

Divine Covenants...the Law...

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

For 400 years, the Hebrews had been slaves and governed by Egypt. With their sudden freedom from captivity, they had 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, God makes a covenant with Abraham's descendants, the children of Israel.

2. 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?

The Mosaic Covenant is a conditional promise by God. It promised blessing for obedience and curse for disobedience.

- a) *"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..."* The Israelites will be a cherished possession of the Lord (Ex 19:5).
- b) *"you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests..."* (Ex 19:6)
- c) *"...and a holy nation."* (Ex 19:6)

The Mosaic Covenant (Law), all 613 commands (365 negative and 248 positive), directed how the Hebrews were to live for the purpose of pleasing God and enjoying His favor. The Ten Commandments (Decalogue) were essentially the basic rules of the Law; the other laws applied and clarified the principles. Exodus largely expands and explains the Ten Commandments. 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,

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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.

For purposes of study, the Mosaic Covenant (Law) can be viewed as having 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.

Through the moral and social laws, God defined sin and what constituted just punishment. This was to show the Israelites' need for God's Grace. Through worship laws and the sacrificial system, God provided the means for an Israelite to seek forgiveness, **cover** (not take away) one's sins, and continue to receive the blessings of the covenant; but this was not the means for salvation, the **removal** of sin. Salvation was only possible through faith in God.

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 Law also established the Tabernacle, the house of God, and the Ark, the symbol of God's presence. 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 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); 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 Hebrews, 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.

3. 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 *cover* their sin. While it was a process prescribed and ordained by God, complying with the process required the effort of man. 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.

A later covenant (the New Covenant) would provide a "covenant written on their heart," the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, that would *remove* their sin and make them 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; he no longer had to repeatedly "cover" them.

4. 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?

The Mosaic Covenant had two principle purposes. As a revelation of God's code of moral and spiritual behavior, Jesus tells us that this is eternal and immutable. As a covenant by which man atones for his sins to keep God's favor, Paul tells us that this function has ended.

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