

THE MOSAIC COVENANT – Session Four

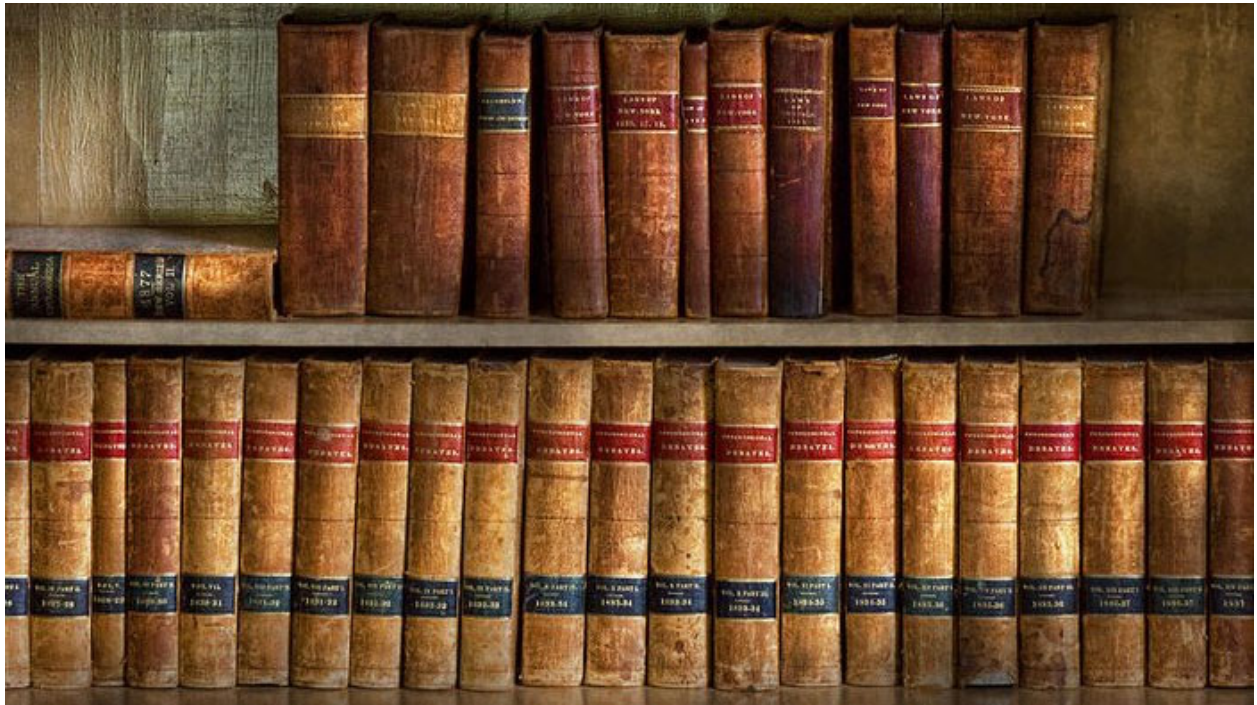


Leader's Opening Remarks

After Sarah and Abraham died, we read about Isaac and Jacob, then Jacob and Laban and Rachel; Jacob wrestles with God. Then Esau, Joseph and his brothers led us to know Pharaoh and the country of Egypt. Jacob died, followed by Joseph, and the Israelites became oppressed. Moses was born, grew up and had a talk with God, who took the form of a burning bush. Moses reluctantly confronted Pharaoh and God sent a series of plagues to help deliver the Israelites from Pharaoh in the Exodus event at the the Red Sea.

After about 3 months, Moses and the Israelites arrived at Mt. Sinai

and God made an appearance in a dense cloud. Today, we take a turn in our covenant journey. We turn from stories about biblical characters to a discussion about Laws.



THE LAW

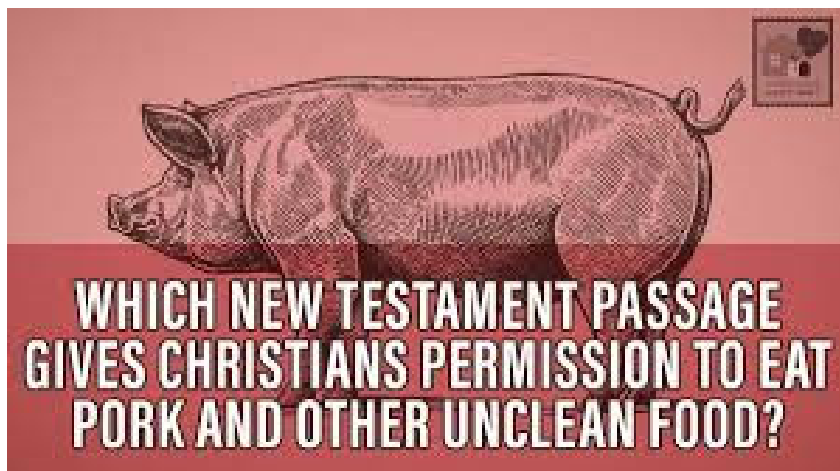
Many have heard the story about God's 10 commandments given to Moses and the Israelites. But, we do not often talk about the two main problems with the whole of the laws given to us in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

The first problem, is we ignore the law and we do not read it. Some long time Christians might justify that position by things in Galatians from Paul's writing that suggest Christ frees us from the Curse of the Law. But, does that mean we are freed from the law itself?

A second, and perhaps even bigger problem is that we pick and choose from the law. We repeat every Sunday to love your neighbor as yourself (Lev 19); however, we rarely if ever discuss not wearing a garment with 2 types of red in it.

Quick question:

Why might it help to accept and think about the laws in the Torah, the 1st 5 books of the Bible, as a whole, rather than looking at each law?



There are ways in which countries are defined: rivers, borders, those imaginary lines on a map. But laws also define countries and the people who live in them.



We have some ridiculous laws in the US: 1) Did you know you can be fined \$500 for sending pizza to someone's house without their knowledge? And for whatever reason if you are going to feed your pigs leftover food, you have to cook it first. Finally, hold on to your masks – in LA, no reptiles are allowed within 200 yards of a Mardi Gras parade... Makes you wonder who brought their snake to a parade!

We tend to think mostly about individual laws when we are considering breaking them. Otherwise, we tend to not think about them that much; rather, they are simply part of who we are. Most of the time we are part of a nation and we generally understand what our laws are – it is woven into who we become.

There is something about the laws that we encounter with the Mosaic Covenant that helps us to understand what type of relationship we have with God and what type of relationship we have with others. But note, that there isn't just "THE LAW." But, there are laws! Plural:

- Covenant code
- Building of Tabernacle and the Tabernacle Code (Lev)
- Holiness Code (Lev)
- Legal Code (Num)
- Priestly Code (Lev)
- And don't forget - the whole book of Deuteronomy

Guess what? These laws often disagree and contradict one another, just like many of our own laws today! And that's all fine and good, unless you are trying to obey and live by them.

Mosaic (or Sinaic Law) is trying to define who we are in relation to God and to each other. Those various voices mentioned, though they say different things (sometimes at the same time), they provide the relationship that we have with God and each other with a certain depth, and realism, and texture that we could not get if we were just trying to live by some rigid code.

Another funny thing about how we misunderstand law: there is a phrase called law and covenant (Lutherans and Calvinists were big on covenant) we love covenant... we Christians love to asked questions like, "have you accepted God/Jesus as your personal savior? We do not love law as much though... but law and covenant are not mutually exclusive; rather, they are very interconnected and interdependent.



MORE ABOUT COVENANTS

There are 3 types of Covenant:

Treaty (a formal relationship between two bodies, individuals, groups, or both:

- **Parity Treaty:** Remember the Cold War? King/Nation A and King/Nation B are basically equal and don't want war because the outcome might be everyone loses. So, a parity treaty was agreed upon – you don't attack us and we won't attack you. This should NEVER be used as a metaphor for how we are in a relationship with God – despite our frequent tendencies to act like God, we are not God and are not equal to God.

- In the ancient times, treaties often involved intermarriage between the two kingdoms to ensure peace.
- **Vassal Treaty:** King/Nation A and King/Nation B get in a war and King A wins. King B is under the authority of King A and King B is now a vassal/servant with some kind of standing/stature. For instance, Kingdom B is a puppet state to Kingdom A (which means pay taxes). King A is a suzerain. **This type of treaty provides the most foundational metaphor for how human beings are in relationship to God.** Think about how Paul wrote that if you say in your heart that Jesus is Lord (suzerain) then you are saved. He's not only King; but King of Kings and Lord of Lord's. If you do not understand this, you will get into trouble theologically. Too often, we misconstrue the father/child relationship to not include the King/servant relationship with God.
- **Land Grant Treaty:** We have the suzerain and the vassal. King B hears that other vassal(s), we will call them (Queen C) does not like King A. Furthermore, Queen C wants to commit treason and

decides to overthrow King A so that she does not have to pay taxes anymore. King B tells King A and as a reward, King A gives King B a parcel of land, which becomes part of King B's land **forever.**

This happens metaphorically in the Bible as well. We saw this with Abraham last week (I will make this covenant with you forever) and we'll see it with David and God, too.



MORE ABOUT LAWS

We are going to look at 2 types of law to help us on our journey with the covenants.

- **Apodictic Law:** This type of law says what you need to do, like the 10 commandments. Do not steal. Do not kill. Do not gossip.
- **Casuistic Law** (case law): This type of law says something about a particular situation (if this, then that). Casuistic law only applies in those certain circumstances and cannot be generalized.

“Do love one another” is apodictic. But, “If your enemy strikes you, then turn the other cheek” is casuistic. Every time we read and interpret the Bible, we should come away with an understanding of how God is extending grace. The laws are no exception.

The drilldown on the Hebrew word for commandment is “principles.”

The 10 commandments are apodictic **principles**. If you understand them, you’ll get the gist of the rest of the 600+ laws. Of those 10 laws, the first 4 are about our relationship with God and the last 6 are about our relationship with others.

Now remember, all heaven has broken loose at Mount Sinai, and it’s not clouds and angel harps; rather, it is a cloud of smoke, thunder and

lightning and an ancient trumpet whose sound grows greater and greater; a perimeter that is reverent to God who, if anyone doesn't respect it, will die; and, the booming voice of God as they hear God speak these words! "I am the Lord your God." We have a relationship with God already; therefore, having a relationship with God is not the purpose of these principles. The Law is not about establishing a relationship. God already loves us as much as God can. God has delivered us. What the law does do is help us to define that relationship.

- #1 - No other gods. The relationship with God determines all other relationships.
- #2 - No idols. (not talking about worship of other gods...that the first commandment) This is about worship. You don't make a statue... like a man with a birdhead; or a woman with cowhead; or an ibis, or a crocodile. Statues don't change; God is living and does change.

When the Bible talks about Yaweh being God, it's a metaphor.

We need to get comfortable that we cannot fully define who God is. When we get so concrete that our understanding doesn't change – we get into trouble.

We also do not like the idea of a jealous God. Have you ever been a jealous spouse? In certain types of exclusive relationships, jealousy is how it works! God is like this with us. Based on how important that is to God, this is how God deals with it: 3rd to 4th generations are punished, 1000th generation rewarded for those who love and keep the principles of the law. Look how lenient God is! The default is always blessing with God. Grace. Love. Unless we push relentlessly – and that has and can happen. But the default is love.

- #3 - No misuse of God's name. (not hitting your thumb with a hammer and saying #\$%&). For those of us who are Christian and therefore whose lives are given over to God for ministry here in God's creation – this means that you cannot use Gods name for

vanity (for your own purposes). You cannot use it to win an argument. God's name is holy and undefinable. You cannot use it for profane, silly things (God told me to pray and LSU would win...or God told me to add some more milk to the recipe...)

Don't make wrongful use of God's name.

- #4 - Remember the Sabbath: it's a neat law. This one ties things together... this one deals with both our relationship with both God and others. It is this law that ties heaven and earth into the perfect whole! It defines everything. Much more important than how we typically understand it! When you go to a party, the first things you want to know is who are you and what do you do? This law helps to define Christians apart from all others.

The remaining laws are about our relationship with others

- #5 - Honor your father and mother: the very first thing we do is pay attention to those who were around when we came on the scene (Look at like this... it is like the first commandment!)

- #6 - Don't murder
- #7 – No adultery
- # 8 - Don't steal
- #9 – Don't give false testimony (as in a court)
- #10 - Don't covet – anything. A churchy word. (The correct drill down on the Hebrew here is “obsession”) Don't be obsessed with anything. Because, It will start determining how you live; and, there is only One that should determine that!
- The punishment that comes from these things... often comes directly from the violation itself – remember the people in the water in the story of Noah? Then, think about Pharaoh and what happened to him. Remember, what is sewn - so shall you reap.

In the Mosaic Covenant, we learn that we need to think about how we each relate to God; And, how we relate to others. We all have preconceived ideas about what it means to be in relationship with God and others and how we should live in this world in relation to God and

others. But these 10 principles are the foundational posts in which we Christians are identified as the set apart children of the One Triune God.

The Law is not about God establishing a relationship with us; rather, it is about defining our relationship with God and others; also, to set us apart as a kingdom.

Quick Question

Are you more “patriotic” about being a Christian in the kingdom of heaven than you are about being an American?

Remember... “NO OTHER GODS BEFORE ME,” said the Lord!