

Teachings

First Seen in a Basket, Last Seen on a Mountain Top The Extraordinary Life of Moses

PART 14. THE LAW AND THE COVENANT

In Part 13, God added the requirement to keep the **Law of Moses** to the Abrahamic Covenant. The expanded covenant is generally referred to as the **Mosaic Covenant**, commonly called the **Old Covenant** by Christians.

The Book of the Covenant

Moses again ascended Mount Sinai to meet with God, this time alone:

“So the people stood afar off, but Moses drew near the thick darkness where God was.” (Exodus 20:21)

and God gave him a series of laws and promises (Exodus 20-23) to be recorded in the Book of the Covenant (Exodus 24:3-7) along with the Ten Commandments.

The laws covered building an altar; treatment of slaves; violent acts; animal violence and compensation; immoral acts; serving other gods; sorcery; reviling God; cursing rulers; treatment of strangers, widows and orphans; lending money to the poor; sacrifices and offerings; eating meat from dead wild animals; impartial justice: sabbaths and annual feasts.

The promises: included God’s blessing on their bread and water; freedom from sickness; no miscarriages or barrenness; a full lifespan; fear and confusion among enemies; and the boundaries and progressive occupation of the promised Land.

The Angel: The promises also included an “Angel” to guard and lead them on the journey to their new land:

“Behold, I send an Angel before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. Beware of Him and obey His voice; do not provoke Him, for He will not pardon your transgressions; for My name is in Him.” (Exodus 23:20-21)

Acts 7:38 reveals that the “Angel” was the same one who spoke to Moses on the mountain:

“This is he who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the Angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai”

In Part 13, this “Angel” was shown to be God the Son, the Lord Jesus. His deity was confirmed by Him having the authority to forgive transgressions and bearing God’s name – Exodus 23:20-21 above.

The Inauguration of the Covenant

After returning to the camp, and recording God’s laws and promises in the Book of the Covenant, Moses led the Israelites through the formalities of their Covenant with God:

The Covenant Sacrifices

Exodus 24: 4-6 tells how Moses first built an altar and twelve pillars according to the twelve tribes of Israel, then sent young men to offer burnt offerings and peace offerings of oxen to the Lord. Moses then sprinkled half of the blood from the offerings on the altar.

The burnt offerings were to atone for the sinfulness of the people to make them acceptable to God and able to come into His presence and enjoy His favour (Leviticus 1:4 and 9:7). The whole oxen were burned except for their skins.

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The peace offerings represented the people's thankfulness to God for entering into covenant with them, and for His promised blessings. "Peace" in Hebrew has a broader meaning than in English and includes welfare, health, prosperity and safety. This is recognized in the NRSV version of the bible which uses "offering of well-being" which better reflects the covenant promises outlined above.

The Pledge of Allegiance and the Blood of the Covenant

In Exodus 24:7, Moses read the Book of the Covenant to the people, and they pledged that:

"All that the Lord has said we will do, and be obedient."

Then in 24:8 he sprinkled the remaining portion of the blood on the people, and said:

"This is the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you according to all these words."

The blood consecrated (dedicated) them to God's service under the terms of the covenant. (Leviticus 8:15)

The Covenant Feast on the Mountain with God

Exodus 24:9-11 records that, as God had commanded, Moses brought Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel up the mountain where they ate and drank and were allowed to look upon God from a distance. As discussed above and in Part 13, this was God the son, the Lord Jesus, who was also called "God" in a number of other Old Testament appearances including by Jacob in Genesis 32:30 and Manoaah and his wife in Judges 13:32. Jesus Himself confirmed that the Elders could not have seen God the Father:

"No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him." (John 1:18)

Book of the Law

More laws and promises were progressively added to the Book of the Covenant and are recorded in the rest of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. The additions included further blessings for obedience to the law (Deuteronomy 6-8 and 28:1-14), curses for disobedience (Deuteronomy 28: 15-68, and Galatians 3:10), and a system of offerings and sacrifices to atone for disobedience and enable the Israelites to escape the curses and live in the promised blessings.

The expanded Book of the Covenant was called the Book of the Law (Deuteronomy 31:24-25). Both names are used interchangeably later in the Old Testament (2 Kings 22:8 and 23:2).

Why the Law?

The apostle Paul, who as a leading Pharisee, was an expert on the law, said that it was added as a restraint to sin and a tutor till the 'Seed' (ie Jesus) came to empower living by faith without the need for a tutor:

"What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made". (Galatians 3:19)

Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. (Galatians 3:24-25)

No Curses in the New Covenant

Under the New Covenant Jesus redeemed us from the law of Moses and its curses:

"Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree')." Galatians 3:13

but Jewish believers remained under the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant:

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"And this I say, that the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect. For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise." (Galatians 3:17-18).

while the blessings were extended to Gentile believers:

"that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:14)

and both Jewish and Gentile believers received the wonderful blessings of the New Covenant.

"And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance." (Hebrews 9:15)

In **Part 15: The Tablets of Stone and the Golden Calf**, only 40 days after hearing the audible voice of God, the Israelites break His first and second commandments by making and worshipping an idol while Moses is on Mount Sinai receiving the Tablets of Stone and more laws and instructions from God.