
- 2) You shall not make yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God.
- 3) You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain.
- 4) Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

Deuteronomy focuses on the other 6 Commandments:

- 5) Honor your father and your mother.
- 6) You shall not murder.
- 7) You shall not commit adultery.
- 8) You shall not steal.
- 9) You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
- 10) You shall not covet your neighbor's wife or ... anything that belongs to your neighbor.

Through the moral and social laws, God taught what sin was and how to atone for it; the God of Israel was not a capricious God and established a legal framework. God defined sin (Rom 7:7) and what constituted just punishment.

In defining how they could atone for their sins and reconcile with Him (Lev 17:11), the Israelites learned how to seek forgiveness (expiation), and appease God's wrath (propitiation) so that they may continue to receive the blessings of the Mosaic Covenant.

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The repetition of making sacrifices for atonement was intended to teach the nation about the nature of sin within themselves and the need to continually seek God's forgiveness. Although to be holy as God was holy was not humanly possible, through this process, obedience to God's words and commands required a maintenance of genuine faith through which salvation was only possible.

The Mosaic Covenant taught Israel about the holy character of God. To be holy placed an emphasis on God; something of the world must be set apart or separated from the profane or unclean before it can be devoted to Him or in the presence of His glory. It applies to time (Ex 20:8-12), space (Ex 19:23), objects (Ex 28:4-43) and people (Ex 40:12-15).

The Mosaic Covenant's instruction on atonement revealed that sin could not come into God's presence; the concept of holiness cannot be understood apart from the Mosaic Covenant.

The Mosaic Covenant established a theocracy but the emphasis of the Law was priestly not political. The highest office of the state was the Aaronic (Levitical - from the tribe of Levi) priest. In religious matters, the Levitical priest was integral in administering the sacrifices and offerings of atonement (Lev 1-7, 12, 14, 16). In judicial matters, the Levitical priest decided the most difficult civil and criminal matters (Deut 17:8-12). In matters of judicial due process, the Levitical priests owned 6 centrally located *Cities of Refuge*, which allowed unintentional murderers safety from retribution until trial (Num 35). In matters of healthcare, the Levitical priests declared who was healthy or should be quarantined (Lev 13). In economic matters, the Levitical priest was the one who decided disputes on financial valuations (Lev 27). In matters of warfare, the Levitical priest was called upon to inspire the troops (Deut 20:2-4).

The Mosaic Covenant was essential to fulfilling God's promise of land and nation to Abraham. However, the land and nation were intended to be set apart from the profane for "God's own possession" for the purpose of being "His kingdom of priests and holy nation" in order that they may serve Him (Mal 3:16-18).

The Mosaic Law also established the Tabernacle, the house of God, and the Ark, the symbol of God's presence.

"Have them construct a sanctuary for Me, so that I may dwell among them. According to all that I am going to show you as the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furniture, so you shall construct it." (Ex 25:8-9)

The Tabernacle was where all worship and sacrifices were performed. The Ark itself was "alive." It brought judgment (death) if not treated in a holy manner, and on Israel's enemies. Through apostasy, the Ark and Tabernacle were separated, and Israel lost a blessing of having God's presence through the Ark.

Scholars see many similarities with the Mosaic Covenant (Law) and Near Eastern treaties of that time specifically Hittite Suzerainty Treaties. These treaties were made between kings and their vassals, and analogously, the Israelites were seen as God's vassals. With regard to laws and governance, the Mosaic Law was unique:

- 1) The Mosaic Law was God given; in contrast, pagan laws were man made.
- 2) The Mosaic Law was publicly read regularly every seven years (Deut 31:10-13), and its preamble about the Exodus was a reminder of what faith means. In contrast, pagan laws of the Near East were not public and published only after the king was leaving the kingship.
- 3) God governed the Israelites, not the Mosaic Law, thus, man served God and His Law; in contrast, pagan laws of the Near East were binding and had to be obeyed by all including the king; thus; the law governed the state.

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4. What does Mosaic Covenant fail to do?

The Mosaic Covenant was made with Israel alone and written on tablets of stone; the blood of sacrificed animals only provided a way to temporarily atone for their sins, and the process of atonement only covered the sins up to that moment; failure to atone by sacrificing as God prescribed meant that the Israelite's sins were not covered. The Mosaic Covenant required that Jews repeatedly make sacrifices to atone for their sins to be holy.

A later covenant (the New Covenant) would provide a "covenant written on their heart," the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, which results from Jesus' atoning sacrifice that pays for *all of sinner's lifetime of sin* and makes him righteous before God (Heb 8:10; 9:11-14). The New Covenant provided for yet another blood sacrifice; the blood of Jesus Christ. With this one time encompassing and supreme sacrifice, man had complete atonement for his sins and was forever holy and set apart.

5. Jesus said that the Law was eternal (Matt 5:18) and Paul said that the Law ended at the cross (Gal 3:19). So who's right? Does the Law continue today or did it end?

As a revelation of God's standard for holiness, Jesus tells us that this is eternal and immutable. As the means by which man atones for his sins, Paul tells us that this function has ended.

6. How should the Mosaic Covenant be viewed within the context of the Abrahamic Covenant?

Associated with the acts of the Exodus, it provides the definition of faith. Like the Abrahamic Covenant, genuine faith entitles one to God's promises of being His possession among all the peoples, a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation.

The conditionality of the Law determines who is able to enter the Land (Deut 1:34-36). When Jesus Christ fulfills this function of the Law, the concept is carried through to the New Jerusalem.

By associating the land to the kingdom of priests and holy nation, it defines the purpose of the Promised Land as being set apart for the service of God.

It provides the basis of understanding the atonement of Jesus Christ and why God made the New Covenant.

It provides a glimpse into what the Promised Land and the Kingdom of God would be like at the end of time.

It introduced the world to a new worldview and moral standard.

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