

## Laws For Israel

**Introduction:** Before Jesus came, God's Word was incomplete. It contained only the 39 books we now call the Old Testament (written mostly in Hebrew). The church of history gave the Hebrew Scriptures the name "Old Testament" (testament means covenant). Today we study the covenant for which the 39 books of the Hebrew Scripture are named (the "Old" covenant). "The" Old Covenant is the covenant between God and the nation of Israel made at Mount Sinai (Ex 19:1-2). It is not the most important of the covenants, but it is the bulkiest, taking up the most type space.

Due to the fact the covenant was made at Mount Sinai, some call it the **Sinai Covenant**.

The mediator of this covenant was Moses. (**Joke:** You might remember Moses from his role in the famous Cecil B. DeMille movie, *The Ten Commandments*). Thus is sometimes also called the **Mosaic Covenant**.

The first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures were written by Moses. The Greek name for them is the *Pentateuch* (five scrolls). The Jews call these five books the *Torah* (which means teachings or instructions). These five books are also called the *Law* because they mainly deal with the laws of the Old Covenant.

The name **Old Covenant** comes from its contrast with the New Covenant. The Sinai covenant was made old in comparison to the glory of Christ and the new covenant (2Co 3:7-18). The Sinai Covenant is given the name old by the apostle Paul:

**ESV 2 Corinthians 3:14** . . . [Jews] read the old covenant.

**Summary:** This covenant has three names: Old, Sinai, Mosaic.

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**\*\*\*\*According to Exodus 2:23-25, what moved God to bring the Israelis out of Egyptian slavery?** It was because of the covenant that had already been made with Abraham.

**Note:** The book of Exodus is so named because it records the exodus of the Israelis out of Egypt.

**Review:** God's covenant with Abraham was made around 2,000 B.C. When God made the covenant He told Abraham that his descendants would be enslaved in Egypt 400 years. God's covenant with the nation of Israel came 430 years later (Ga 3:15), in roughly 1500 B.C.

**Insight:** The Abrahamic Covenant was still very much in effect. God still "remembered" it.

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**\*\*\*\*What did God promise to do for the Israelis in Exodus 6:6-8?** God promised three things: **1)** emancipation from Egyptian slavery, **2)** to be their God and they His people, and **3)** to bring them into the Promised Land.

Of these three the second obviously is the most important (more on this below).

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\*\*\*\***Based on Exodus 19:4-6, what was the primary reason for the Sinai Covenant?** A major purpose of the covenant was to establish a God/people relationship, to make them a peculiar people and to make them into a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

ESV **Deuteronomy 14:2** . . . you are a people holy to the LORD your God, and the LORD has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.

Because of promises like this (Ex 19:4-6), the New Testament makes it clear that God will never give up in the Jewish people, electing a remnant in every generation to have the faith of Abraham.

ESV **Romans 11:5** . . . at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace.

ESV **Romans 11:28-29** As regards the gospel, they are enemies of God for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

**What in Exodus 19:5 indicates this covenant is conditional?** Note the “if”. They had to “obey” (19:5).

ESV **Exodus 23:22** . . . if you carefully obey his voice and do all that I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries.

**Important Observation:** The Sinai covenant (based on law) was fundamentally different than the covenant with Abraham (based on promise).

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**Exodus 20-23 contains some of the laws of the Sinai Covenant. Theologians have observed that are three types (or categories) of law. Can you figure out what they are from the below sample texts?**

- 1. Exodus 20:15.** This is an example of a **moral** (ethical) law ~ The moral law establishes basic morality, right from wrong.
- 2. Exodus 20:8-11.** This is an example of the **ceremonial** (religious) law ~ Keeping the Saturday Sabbath. Other examples include not eating pork or shrimp or bringing a grain offering annually (**Le 22:17-25**). The **ceremonial** law has religious rules concerning sacrifices, offerings, feasts, dietary regulations, etc. These ceremonial laws not only helped ensure their good health, but also set them apart culturally from the surrounding nations (even as the Amish are set apart from American society).
- 3. Exodus 22:2-6.** This is an example of a **judicial** (civil) law ~ If convicted of stealing, a thief must pay back seven times the amount stolen. The civil (penal code, judicial) law consists of rules for Israel’s civil government and the penalties to be imposed for breaking the law.

**Despite the fact that the law may be divisible into three types, what must we understand from James 2:10?**

ESV **James 2:10** . . .whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.

Though there are clearly three types of Mosaic Law, the Law itself is indivisible. It stands or falls as a unit. The Bible itself does not separate God's law into three parts (moral, ceremonial and civil). They are all jumbled up together. Historically, this threefold separation was not substantially taught until the time of Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century and in the 16th century by Calvin.

James 2:10 implies that we do not have the freedom to pick and choose, cafeteria style, which of the laws to obey. A person is either under all of them, or none of them. Some misguided applications of Mosaic Law have occurred when New Covenant believers attempt to pick and choose which Mosaic laws are relevant under the New Covenant. We are either under all of the Law of Moses or none of it (more on this in the next lesson).

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**\*\*\*\*How was the Sinai Covenant ratified (Ex 24:3-8)?** Animals were killed and their blood was sprinkled on both the altar (representing God) and the people.

**In Exodus 24:3, how did the Israelites respond to God's proposal?** God made them an offer they could not refuse! The people of Israel agreed to obey God's voice and keep the rules of the covenant.

**Why is the significance of it being a blood covenant (Ex 24:1-12)?** It was said that covenants were "cut" (as in cut a deal) because often animals were cut and killed in the making of a covenant. A blood covenant was the highest level of covenant, typically a life or death commitment. As will be obvious from the penalties, this was a serious, binding, life or death contract.

**Insight:** Our covenant, the New Covenant, is also a blood covenant, ratified by the blood of Jesus.

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**Upon what did God record the conditions of this covenant (Ex 24:12)?** The commandments were written on tables of stone. According to Exodus 31:18, there were in fact **two** tablets.

**Suzerainty Treaty:** The whole Sinai Covenant was typical of a **suzerainty** treaty common in that day. In it, a strong king (called a **suzerain**) would make a treaty with a weaker neighboring vassal state, making it a protectorate. These Suzerainty Treaties created a template followed by God in writing the Sinai Covenant. The Sinai Covenant and these suzerainty treaties follow the same pattern; there was sort of a standard legal format. There was a review of what the strong king had done for the vassal state, the rules of the treaty, and then a list of blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. There were two copies of the rules, one for the king and one for the vassal, each kept in that country's sacred temple.

**Where were the rules of the Sinai covenant stored (Ex 25:10-16)?** The two tablets were kept in the ark (box) of the covenant. That's why it is named what it is called the Ark of the Covenant.

Remember the old movie, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*? That adventure movie was about the recovery of the Moses' ark (not Noah's ark).

**Why do you suppose the Sinai covenant was written to two tablets (Ex 31:18)?** It was probably because with a suzerainty treaty there was one copy of the commands for the King (in this case Jehovah) and one for the vassal state (Israel). Both copies were kept in the one and the same ark because in this case both the King and the Israel had the same temple.

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**Based on Exodus 31:12-17, what was the sign of God's covenant with Israel?** The sign of the Sinai covenant is observing the Saturday Sabbath.

**What day of the week is the seventh day (31:15)?** The seventh day is Saturday. Sunday, the Lord's Day, is the first day of a new week. Jewish people still worship on Saturday.

**What does Sabbath mean?** It is from *shabbat* (7676), "to cease, desist, rest."

**How long are/were the Hebrews supposed to do observe the Sabbath (Ex 31:16-17)?** The text states that they were to observe it forever.

**What does "forever" (Ex 31:16-17) mean?** It is from *olam* (5769), which fundamentally means "most distant times" (future or past). In some contexts it can mean "everlasting." However, the *TWOT* (#1631a) points out that "neither the Hebrew nor the Greek word (*aion*) in itself contains the idea of endlessness." It is determined by context. It literally means "a long time" (Holladay). *Olam* is used 300 times to denote indefinite continuance into the very distant future.

#### **Forever Examples:**

ESV 1 Samuel 1:22, 28 Hannah . . . said to her husband, "As soon as the child is weaned, I will bring him, so that he may appear in the presence of the LORD and dwell there forever (*olam*). . . Therefore I have lent him to the LORD. As long as he lives, he is lent to the LORD."

ESV 1 Samuel 27:8 Now David and his men went up and made raids against the Geshurites, the Girzites, and the Amalekites, for these were the inhabitants of the land from of old (*olam*), as far as Shur, to the land of Egypt.

Before concluding the Saturday Sabbath should be observed by Christians today, consider this:

*Are you a physical descendant of Abraham?*

*Are you party to this covenant (suzerainty treaty)?*

*Do you intend to move to the Middle East to occupy Palestine, settling perhaps on the West Bank?*

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The last of the five books of Moses is Deuteronomy. *Deuteros* is Greek and means second and *nomos* means law. Deuteronomy contains an account of the second giving of the Law by Moses. It was written a full generation after the first giving of the law (in Exodus). No longer were they at Mt. Sinai, but rather on the plains of Moab (an area along the eastern shore of the Dead Sea). The Israelis were poised to enter the Promised Land and Deuteronomy was given a reminder to the nation of its covenant obligations.

\*\*\*\* **According to Deuteronomy 28:1-9, what blessings did God guarantee as a result of obedience to the terms of the Sinai covenant?** They were promised **possession** of the land, **protection** in the land, **prosperity** in land, a populous **posterity** in land. Another major blessing was the establishment of a God-people relationship (Ex 19:1-6), making them a **peculiar people**.

**Confirmation:** Notice again the “if” in the passage (28:1); this is very much a **conditional** covenant.

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\*\*\*\* **According to Deuteronomy 28:15-19, what kinds of penalties did God promise for disobedience?** Instead of blessings would be the exact opposite curses. Instead of *Obamacare* they would get *Obamacurse*!

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**Related to national independence, what penalty did disobedience carry (De 28:47-50, 28:64-68)?**

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**Israel’s Constitution:** The old covenant was to the nation of Israel what the Constitution is to the United States. It was a legal document, the “law of the land.” This law is recorded in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. It is like the Torah is the rule book to a game, and the rest of the Old Testament scriptures are real life example of what happened when people played the game. When the Israelis were obedient to the Law, they were blessed and possessed the Land. When they were disobedient, God raised up a foreign nation to oppress them and eventually drive

them from the Promised Land. Then when they repented, God brought them back into the Promised Land and the cycle started all over again. The last cycle under the Old Covenant ended in A.D. 70 when God used the Romans to judge the Jews for rejecting Jesus, destroying the nation and exiling them from the land.

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**\*\*\*\*What prediction did God make in Deuteronomy 31:16-18?** God predicted that after Moses died and Israel entered the land, they would break the covenant and worship foreign gods.

The first Christian martyr, Stephen, declared the same thing as Moses at this trial:

ESV Acts **7:51-53** You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it.

It got him stoned to death. Stephen declared that the Hebrew people were, on the whole, *not* a God fearing group of people and that *they never had been*. Only a remnant had even been truly right with God. Spiritual Israel was always a tiny fraction of overall physical Israel.

ESV **Romans 9:6** . . . not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel . . .

ESV **Romans 9:27** . . . Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved . . ."

ESV **Romans 11:5** So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace.

Such negative statements regarding physical Israel are not anti-Semitic; the same spiritual condition exists among the Gentiles as well. Only God's grace can break through anyone's stiff necked hard heartedness.

### So What?

In Exodus 32:1-6, the Israelis committed the sin of worshipping other gods. It was a capital offense.

ESV **Exodus 22:20** Whoever sacrifices to any god, other than the LORD alone, shall be devoted to destruction.

Exodus 32:7-10 records God's penalty for their idolatry: To wipe the whole nation out and start over again with Moses. Earlier God promised Abraham a multitude of descendants. Moses was directly descended from Abraham. God could have started all over with Moses, just as he had with Abraham. All it would change is that it would set God's timetable back about 500 years.

**\*\*\*\*What does Moses' prayer in Exodus 32:11-14 show us about the relationship between the Sinai covenant and the covenant with Abraham?** It shows that both were in effect simultaneously and that the Abrahamic covenant was more fundamental than the Sinai covenant. They complemented each other.

**Why did Moses not appeal to God on the basis of the Sinai Covenant (Ex 32:11-14)?** The Sinai covenant was conditional and the Israelis had broken the conditions. By law they were guilty and liable to the death penalty.

**What does Galatians 3:15-19 reveal about the differences between God's covenant with Abraham and God's covenant with Israel and the impact of one on the other?** God's covenant to Abraham was based on promise and was unconditional. God's covenant with Israel came 430 years later and was based on law. The covenant with Israel did not invalidate the covenant with Abraham. The purpose of the law was to show the Israelis their sins and make them appreciate the need for promise and the arrival of the promised Seed: Jesus the Messiah.

The Sinai covenant and its law were all about the physical land, the physical seed and the physical blessing. The Abrahamic covenant and its promises weren't really about those physical things. It was about the coming of Christ, the justification by faith that Christ made possible and a heavenly country.

**Which of the "big three" promises to Abraham (land, seed, blessing) does the Sinai Covenant touch upon?** Through the Sinai Covenant the descendants of Abraham were given a vehicle by which to prosper (blessing), multiply (seed) and possess the land (land).

**Where was eternal life promised for obedience to the Sinai covenant?** Eternal life is never offered by Moses for obedience to the laws. It concerned real estate. Indeed, it is impossible for anyone to be made right with God by keeping the Law.

**NAS Galatians 2:21** . . . if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly.

**ESV Galatians 3:21** . . . if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law.

**What role in the salvation of the Jews did the Law of Moses play, according to Romans 3:19-20?** The spiritual function of the Law of Moses was to show Jewish people their sins and get them ready for a Savior in the Person of Jesus.

\*\*\*\* = ask the class this question before having the text read aloud.

**Teacher's Note:** These lessons were designed for a 60 minute session.

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