

THE MOSAIC LAW

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Introduction

The objective of this study is to understanding the Mosaic Law as it was given to Israel by God. It was the system under which Israel was called to live. It is also called “The Mosaic Covenant,” “The Law of Moses,” or just “The Law,” and I will be using all these terms during this study. It is very unlike the system Church Age believers live under in this present age, which we call “Grace” (Rom 6:14-15).

We shall begin our study with a very much abbreviated history of Israel leading up to the giving of the Law.

Beginnings

The Mosaic Law did not exist as system until the Exodus when it was given to Moses on Mt Sinai (Lev 27:34). Prior to the giving of the Law of Moses God dealt with individuals on the basis of grace and generally with only a few individuals, but now God was going to be dealing with a whole nation of people, a nation that He had Himself created through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Some moral aspects associated with the Law had previously been made known to man by God to govern his behavior. We understand that from the incident of Cain and Able with their “offerings” and Abraham building alters prior to the giving of the Law that God had instituted a very basic system of sacrifices. It isn’t clear when and how these requirements were issued by God. On Mt. Sinai that fateful day, God codified all of what had been previously revealed and much more into an organized system. Its observance by the people of Israel, the Hebrews, was a requirement to experience His blessings.

With God calling Israel out of Egypt and the giving of the Law, He was creating a people and a nation for Himself through whom He would work and reveal Himself and His righteousness. That nation/people building process began long before when God called Abram out of the evil religious

system in Ur of the Chaldeans and led him to Canaan, a land He promised to give to Abram and his progeny as a possession forever. This land grant promise is called the Palestinian Covenant and is an unconditional covenant, meaning their ultimate possession of it would depend completely on the word of God. While they will ultimately possess the land during the Kingdom Age, their ongoing occupation of it until then was conditioned on their behavior under the Mosaic Covenant.

Gen 12:1 Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. ² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

Genesis 12 speaks of the Abrahamic Covenant, an unconditional covenant made with Abraham. Unconditional because its fulfillment depended entirely on God and what He purposed to do. He would make (out of Abram/Abraham) a great nation and would bless those who blessed them and curse those who did not. “In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” is, of course, is a reference to Christ. God later expanded on that covenant and sealed it with the sign of circumcision.

Gen 17:1 When Abram was ninety-nine years old the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, ² that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly.” ³ Then Abram fell on his face. And God said to him, ⁴ “Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. ⁵ No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. ⁶ I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. ⁷ And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. ⁸ And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God.”

⁹ And God said to Abraham, “As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. ¹⁰ This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. ¹¹ You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. ¹² He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring, ¹³ both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money, shall surely be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. ¹⁴ Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.”

Abraham was old and had no heirs to fulfill God’s promise so it looked like he might have to take matters into his own hands. At the urging of his wife, he took her slave to have a child through her, and she became pregnant with a male child Abraham named Ishmael. But Ishmael was not the one through whom God would fulfill the covenant. Abraham would have another son through his wife Sarah he would name Isaac, and he would be the one God would use to continue the line. Ishmael would go on to also father many nations that would ultimately be a problem for Israel, the Arabs. With the death of Abraham, Isaac became the recipient of the covenant.

Gen 26:3 Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father. ⁴ I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, ⁵ because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.”

Isaac had a son named Jacob who had 12 sons, and they would eventually father the twelve tribes of Israel. God transferred the covenant to Jacob along with a name change.

Gen 35:10 And God said to him, “Your name is Jacob; no longer shall your name be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name.” So he called his name Israel. ¹¹ And God said to him, “I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply. A nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall come from your own body. ¹² The land that I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you, and I will give the land to your offspring after you.”

Because of the jealousy of his brothers, Jacob’s son Joseph was sold into slavery and ends up in Egypt where he eventually gains favor with Pharaoh by interpreting Pharaoh’s dream that foretold of famine in Egypt. Joseph devised a plan that would allow Egypt to survive the famine, gaining much favor with Pharaoh, and was appointed to second in leadership in Egypt. The famine comes and Joseph’s family back in the land of Canaan seeks to buy grain in Egypt only to encounter Joseph who eventually has the whole family brought to Egypt and placed under his protection. They settle in the Land of Goshen in northern Egypt as herders where they prosper for many years. But that eventually changed with a new administration in government.

Exodus 1:8 Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. ⁹ And he said to his people, “Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us. ¹⁰ Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and, if war breaks out, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land.” ¹¹ Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens. They built for Pharaoh store cities, Pithom and Raamses. ¹² But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad. And the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel. ¹³ So they ruthlessly made the people of Israel work as slaves ¹⁴ and made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field. In all their work they ruthlessly made them work as slaves.

Out of this oppression some 450 years after Joseph, arose a Hebrew named Moses who was adopted into the royal family, rose to power in Egypt, and was eventually called by God to lead the Israelites out of bondage.

What started as one man, Abram (Abraham) and his immediate family with a few servants, had by then grown to over a million people. Out of that bunch, God intended to build a nation and a people He would call his own and through whom He would work.

With the help of God, Moses led the Israelites out of bondage and into the wilderness for what would become a 40 year trek to the homeland God had promised them and was leading them to. To manage them, teach them, and position them for His use, He needed some “rules,” and those we call the Mosaic Covenant or the Law of Moses since Moses was the recipient of the Law directly from God.

Ex 19:1 On the third new moon after the people of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that day they came into the wilderness of Sinai.
² They set out from Rephidim and came into the wilderness of Sinai, and they encamped in the wilderness. There Israel encamped before the mountain, ³ while Moses went up to God. The Lord called to him out of the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: ⁴ ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. ⁵ Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all 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 people of Israel.”

Three days later Moses was called back and given the Ten Commandments to present to the people of Israel (Ex 20). In Exodus 21 all the way through the end of the Book of Exodus, we have a whole series of revelations concerning this system or covenant God was making with Israel with details for government, a legal system, a system of worship, and details for the construction of the Tabernacle, Ark of the Covenant, priestly vestments, etc. That is followed by more details of the various offerings and expounding on the Laws in the Book of Leviticus. The system was elaborate and extensive. And if that were not enough, the Pharisees later piled all manner of man-made minutia on top.

That has been a very much abbreviated history up to the receiving of the Law. Now we will begin our look into details of the law itself.

The first thing we should understand about the Law is that it is a covenant between God and this people who will be called Hebrews. Specifically, it will be a conditional covenant, meaning the two parties to the covenant, Israel and God, each have responsibilities under its terms. God promises to bless Israel if they meet the terms of the covenant—and discipline them if they do not. This is detailed in Deuteronomy 28. This potential discipline included being expelled *temporarily* from the land, but ultimately, the land would be theirs in the Kingdom Age as promised *unconditionally* by God. Until then their occupation of the land was conditioned on their behavior under the Mosaic Law as spelled out in Deuteronomy 28.

Ex 19:7 So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words that the Lord had commanded him. ⁸ All the people answered together and said, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do.” And Moses reported the words of the people to the Lord.

Moses presents the terms of the covenant to the Israelites, and note their answer, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do.” Prior to this they were under a system of grace, and they should have said, “NO! We want to stay under the Lord’s unmatched grace!” But they didn’t. They boasted they would do all *they* were called to do—and, of course, they failed miserably.

There was no universal indwelling of the Holy Spirit prior to the Church Age. There were many examples of people being endued with the power of the Holy Spirit—the temporary indwelling and enablement of the Spirit, prior to the Church Age. But that was restricted to certain individuals through whom God was working to accomplish some purpose. Examples would be Adam and Eve, Noah, Moses, Abraham, Joshua, and later the prophets and some kings and judges during the Age of Israel, and artisans tasked with building the Tabernacle and later the Temple along with all the articles of worship. The Mosaic Law was intended to be kept by the power of human effort alone. That was intentional to teach man that experiential righteousness is not possible without divine enablement, meaning the indwelling and subsequent empowerment of the Holy Spirit, which would become universal for all believers during the later Church Age.

The Mosaic Law

Let's begin our exploration of what exactly was involved in this system.

I remind you that the Mosaic Law was given to the entire nation of Israel, including believer *and unbeliever* alike. It is divided into three parts that in English translation are called the Decalogue, the Ordinances, and the Judgments. We also refer to these as three codices.

Codex one is the Ten Commandments or the Decalogue. These commandments form the basis for freedom in Israel. The Ten Commandments define freedom in terms of human activity. There can be no freedom without morality, which must be fulfilled by both believers and unbelievers if the citizens of the nation are to have the freedom to live and conduct business in safety. The Ten Commandments define human freedom in terms of morality, privacy, property, life, and authority in general. They define human freedom under two categories: relationship with God and relationship and interaction with people. While some sins are mentioned in the Ten Commandments, its purpose is not to define sin. The sins mentioned are intrusions upon privacy, property, and freedom.

Human freedom must live and prosper under proper authority, and this authority is defined in two areas: human volition as the basic authority in life, and establishment (government) authority summarized by the Ten Commandments, Ex 20:1-17.

Ex 20:1 And God spoke all these words, saying, ²“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

³“You shall have no other gods before me.

⁴“You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. ⁵ You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶ but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

7 “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

8 “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. 11 For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

12 “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

13 “You shall not murder.

14 “You shall not commit adultery.

15 “You shall not steal.

16 “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

17 “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.”

All of the rights of a group of people must be defined in terms of personal authority. Everyone is responsible in the framework of freedom to follow establishment rules. When these rules are violated, we get crime and loss of freedom for even the law abiding citizens. We are seeing the failure of this system all over America today. When there is a weak (or no) moral code of conduct in a society coupled with the failure of government to enforce laws you get anarchy, and that is exactly what we have in some jurisdictions in America today. Punishment is described in the Law. Criminals have the right to use their own free will to recognize these rights and principles or not. If not there are consequences to be paid. Other factors include good manners, thoughtfulness of others, and regard for women.

On the other side of volition, establishment authorities are set up to guarantee freedom. For example, the authority of the husband over the wife, parents over children, and government.

"Thou shall not" defines in a negative way what morality is. Morality is the system whereby freedom permeates the human race. Morality is a requirement for the entire human race, not just believers. Something much higher than morality is required for believers: virtue, and the highest form of virtue is spiritual maturity.

Mat 22:36-40 sums up the entire Law.

Mat 22:36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?"
³⁷ And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.

Imagine how nice it would be in a society that believed and followed this simple rule of life.

Codex two is the Ordinances (Ex 25:1 - 31:18) or the spiritual code. If you have freedom from the Ten Commandments, you are free to hear the gospel and to accept it or reject it. This emphasizes the fact that believers are designed to function under both the laws of divine establishment as well as Bible doctrine in the soul.

The ordinances are the spiritual heritage of Israel. They are the theological code designed to present Jesus Christ as the only Savior. The spiritual heritage of Israel includes a complete but shadow soteriology and christology, the essence of God, and the explanation of justification in terms of divine integrity, and all the adjustments to the justice of God. These doctrines were communicated both through ritual and through oral teachings.

The ritual communication included directions for the construction of the Tabernacle and its furniture (Ex 25-27), the delineation of the Holy Days (Lev 23:1ff), the function and operation of the Levitical priesthood (Ex 28-29), and the significance of the Levitical offerings (Lev 1-3). All of these things spoke of the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ in shadow

form. The Ordinances are a means of communicating the gospel. They are also a means of appreciating the salvation the Lord has given to all of us.

Codex three is the Judgments, the establishment code or the national heritage of Israel, that is its unique, inherited sense of family identity: the values, traditions, and culture. This includes all of the political and functional heritage of the nation Israel reduced to writing, oral communication, and government modus operandi. This includes an elaboration of freedom and authority, privacy, rights, property, privileges, marriage and divorce, military policy, taxation, diet, health, sanitation, quarantine, criminal law, trial, punishment, laws of evidence, and capital punishment, Ex 21:1-23:9.

The responsibility of government is to ensure freedom. The Mosaic Law has everything necessary for ensuring the freedom of its citizens.

It defined the concept of juris prudence, which distinguishes between criminal and civil law, and developed the laws of evidence, which exclude hearsay and assign just punishment for criminal acts and tort for civil law. No one could be convicted unless there were two or three witnesses who independently before the court presented the same facts. Criminals were punished immediately. The principle was that punishment must be so severe it restrains the criminal.

Part of the establishment code is capital punishment, which was first enucleated in the Scripture.

Gen 9:5 And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man.

And this was incorporated into the Mosaic Law.

Ex 21:12 Whoever strikes a man so that he dies shall be put to death.

Num 35:30 If anyone kills a person, the murderer shall be put to death on the evidence of witnesses. But no person shall be put to death on the testimony of one witness.

And transferred to the Church Age.

Rom 13:3 For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, ⁴ for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.

Codex three included a just system of taxation. Tithing was simply a system of taxation and was levied on **both believers and unbelievers** in Israel under the Law. There was a separate system of offerings for believers only. The offerings of believers were not assigned any percentage.

There were three income tax systems in Israel. There was a ten percent income tax for the maintenance of the Levites.

Deut 18:1-5 "The Levitical priests, all the tribe of Levi, shall have no portion or inheritance with Israel. They shall eat the Lord's food offerings as their inheritance. ² They shall have no inheritance among their brothers; the Lord is their inheritance, as he promised them. ³ And this shall be the priests' due from the people, from those offering a sacrifice, whether an ox or a sheep: they shall give to the priest the shoulder and the two cheeks and the stomach. ⁴ The firstfruits of your grain, of your wine and of your oil, and the first fleece of your sheep, you shall give him. ⁵ For the Lord your God has chosen him out of all your tribes to stand and minister in the name of the Lord, him and his sons for all time.

Num 18:21 "To the Levites I have given every tithe in Israel for an inheritance, in return for their service that they do, their service in the tent of meeting, ²² so that the people of Israel do not come near the tent of meeting, lest they bear sin and die. ²³ But the Levites shall do 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 people of Israel they shall have no inheritance. ²⁴ For the tithe of the people of Israel, which they present as a contribution to the Lord, I have

given to the Levites for an inheritance. Therefore I have said of them that they shall have no inheritance among the people of Israel.

Lev 27:30 “Every tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the trees, is the Lord’s; it is holy to the Lord. ³¹ If a man wishes to redeem some of his tithe, he shall add a fifth to it. ³² And every tithe of herds and flocks, every tenth animal of all that pass under the herdsman’s staff, shall be holy to the Lord. ³³ One shall not differentiate between good or bad, neither shall he make a substitute for it; and if he does substitute for it, then both it and the substitute shall be holy; it shall not be redeemed.”

There was a ten percent income tax for feasts and sacrifices.

Deut 14:22 “You shall tithe all the yield of your seed that comes from the field year by year. ²³ And before the Lord your God, in the place that he will choose, to make his name dwell there, you shall eat the tithe of your grain, of your wine, and of your oil, and the firstborn of your herd and flock, that you may learn to fear the Lord your God always.”

There was a ten percent income tax gathered every third year for the poor of the Land.

Deut 14:28 “At the end of every three years you shall bring out all the tithe of your produce in the same year and lay it up within your towns. ²⁹ And the Levite, because he has no portion or inheritance with you, and the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, who are within your towns, shall come and eat and be filled, that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands that you do.

Malachi 3:8-11 describes income tax evasion.

Mal 3:8 Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, ‘How have we robbed you?’ In your tithes and contributions. ⁹ You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. ¹⁰ Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until

there is no more need. ¹¹ I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of your soil, and your vine in the field shall not fail to bear, says the Lord of hosts. ¹² Then all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a land of delight, says the Lord of hosts

Great blessing were promised to Israel when its citizens faithfully pay legitimate income taxes.

Tithing under the Law actually calls for giving 20% annually plus another 10% every ten years. That means if you say you “tithe according to the Law,” then you must be giving 23.33% a year? PLUS spiritually giving! All that is a bit more than 10% a year.

Spiritual giving does not have a percentage assigned to it. Like Church Age giving it is as the Lord moves you to give and not limited to a tithe. While spiritual giving is mentioned, it is not an issue in the establishment code of the Mosaic Law. In the spiritual code, the offerings of a believer is a private matter between a believer and God. No percentage is specified. Charity is always a valid part of the spiritual life, both in the Old Testament and the New.

The laws of divine establishment (marriage, family, government) are for believer and unbeliever alike. Morality mandated by the Mosaic Law was for both believers and unbelievers; it was not the means of spirituality. Morality is not spirituality. Spirituality is infinitely greater than morality. Morality is produced by human self-determination and is good but spirituality is produced by God the Holy Spirit and is infinitely greater than human moral good.

Next we are going to take two side trips. The first will be to develop this doctrine of “divine establishment”.