

## How and why the Mosaic Covenant is essential to the Abrahamic Covenant

Of the Mosaic Covenant, many discussions revolve about its purpose and contrasts with the Abrahamic Covenant as though they are two independent covenants. Are they independent of each other? If not, how are they related?

Just before He ratifies His covenant with Abraham (Gen 15:17-18), God tells Abraham that his descendants will be absent from the Land for 400 years.

Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, terror and great darkness fell upon him. 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 four hundred years. But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions. As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you will be buried at a good old age. Then in the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete." (Gen 15:12-16)

The enormous scale of God's plan becomes palpable. World events were being arranged to set up the Exodus, which would demonstrate the reality of God's living presence on earth.

When the Exodus occurs, it becomes one of mankind's defining moments in history.

When God met Moses on Mount Sinai, He called attention to the Exodus and defined the meaning of faith (Ex 19:3-60).

Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the sons of Israel: You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore 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.' These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel." (Ex 19:3-6)

1. **Believe.** The invisible Lord God makes Himself apparent in the real world with His supernatural action against the Egyptians.

2. **Trust that engenders obedience.** If you are obedient to God's words, you will be God's own possession among all the peoples of the earth, God's kingdom of priests, and a holy nation.

God defines who He considers His "elect," His choice people.

Affirming this understanding, Moses provides instruction on how to explain obedience to the Law to future generations who did not have first-hand experience of the reality of God. The emphasis is placed on the fact that God exists as demonstrated through actual historical events (Ex 6:20-25).

"When your son asks you in time to come, saying, 'What do the testimonies and the statutes and the judgments mean which the Lord our God commanded you?' then you shall say to your son, 'We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and the Lord brought us from Egypt with a mighty hand. Moreover, the Lord showed great and distressing signs and wonders before our eyes against Egypt, Pharaoh and all his household; He brought us out from there in order to bring us in, to give us the land which He had sworn to our fathers.' So the Lord commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God for our good always and for our survival, as it is today. It will be righteousness for us if we are careful to observe all this commandment before the Lord our God, just as He commanded us. (Deut 6:20-25)

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The event becomes the historical prologue (Deut 5:6) that is repeated with the recitation of the Ten Commandments (Deut 5:7-21).

Then Moses summoned all Israel and said to them: "Hear, O Israel, the statutes and the ordinances which I am speaking today in your hearing, that you may learn them and observe them carefully. The Lord our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. The Lord did not make this covenant with our fathers, but with us, with all those of us alive here today. The Lord spoke to you face to face at the mountain from the midst of the fire, while I was standing between the Lord and you at that time, to declare to you the word of the Lord; for you were afraid because of the fire and did not go up the mountain. He said, I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. (Deut 5:1-6)

Moses reminded the nation of Israel that, though they saw no form that established the real existence of God, they heard the voice of God as they made the covenant with Him (Deut 4:10-13).

Remember the day you stood before the Lord your God at Horeb, when the Lord said to me, 'Assemble the people to Me, that I may let them hear My words so they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children.' You came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, and the mountain burned with fire to the very heart of the heavens: darkness, cloud and thick gloom. Then the Lord spoke to you from the midst of the fire; you heard the sound of words, but you saw no form—only a voice. So He declared to you His covenant which He commanded you to perform, that is, the Ten Commandments; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone. (Deut 4:10-13)

In lieu of His voice, the divine act of the Exodus represents the reality of God, and it serves as the basis of faith throughout the Old Testament (Jud 2:1; 1 Sam 2:27; Jer 2:6; Dan 9:15).

The Mosaic Covenant was essential to fulfilling God's promise of land to Abraham.

1. "To your descendants, I give this land,..." (Gen 15:17-21)

The Mosaic Covenant was made with none other than **Abraham's descendants**.

"You stand today, all of you, before the Lord your God: your chiefs, your tribes, your elders and your officers, even all the men of Israel, your little ones, your wives, and the alien who is within your camps, from the one who chops your wood to the one who draws your water, that you may enter into the covenant with the Lord your God, and into His oath which the Lord your God is making with you today, in order that He may establish you today as His people and that He may be your God, just as He spoke to you and as He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. (Deut 29:10-13)

Jesus, in response to the Jews' claim of Abrahamic ancestry, elaborates on the characteristics of a descendant of Abraham (John 8:33-47), which Paul succinctly states as "those who are of faith" (Gal 3:7).

2. "I will make you a great nation." (Gen 12:2)

**God's own possession among all peoples.** The Mosaic Covenant, as a conditional covenant, taught the nation of Israel what sin was; God defined sin and what constituted just punishment (Rom 7:7). The Mosaic Covenant has 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.

What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, "You shall not covet." (Rom 7:7)

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The Mosaic Covenant taught Abraham's descendants how they could atone for their sins and reconcile with God (Lev 17:11). They learned how to seek forgiveness (expiation), and satisfy God's wrath (propitiation) so that they may continue to receive the blessings of the Mosaic Covenant.

For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement.' (Lev 17:11)

**A nation of priests.** The Mosaic Covenant established a theocracy; but, the emphasis of the Law was priestly not political (i.e a nation of priests). The highest office of the state was the Aaronic (Levitical - from the tribe of Levi) priest. The Levitical priest administered the sacrifices and offerings of atonement, decided the most difficult civil and criminal matters, declared who was healthy or should be quarantined, and was called upon to inspire the troops in times of war.

**A holy nation.** The Mosaic Covenant was the means to define what faith meant and who He considered "His elect" and choice people. The emphasis on supernatural historical events establishes the reality of God (Ex 19:4-6; Deut 6:20-25; Mal 3:16-18).

The Mosaic Covenant was how the "Lord will establish you as a holy people to Himself, as He swore to you, if you keep the commandments of the Lord your God and walk in His ways" (Deut 28:9).

Moses reminded the nation of Israel that the Conquest was God's judgment of the wicked nations of Canaan, and that their possession was because of His promise to Abraham.

Do not say in your heart when the Lord your God has driven them out before you, "Because of my righteousness the Lord has brought me in to possess this land," but it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is dispossessing them before you. It is not for your righteousness or for the uprightness of your heart that you are going to possess their land, but it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord your God is driving them out before you, in order to confirm the oath which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. (Deut 9:4-5)

To keep the land, the nation of Israel had to remain loyal to the Mosaic Covenant; God's promise of land was intended for those who strove to be holy before Him. Obedience to the Mosaic Covenant brought blessings which required land and the military success to keep and defend it (Deut 28:1-14).

All the nations will say, 'Why has the Lord done thus to this land? Why this great outburst of anger?' Then men will say, 'Because they forsook the covenant of the Lord, the God of their fathers, which He made with them when He brought them out of the land of Egypt. They went and served other gods and worshiped them, gods whom they have not known and whom He had not allotted to them. Therefore, the anger of the Lord burned against that land, to bring upon it every curse which is written in this book; and the Lord uprooted them from their land in anger and in fury and in great wrath, and cast them into another land, as it is this day.' (Deut 29:24-28)

The Mosaic Covenant was essential to fulfilling God's promise of land and nation to Abraham. The Law determined who were "God's own possession" and "His kingdom of priests and holy nation," which enabled their entrance into the Land (Deut 1:34-36).

Despite receiving their inheritance of land and affirming their promise to "serve the Lord our God and obey His voice," the nation of Israel continued to have a problem with apostasy (Josh 24:14-23). In a short time, despite God's lovingkindness, the nation of Israel would be consistently unfaithful to the Mosaic Covenant. By 600 B.C., the prophet Jeremiah prophesizes of a New Covenant, because the Jews broke the Mosaic Covenant:

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“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, 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. “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. They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the Lord, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.” (Jer 31:31-34)

It is significant that Jeremiah is prophesying during the time of Nebuchadnezzar who destroyed the Temple in 586 B.C. With the Temple’s destruction, the Jews could not atone for their sins even if they wanted to; God made His promise of the unconditional New Covenant fully aware that the Jews were utterly unable to comply with the Law. It was as though God’s view of the Jews’ compliance to the Mosaic Covenant was akin to not having a Temple at all!!

When the New Covenant was inaugurated, the Mosaic Covenant was essential to understanding the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham, “... in you all the families of the world will be blessed” (Gen 12:3; 22:18). Without the Mosaic Covenant, no one would understand the significance of Jesus Christ’s crucifixion.

We would not know that God established a legal framework; there is a judicial price for sin. While all other gods are capricious, Yahweh is not.

The Day of Atonement is significant. Occurring only once a year, this solemn day required the sacrifice of a 1) bull (its lifeblood) to atone for the sins of the high priest and his household, and 2) male goat (its lifeblood) to atone for the sins of the nation (Lev 16:2-19). The male scapegoat represented the pardon of sins brought on by the sacrifice of the other.

Only the high priest can enter the Holy of Holies to make atonement for himself and the nation of Israel for all their sins once every year (Lev 16:34)

The prophet Isaiah portrays the Messiah’s sacrifice within the context of Levitical sacrificial laws (Isa 53:1-12). The Suffering Servant died for iniquity, transgression and sin (Isa 53:5-12). He was a guilt offering and in substitute for human beings (Isa 53:5-12).

The apostles Paul and Peter understood the crucifixion of Jesus Christ as a fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy. Jesus was unblemished and sinless and took the place of the sinner to make atonement for sin (2 Cor 5:21; 1 Pet 2:22-24; 3:18).

Jesus was the only High Priest, who was Himself the supreme once and for all sacrifice (Heb 9:24-26) that accomplished complete atonement for sin and appeased God’s wrath towards human beings; Jesus became the mediator of the New Covenant.

The high priest applied the blood of the sacrifice on the Mercy Seat to expiate (cover) the sins of himself and the nation to propitiate (appease) God.

Jesus provided the blood at the place of propitiation (Rom 3:25; Heb 9:12-14) and was Himself the place of propitiation (1 John 2:2; 4:10).

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Associated with the Mosaic Covenant is Passover. This event, the last plague that struck the first born of Egypt but spared those Israelites who smeared the blood of a sacrificed unblemished lamb on their doorposts, would represent the Exodus.

The Mosaic Covenant included laws on religious festivals such as Passover (Lev 23:5-8; Ex 12:1-13, 42-51).

Jesus was the Passover lamb (1 Cor 5:7; 1 Pet 1:19; Rev 5:6).

John the Baptist prophetically sees Jesus as the link between Passover and the Day of Atonement, the "Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!" (John 1:29), and by divine appointment (Acts 2:23), Jesus' crucifixion takes place during the Passover celebration (Mark 14:12).

Because Jesus Christ fulfills the atonement aspect of the Mosaic Covenant, God's Son re-establishes the means of becoming "God's own possession" and "His kingdom of priests and holy nation," and enabling their entrance into the Land.

Perhaps the most essential feature of the Mosaic Covenant for the Abrahamic Covenant is that it teaches one about the holy character of God. To be holy places an emphasis on God; something must be set apart or separated from the profane or unclean before it can come into 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). When the author of Hebrews wrote that the New Covenant "made the first obsolete" (Heb 8:13), he referenced the Law's function as the means of atonement; but, this was not in reference to the Law's purpose of teaching one about holiness.

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.

It shall be a tassel for you to look at and remember all the commandments of the Lord, so as to do them and not follow after your own heart and your own eyes, after which you played the harlot, so that you may remember to do all My commandments and be holy to your God. (Num 15:39-40)

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: "Speak to all the congregation of the sons of Israel and say to them, 'You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.'" (Lev 19:1-2)

The sacrificial laws of the Mosaic Covenant indicated that holiness was distinct from faith. It is only on the Day of Atonement that the whole nation of Israel was clean from all sins and be holy before the Lord (Lev 16:30).

for it is on this day that atonement shall be made for you to cleanse you; you will be clean from all your sins before the Lord. (Lev 16:30)

In failing their covenant responsibilities, the nation of Israel could not be holy. Recognizing that the Mosaic Covenant is about holiness and the nation of Israel's failure elevates the beauty of the New Covenant and emphasizes the magnitude of God's commitment to His promises of blessing through Abraham.

In contrast to the Mosaic Covenant, the New Covenant unifies faith with holiness so that one is holy without any human effort. Just by faith alone one enables the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and becomes forever holy.

With this understanding, the apostle Peter indicates that all Believers are God's own royal priesthood.

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But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Pet 2:9-10)

Lastly the Mosaic Law established the Tabernacle as the house of God, and the Ark as 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)

While instructing Moses on the construction of the tabernacle, God emphasizes the importance of being precise, because it was a "copy and shadow" of the heavenly tabernacle:

Now the main point in what has been said is this: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister in the sanctuary and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man. For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices; so it is necessary that this high priest also have something to offer. Now if He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all, since there are those who offer the gifts according to the Law; who serve a **copy and shadow of the heavenly things**, just as Moses was warned by God when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, "See," He says, "that you make all things according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain." (Heb 8:1-5)

The tabernacle was a portable tent that was divided into two rooms, the Holy Place and the Holies of Holy. Known as the "tent of meeting," the tabernacle was recognized as the meeting place between God and the His people (Ex 40:34-35); however, in practice, God met with only the High Priest in the Holy of Holies once a year on the Day of Atonement (Heb 9:7). When Solomon's Temple was built, the Holy of Holies had the dimensions of a cube: 30 feet x 30 feet x 30 feet (1 Kings 6:20).

Whereas a thick curtain separated the Holy of Holies from the adjacent room the Holy Place to maintain its sanctity in the Old Testament, the Temple of God in heaven does not have any curtain separating the Believer's spirit from the presence of God – God spreads His tabernacle over all of them (Rev 7:15).

When New Jerusalem is created after the Apocalypse, the city is laid out as a square cube; its width, length, and height measures about 1400 - 1500 miles (Rev 21:15).

There is no temple in the new Jerusalem!

God and His Son are effectively the temple (Rev 21:22).

The glory of God powers the lamp of His Son and illuminates the city (Rev 21:23; 22:5).

The Promised Land is New Jerusalem the Holy of Holies and encompasses the land that God promised to Abraham from the Nile river to the Euphrates (Gen 15:18) within which God's royal priesthood will live in the presence of God and His Son (Rev 20:6) without any curtain separating the holy God from all of His holy people.