

# **The Law of Moses**

**A Study of the Law  
and  
How it Compares to Grace**

Dick Johnson  
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# Table of Contents

<b>Chapter 1. Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter 2. What is the Law of Moses? .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Chapter 3. The Purpose of the Law.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Chapter 4. The Ten Commandments .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Chapter 5. The Sabbath.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Chapter 6. Promises and Consequences.....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Chapter 7. Different Laws .....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Chapter 8. Jesus and His Disciples .....</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>Chapter 9. Changes to the Law of Moses .....</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>Chapter 10. Christianity Today .....</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>Chapter 11. Old and New Testaments.....</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>Chapter 12. Closing Thoughts .....</b>	<b>78</b>



# The Law of Moses

## Chapter 1 Introduction

**“Do not think that I [*Jesus*] came to abolish [destroy] the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.”** (Matthew 5:17-18)<sup>1</sup>

**Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present [yield] yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under [the] law<sup>2</sup> but under grace.** (Romans 6:12-14)

The primary focus of this study is on the Law of Moses, which I will also refer to as *the Law* or *the covenant*. What is it and are we supposed to obey it? In my youth, as I recall at least, these seemed to be straight-forward questions with straight-forward answers. I was taught that the Law was God’s covenant to Israel in the Old Testament and we are not to obey it because Christ fulfilled the Law. At the same time, however, I was taught to obey *the Ten Commandments*. Furthermore, I began to be taught that America could realize the promises given in the books of the Law and the Prophets if we repented as a nation and turned back to God. The answer to whether we are to obey the Law, therefore, was no longer simple.

Before going any further, I need to briefly explain what is meant by *the Law* and *the Prophets* as identified in Matthew 5:17 and how I am using those terms in this study. The Law refers to the covenant given by God to Israel through Moses as is presented in Exodus 20 through the book of Deuteronomy. Depending on the scriptural context, references to Moses may be about the man, the Law, or the five books attributed to him (Genesis through Deuteronomy<sup>3</sup>). References to the Prophets contain prophecies about the future application and fulfillment of the Law of Moses as well as about Christ and the future kingdom of Israel as recorded in the books of Samuel and Isaiah through Malachi (Acts 3:24). The book of Psalms is also prophetic about these things because David, the primary author, was both a king and a prophet (Luke 20:41-44; 24:44; Acts 2:29-36). Nothing in the books of the Prophets or the book of Psalms changed or contradicted the Law of Moses.

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<sup>1</sup> All references are quoted from the *New American Standard Bible (NASB Side-Column Reference Edition, Copyright © 1996 by The Lockman Foundation)* unless otherwise noted. Nonbolded words in brackets are either equivalent words from the *King James Version (KJV)* or, if in italics, were added by me for clarification.

<sup>2</sup> The context of this statement is the Law of Moses instead of a general spiritual, moral, or civil law (Romans 5:18-21; 7:4-12). Therefore, the KJV is correct in using the definite article.

<sup>3</sup> These books do not mention an author but, traditionally, have been attributed to Moses. He could not have written the book of Deuteronomy, however, because it includes his death and is written from the perspective of someone who was already in the promised land, which Moses did not enter (Deuteronomy 1:1-5; 4:37-38; 34:1-8). Whether or not he actually wrote all or parts of them does not matter—they are the inspired word of God, they include the first prophecies about Christ and the future promised land of Israel, and I believe are rightfully considered to be the books of Moses (Mark 12:26; Luke 16:29; 24:27).

Please consider the opening passages. In Matthew, Jesus said that nothing in the Law of Moses will change until heaven and earth pass away and until everything in the Law is accomplished. And then, in his letter to the believers in Rome, the Apostle Paul said that they were no longer under the Law but under grace. These are vastly different statements that will be investigated in this study. It appears that something changed, but if something about the Law changed, how and why did it change?

In this study I will use Scripture to describe the main attributes of the Law of Moses and God's purpose for providing it in the first place. This will include specific requirements of the Law and their associated promises and consequences depending on obedience. Because of the pervasive teaching in our churches that we should obey the Ten Commandments, I will examine them briefly in Chapter 4 except for the commandment regarding *the sabbath*, about which I will provide more detail in Chapter 5. There are other laws mentioned in Scripture, and I will address them as well in Chapter 7.

It is important that we see if Jesus and His disciples were to be obedient to the Law of Moses and what they said about the Law. Was the Law abolished with Christ's death or did it continue to be in effect? Will it ever be abolished?

I hope to sufficiently demonstrate that we are no longer under the Law but under grace as revealed in Romans 6:14 and why this is the case. That is, we are not subject to the jurisdiction of the Law of Moses; instead, God is dealing with us according to His unmerited favor (grace) apart from the Law. However, our church doctrine and manner of worship show that we continue to hold to the Law as if it is still part of God's plan for us today. I will address some of the ways that we do so in Chapter 10.

The Apostle Paul often referred to the Law of Moses in his letters (Romans through Philemon) to the members of the body of Christ—believers. However, he did so to explain the purpose of the Law and to distinguish it from the grace of God. The following passages will be addressed throughout this study, but for now please note the difference in perspective between them—the first says to keep the Law and the second says we are justified apart from works of the Law.

**“Now then, if you [Israel] will indeed obey My [God's] voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you [Moses] shall speak to the sons of Israel.”** (Exodus 19:5-6)

**Now we know that whatever the Law [of Moses] says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed [silenced] and all the world may become accountable to God; because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin. But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation [atoning sacrifice] in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. For we maintain [conclude] that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.** (Romans 3:19-28)

A study about the Law of Moses cannot be complete without understanding what Scripture says about the grace of God. Conversely, we cannot fully grasp the grace of God without realizing what the Law of Moses says and its purpose. Therefore, as much as possible, I will be comparing the Law with grace throughout this study.

## **Bible Divisions**

When we think of divisions or partitions in the Bible, most of us think of the Old Testament and the New Testament because that is how the books of our Bible are grouped. I will address this common demarcation in Chapter 11. When considering scriptural context, however, there are other divisions in the Bible including Israel and the nations, Jews and Gentiles, the gospel of the kingdom and the gospel of the grace of God, and the Law and grace. I believe that the most important division in the Bible, however, is even lesser known than these: it is the difference between prophecy and the mystery. What do I mean by *the mystery*, which I recall was never even mentioned in the denominational churches I attended? But first, I will provide a very brief overview of God's prophetic plan.

Prophecy is that which was spoken *since* the world began (Luke 1:67-79; 24:25-27, 44; Acts 3:21). God began revealing His prophetic plan for the world through His perfect garden of Eden (Genesis 2:7-9), then began revealing His plan for a people of promise and their promised land through a covenant with Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3; 22:15-18), then revealed His requirements and promises for His chosen nation of Israel through the Law of Moses, then revealed His future plan for fulfilling all of His promises to Israel including His judgments on Israel and the nations through the books of the Old Testament prophets and subsequent books in the Bible.

A common thread through all of these prophecies was a promised Messiah or Savior of God's people, including His future birth, death, resurrection, and, ultimately, His reign as King over Israel and the nations. Prophecy, therefore, was God's progressively revealed plan for Israel and the Gentile nations and is described throughout most of the Bible from Genesis through Revelation. Peter summarized God's prophetic plan in a discourse to the men of Israel soon after the events of Pentecost and implored the nation to repent, which it did not do.

**“And now, brethren [men of Israel—fellow Jews], I [Peter] know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did also. But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ [Messiah] would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. Therefore repent and return [to God], so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing [Israel's prophesied restoration and redemption] may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time [since the world began]. Moses said, ‘The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren; to Him [Jesus—the Christ] you shall give heed to everything He says to you. And it will be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.’ And likewise, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and his successors onward, also announced these days. It is you who are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your seed [Christ] all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’ For you [Israel] first, God raised up His Servant [Son**

Jesus] and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways.” (Acts 3:17-26)

But then there are the letters by the Apostle Paul. In his letters, Paul frequently refers to the grace of God and the mystery, and he is the only one to mention and describe the mystery. The mystery is a body of truth that was kept hidden in God *since before* the world began (I Corinthians 2:6-8; Ephesians 3:4-5; Colossians 1:25-27). It was His secret plan that He had prepared in eternity past. He did not reveal it to anyone until He did so by our ascended and glorified Lord Jesus Christ through Paul, who until then had been God’s leading enemy (known as Saul of Tarsus—Acts 9:1-4; I Timothy 1:15-16).

**Now to Him [God] who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past [since the world began], but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith; to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever, Amen.**  
(Romans 16:25-27)

This mystery is the word of God just as the Law and the Prophets are the word of God. Furthermore, it is confirmed as something new because it cannot be found in the Law and the Prophets. Paul was not being arrogant by describing his message to the Roman brethren as *my gospel* (see also Romans 2:12-16 and II Timothy 2:8-9). He was telling them that the gospel that he preached—the gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20:24)—was a new revelation through him just as the Law was revealed to the people of Israel through Moses.<sup>4</sup>

The mystery is described as the manifold wisdom of God—it ties His entire word together. Using Paul as His instrument, it was made known to the world and the heavenly principalities (Ephesians 3:8-10). Through it we learn the all-encompassing work that Christ accomplished for us at the cross. As part of that work, we also learn the full purpose of the Law of Moses and that we are no longer bound by it but are under the administration of God’s grace.

**For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—if indeed you have heard of the stewardship [dispensation] of God’s grace which was given to me for you; that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations [ages] was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God’s grace which was given to me according to the working of His power. To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable [unsearchable] riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things [by Christ Jesus]; so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the**

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<sup>4</sup> There is more than one gospel in the Bible, and they are described in my study **Which Gospel?**



**eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him. (Ephesians 3:1-12)**

The Law of Moses is the centerpiece of prophecy, whereas the gospel of the grace of God is the centerpiece of the mystery. Both are based on the work of Christ. He will fulfill God's prophetic plan as the Messiah and King of Israel, and currently is fulfilling God's eternal secret plan as the head of the church, which is His body. Eventually, all things will be brought together as one in Christ in the dispensation of the fullness of times (Ephesians 1:9-10).<sup>5</sup>

I use the word *dispensation* frequently in my studies, most often regarding the dispensation of the grace of God (Ephesians 3:1-3). The word *dispensation* is not a theological term applied by Bible scholars that we should shy away from (as is often taught that we should do) or one that some brethren denounce as false doctrine, but rather it is just an old English word used in the KJV and used only in Paul's letters (I Corinthians 9:17; Ephesians 1:10; 3:2; and Colossians 1:25). Other versions translate the Greek word as *stewardship*, *administration*, *trust* or *trusteeship*, and *commission*. I still use it because it is a good descriptive word for me. The Bible also uses the similar words *ages* and *generations* to describe how God is dealing with the world at different times (Ephesians 2:7; 3:5, 21; Colossians 1:26). In simple terms, a dispensation covers a period of time during which God is administering His plan in a particular way.

Brethren, it is important to understand that Paul, and only Paul, was the dispenser or steward of the gospel of the grace of God, just as Moses, and only Moses, was the dispenser of the Law of God. The Lord God, who I believe was the person of Jesus Christ (I Corinthians 10:1-4; John 5:37; 8:54-58),<sup>6</sup> spoke directly to Moses (Exodus 19:3-6; 33:9-11; Numbers 12:4-8; Deuteronomy 4:14). Likewise, Paul received the revelation of the mystery and the gospel of the grace of God directly from our ascended and glorified Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 9:1-9; 26:12-18; I Corinthians 15:1-4; II Corinthians 12:1-4; Galatians 1:11-12; I Thessalonians 4:15). We should never diminish the roles in which God used these two men to reveal His will to mankind.

## **To Fellow Brethren**

This is not an academic study of the Bible or of a particular subject. All subjects in the Bible are comprised of so much more than just facts or information—they are included for one or more spiritual purpose being conveyed by God to us (Hebrews 4:12). As with all my studies, my intent is to expound on a doctrinal point, through scriptural support, to help children of God not only have a better understanding of the word of God but how to apply that understanding to our everyday lives according to the will of God. Therefore, this study is directed to my fellow brethren.

Please bear with me as I provide some basic framework or understanding for this study. I do not know the spiritual condition of those who read my studies, so I cannot assume that we are starting from

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<sup>5</sup> See my studies **The Mystery (God's Secret Plan), The Two Messages of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Our Lord Jesus Christ**, and others that describe the differences between prophecy and the mystery, the gospel of the kingdom and the gospel of the grace of God, and the central role of Christ throughout everything in God's eternal plan.

<sup>6</sup> Although usually taught otherwise, the subject of I Timothy 6:13-16 is not Jesus Christ but God the Father who dwells in unapproachable light; therefore, it was not God the Father who dwelled in the sanctuary of the tabernacle. Jesus Christ will be King of kings and Lord of lords when His kingdom is established, whereas God the Father has always been King of kings and Lord of lords (I Timothy 1:17; Psalm 103:19; Proverbs 21:1).

the same position. From God's perspective, there are only two kinds of people: those who are His children and those who are not His children (Ephesians 2:1-3). Therefore, I need to establish who God claims as His own children.

So, what do I mean by my fellow brethren? My brethren consist of every person on this earth who believes the gospel, or good news, of salvation, regardless of denominational, spiritual, or religious background. The gospel of salvation is presented in its most concise form in the following passage by the Apostle Paul to the Corinthian believers (see also Ephesians 1:13-14; Romans 5:6-11).

**Now I [Paul] make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.** (I Corinthians 15:1-4)

The good news that we are to believe, therefore, is that the Lord Jesus Christ—God's Son—died for our sins, was buried, and was raised up again. This implies that we need salvation in the first place, and that God provided one way to be saved in this dispensation of grace. Every one sins and, because we sin, no one can meet the requirements of God's righteousness through our own efforts (Romans 3:10-12; Ephesians 2:1-3). The natural consequence of our sinfulness is spiritual death and eternal separation from God (Romans 6:23). This is why God sent His Son, who knew no sin, to take our sins upon Himself and die for us on the cross.

**He [God] made Him [Christ] who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.** (II Corinthians 5:21)

The death that Christ died, He died to sin once for all (Romans 6:8-11). Through the power of His resurrection, we have forgiveness of our sins and are alive in Christ—we have eternal life (Titus 3:4-7; Romans 6:23). Our Lord paid the full price that God required for our sins. All we must do to receive the benefits of Christ's work at the cross is to believe it—the good news—from our heart (Romans 10:8-10). No works of righteousness are required to be saved, nor any other works or ordinances that our denominations and churches say we must obey before being considered a *Christian* (e.g., penance, good works, water baptism, church membership, confirmation, etc.).<sup>7</sup> Our salvation truly is a gift of God by His grace (Romans 4:4-5).

**In Him [Christ] we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses [sins], according to the riches of His [God's] grace.** (Ephesians 1:7)

**For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.** (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Do you believe that Christ died for you? If so, you are a child of God and my fellow brother or sister in Christ (Romans 8:14-17; Galatians 3:26; Ephesians 1:5-6). You are also a member of the body of Christ with me and all other believers (I Corinthians 12:12-13, 27; Ephesians 1:22-23). Furthermore, you have

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<sup>7</sup> See my studies **Are We Really Christians?, Our Lord Jesus Christ, Good News!**, and others that explain salvation from God's perspective, keeping in mind that we only have to believe the gospel of salvation to be completely and eternally saved by the grace of God.

the Holy Spirit dwelling in you that not only guarantees your salvation but also enables you to understand the word of God (Ephesians 1:13-14; I Corinthians 2:12-16). So, as you read this study, I encourage you to do so prayerfully instead of leaning on your own understanding or relying on what you have been taught, which may or may not be correct.

**I [Paul] pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His [God's] calling [salvation], what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints [believers], and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His [God's] might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. (Ephesians 1:18-21)**

Please open your heart to the word of God and see what Scripture truly says. You may agree or disagree with me, but that is not my point. My desire is that you know, through sound Bible doctrine, what you believe. That is why I provide as many Scripture references as practical to support my statements, and I hope you take the time to look them up and read them for yourself. Then apply what you learn in your worship of our Almighty God, and in your service to Him and our Lord Jesus Christ.

**All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching [doctrine], for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate [complete], equipped for every good work. (II Timothy 3:16-17)**

God wants us to walk worthy of our salvation. That is, we should endeavor to live in such a way that is befitting of our salvation in Christ. Because we are children of God, we should want to set aside our old ways of life and truly live as His children (Colossians 1:9-12; Ephesians 4:20-24; 5:1-2).<sup>8</sup>

**Therefore I [Paul], the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling [salvation] with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:1-3)**

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<sup>8</sup> See my study **Walk Worthy** that examines how God expects us to live each day as we ought to live.

## Chapter 2

### What is the Law of Moses?

The Law of Moses was God's righteous law to His people of Israel revealed through His prophet Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15-18; 34:10-12) after he led them out of bondage in Egypt. It was God's written covenant to His people (Exodus 19:5; 24:7-8). Besides "covenant," it goes by several names in Scripture, but it is usually referred to as simply "the law" (Deuteronomy 29:21; Romans 3:19-28). It is sometimes called the "law of the Lord" (II Kings 10:31; II Chronicles 17:9; Psalm 19:7; Luke 2:23-24). This law is also called "the law of Moses" (Joshua 8:30-35; Acts 13:38-39) and referred to as "Moses" (Luke 16:29; II Corinthians 3:15) after his death. In addition to most of these names, the Apostle Paul also called it the "law of commandments" (Ephesians 2:15), "the letter" (Romans 7:6; II Corinthians 3:6), and, depending on the Bible version, some form of "written code" or "ordinances" (Romans 7:6; Colossians 2:13-14). James said it is the perfect "law of liberty" (James 1:25).

The Law is presented, described, and reiterated from Exodus 20 through the book of Deuteronomy. It consists of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:3-17; 34:28; Deuteronomy 10:4), as well as the specific judgments associated with breaking them. The Law also includes descriptions of nearly all sins and associated consequences, what is considered "clean" and "unclean" (including dietary restrictions), sacrifices (sin offerings), peace and thanksgiving offerings, tithing, observances (holy days, weeks, months, and years), and other worship requirements.

#### To Whom was the Law Given?

The Law of Moses was given to the people of Israel, and only to the people of Israel, to set them apart from all the other nations so that they would be God's own possession—His people (Exodus 19:5-6; Deuteronomy 14:2). All of the other nations worshiped idols and were enemies of God (Exodus 34:11-17; Deuteronomy 4:5-28).

**"This day the Lord our God commands you [*Israel*] to do these statutes and ordinances. You shall therefore be careful to do them with all your heart and with all your soul. You have today declared the Lord to be your God, and that you would walk in His ways and keep His statutes, His commandments and His ordinances, and listen to His voice. The Lord has today declared you to be His people, a treasured possession, as He promised you, and that you should keep all His commandments; and that He will set you high above all nations which He has made, for praise, fame, and honor; and that you shall be a consecrated [holy] people to the Lord your God, as He has spoken."** (Deuteronomy 26:16-19)

#### Why Did God Give the Law to Israel?

At the time the Law was given to Israel through Moses, it was provided so the people of Israel would know and obey God (Exodus 19:5-6; Deuteronomy 7:9-11), and to:

- Set Israel apart from the rest of the nations by distinguishing between the righteousness of God and the unrighteousness of the other nations (Deuteronomy 4:5-8; 7:6).
- Remind the people how God brought Israel out of Egypt and into their promised land (Deuteronomy 6:20-25; 7:7-8).
- Provide God's requirements for atonement of their sins (Exodus 30:10; Leviticus 4:1-35).

When God gave His Law to Israel, it was not because the nation had earned His favor and deserved to be blessed by God. Instead, He gave His Law because of His love for Israel and in partial fulfillment of His covenant with Abraham (Deuteronomy 7:7-8; Genesis 12:1-3). If the nation kept God's commandments, statutes, and ordinances contained in the Law, it would have experienced the love of God by being blessed beyond measure.

God did not reveal to Israel, however, His eternal purpose for establishing His Law with the nation. For example, we find out through the Apostle Paul that it was also given to condemn everyone under sin and to show that the righteousness of the Law could only be obtained through faith. For us, that means faith in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ for our sins. God's eternal purpose regarding the Law will be discussed in the next chapter and elaborated upon throughout this study.

### **The Law was Complete**

The people of Israel were to obey the Law completely and not to add or take anything away from it (Matthew 5:17-19). There are many promises associated with the Law of Moses, both for obeying it and disobeying it. These will be discussed in Chapters 4 through 6.

**“Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I [Moses] am teaching you to perform, so that you may live and go in and take possession of the land which the Lord, the God of your fathers, is giving you. You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you.”**  
(Deuteronomy 4:1-2)

Not only does Scripture show that Israel continually disobeyed the Law of Moses, but the religious leaders of Israel did in fact add to and take away from the Law. Some of the changes that they made are addressed in Chapter 9. Just as the Law was complete, the entire word of God is complete (Ephesians 3:8-12; Colossians 1:25-27; II Timothy 3:16-17). Nothing is to be added to or taken away from it. Please think about this through the course of this study. Are we really any better than the people of Israel when it comes to obeying God?

**I [Paul] am amazed that you [Galatian believers] are so quickly deserting Him [God] who called you [to salvation] by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before [when we were with you], so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!** (Galatians 1:6-9)

## Chapter 3

### The Purpose of the Law

The Law of Moses was, and is, perfect and righteous (Romans 7:12). If the people of Israel had completely obeyed it, then they would have become perfect and righteous. I will offer more on this statement later because God is not finished with Israel or the righteousness of the Law.

Instead of recognizing their sinfulness and seeing their need to humbly approach God by faith, most of the people of Israel tried to attain righteousness by attempting to keep the Law through their own efforts (or they ignored God's Law and lived according to their own law). They tried to be perfected through works of the flesh (Romans 9:30-33). Consequently, they were blinded by their pride and often turned away from God to worship the idols of God's enemies (Deuteronomy 8:11-20; Judges 2:11-15). We have a long history of Israel's disobedience of the Law and rebellion against God provided for us in Scripture beginning from the time God was giving the Law to Moses (Exodus 32:1-6) through the crucifixion of Christ and as recorded throughout the book of Acts (Acts 7:35-53; 28:23-28). Are the children of God any different today regarding obedience to His word? We need to humbly think about this.

Although the Law was given to the nation of Israel through God's prophet Moses, we do not learn of its full purpose until we read the letters of the Paul, who was chosen by God and our Lord Jesus Christ to be the apostle of the Gentiles (Romans 11:13; I Corinthians 1:1; Galatians 1:1-17; I Timothy 1:1). Through Paul, who received his message from the ascended and glorified Lord Jesus Christ through multiple revelations (Acts 9:1-6; Romans 16:25-27; II Corinthians 12:1-10; Galatians 1:11-12; Ephesians 3:1-12), we learn that the Law of Moses condemned in sin not only the people of Israel to whom it was given, but also the whole world (Romans 3:19-20, 23). It was a yoke of slavery or bondage (Galatians 5:1) because it could not be kept and did not provide justification or righteousness. Furthermore, because the Law is perfect, it spiritually killed us because everyone is sinful—we all stand guilty before God and are deserving of eternal death (Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:1-3).

**What shall we [believers] say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I [Paul] would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting [lust] if the Law had not said, "You shall not covet." But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead. I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died; and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. Therefore did that which is good become a cause of death for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful. (Romans 7:7-13)**

**Such confidence we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are adequate [sufficient] in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, who also made us adequate as servants [ministers] of a new covenant [testament], not of the letter [Law of Moses] but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. (II Corinthians 3:4-6)**

In retrospect, what was God's reason for giving the Law in the first place? If we go beyond the facts that God gave it to Israel to set the nation apart unto Himself and to reveal His righteousness and requirements to them, we find that the Law was given:

- To show that everyone sins and that it is impossible to earn our righteousness (Romans 3:23; 5:20-21; Galatians 3:19-25).
- To prove that no one could be justified by doing the works of the Law (Galatians 2:15-16; 3:11; Romans 3:27-28).
- To set the stage for God's eternal purpose to demonstrate to us that Christ paid the price for our sins through His death on the cross; furthermore, we obtain justification and righteousness (by the working of God) through belief in Christ's work at the cross for us (Romans 3:19-28; 5:6-11; Colossians 2:8-14).

**“For through the Law [of Moses] I [Paul] died to the Law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me. I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly.”** (Galatians 2:19-21)

Brethren, if we could become righteous through works of the Law, then Christ died in vain (Galatians 2:21). The Law revealed the sinfulness of mankind and was intended to lead, as a tutor, Israel to recognize their need for a savior. Instead, the people of Israel (in general) tried to justify themselves through works of the Law. Now, however, by faith we know that the Law is no longer needed in that capacity because it led us to Christ—the Law is no longer a mediator between us and God. Our access to God is through Christ Himself apart from the Law of Moses (Romans 3:19-28).

**Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions [sin], having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed [Christ] would come to whom [Israel] the promise had been made. Now a mediator is not for one party only; whereas God is only one. Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on [the] law. But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.** (Galatians 3:19-22)

**But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the Law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you [brethren] are all sons [children] of God through faith in Christ Jesus.** (Galatians 3:23-26)

**Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called “Uncircumcision” by the so-called “Circumcision [Jews],” which is performed in the flesh by human hands—remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups [Jews and Gentiles] into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances [the Law of Moses], so that in Himself He might make the**

**two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body [of Christ] to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were far away [Gentiles], and peace to those who were near [Jews]; for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father. (Ephesians 2:11-18)**

### **Is the Law of Moses in Effect Today?**

If, or because, we are not justified by works of the Law and it is no longer a tutor to lead us to God, what did God do with it? The Law was a curse to Israel and the world because no one could keep it and it condemned them (and us) to spiritual death. Therefore, Christ became a curse for us by dying for us.

**For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written the book of the law [Law], to perform them.” Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, “The righteous man shall live by faith.” However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, “He who practices them shall live by them.” Christ 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”—in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. (Galatians 3:10-14; see also Romans 4:1-3)**

Christ’s death was a propitiatory (atoning) sacrifice for our sins (Romans 3:21-26). Through His death, therefore, the Law was figuratively nailed to the cross with Him—God took it and its condemnation of death out of our way; that is, we were released or delivered from the Law and its consequences. Because we are saved by grace through faith apart from works, the righteous requirement of the Law of Moses is fulfilled in us the moment we believe the gospel of salvation—that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose from the dead.

**When you [brethren] were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He [God] made you alive together with Him [Christ], having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt [the Law] consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He [God] has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross [with Christ]. (Colossians 2:13-14)**

**Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God. For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for [unto] death. But now we have been released [delivered] from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter [the Law]. (Romans 7:4-6)**

**Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement [righteousness] of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (Romans 8:1-4)**



The Galatian brethren were saved through Paul's ministry as recorded in the book of Acts during his sojourns in the Galatian region, a Roman provincial territory in what is now Turkey that included the cities of Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe (Acts 14:1-7; 16:1-5). As we can deduce from his letter to them, He had taught them the gospel of the grace of God and that the Law of Moses was no longer in effect. However, sometime after his ministry with them false teachers had come in and persuaded them that they needed to do the works of the Law to be justified before God. This disturbed Paul greatly, and he bluntly told them that they were foolish for putting themselves under the Law.

**You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law [of Moses], or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? (Galatians 3:1-3)**

Brethren, we, too, are to live according to the Spirit and not according to the flesh (Galatians 5:16-25) as demonstrated by self-righteousness through the works of the Law. As with the Galatians, it is foolish for us to want or try to obey the Law of Moses. We cannot be justified by doing works of the Law, and the Law has been taken out of our way—its requirements, promises, and consequences do not apply to us. If we try to obey the Law, we are disobeying God.

### **What Happened?**

Not only was Christ's birth prophesied in the Old Testament, but so were His death and resurrection. If God's prophetic plan outlined in the Old Testament had continued as prophesied, then God would have restored Israel (reuniting the twelve tribes) to their promised land and to Himself through judgment of them and their repentance for killing their Messiah. Based on the books of the Prophets and prophetic details provided in the book of Revelation, God then would have judged the nations and the earth culminating in the battle at Armageddon, the holy city of New Jerusalem would have descended from the heavens, Christ would have ruled redeemed Israel and the unsaved nations as King of kings and Lord of lords for 1,000 years, *all* of the nations (led by Satan) would have gathered for battle against New Jerusalem and would have been destroyed, and the judgment by Christ at the great white throne would have occurred by judging all nonbelievers of all time and casting them, as well as death and hell, into the eternal lake of fire.<sup>9</sup> None of these prophesies have been fulfilled.<sup>10</sup>

Brethren, if God's revealed prophetic plan had continued without interruption, then we would be well beyond the time that all of the events prophesied in the Old Testament, the gospel accounts (e.g., Matthew 24), and the book of Revelation were fulfilled. What happened? Did God change His plan? Please consider the following brief summary of what happened.

- At Pentecost, after the ascension of Christ into heaven, Peter (standing with the other eleven apostles) proclaimed to the men of Israel that they were responsible for the crucifixion of Christ their Messiah (Acts 2:22-23), but that in accordance with prophecy He had been buried and

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<sup>9</sup> See my study **The Mystery (God's Secret Plan)** for Scripture references supporting these statements.

<sup>10</sup> Contrary to prevailing teaching, the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 was not in fulfillment of prophecy. The Israel of today is a political nation and, as such, is no different than any other nation. It will remain blinded to God and will not experience fulfillment of His promises to them until after the rapture. Individual Jews today, like anyone else, can be saved only by believing the gospel of salvation that was revealed to us through Paul.

raised up from the dead (Acts 2:24-36). For their role in killing their Messiah, and for being disobedient to God in general, they were to repent and be baptized for the remission of their sins (Acts 2:37-39).

- Soon afterward, Peter again spoke to the men of Israel, imploring them to repent so that God would send Christ back to them to establish their long-promised kingdom (Acts 3:17-26). Events were still unfolding as prophesied.
- Sometime later, the spiritual leaders of Israel in Jerusalem had Stephen put to death by stoning because they rejected his indictment of their rejection of, and their actions against, God and His Son (Acts 7:51-60). By stoning Stephen, they also rejected the witness of the Holy Spirit because it was apparent that he was under the control of the Holy Spirit as he spoke (Acts 6:8-15; 7:55-56). If God's prophetic plan had continued, then He would have restored Israel to its promised land where He would judge and redeem them.
- Instead of continuing with the prophetic plan, God saved Saul of Tarsus, a Jewish Pharisee and His leading enemy (Acts 8:1-3; 22:1-5; 26:9-11; I Timothy 1:15-16), while he was heading to Damascus to round up followers of *the Way* (disciples of Jesus) for judgment (Acts 9:1-16; 22:6-15; 26:12-18). It was due time for God to set Israel and its promises aside and usher in the dispensation of His grace through Paul (formerly Saul of Tarsus), God's appointed apostle of the Gentiles.
- Paul preached in the cities and nations beyond the borders of Judea and Samaria, primarily to the Gentiles but also to the Jews residing in those areas (Acts 9:15-16; 17:1-3).
- Although some Jews believed Paul (Acts 17:4; 18:7-8), most of them and their spiritual leaders rejected Paul's message about Christ (explained from the Law and the Prophets) and his message about salvation through Christ by the grace of God apart from the Law of Moses. The book of Acts records three occasions—at Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:38-39, 44-52), at Corinth (Acts 18:1-6), and at Rome (Acts 28:23-28)—where Paul condemned the unbelief of the Jews and proclaimed that he was taking the word of salvation to the Gentiles.
- Because of the rejection by the Jews of Judea and the Jews living outside of Israel, God hardened (blinded) the nation of Israel to the truth of God until He is done dealing with the Gentiles through His grace. This was not in accordance with prophecy because the Gentiles were to be blessed through the blessings of Israel, with Christ as King, when its kingdom is established (Genesis 12:1-3; 22:18; Galatians 3:16).

**For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening [blindness] has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, “The Deliverer [Christ] will come from Zion, He will remove ungodliness from Jacob [Israel].” This is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins.” From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers [Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob]; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. For just as you [Gentiles] once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their [the people of Israel's] disobedience, so these also now have been disobedient, that because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy. For God has shut up all [Jews and Gentiles] in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all. (Romans 11:25-32)**

- Paul referred to Israel’s blindness as a mystery (Romans 11:25). It was one aspect of the overall mystery, which was the plan that God had kept hidden in Himself as a secret since before the world began as discussed earlier. As with the mystery as a whole, Israel’s blindness was not prophesied or even hinted at in Scripture until God revealed it through His Apostle Paul. Israel will be restored and redeemed by God as He promised (God will remove their blindness—Romans 11:26-29; see also Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:22-28) sometime after the event we call *the rapture* (which is also part of the mystery—I Corinthians 15:51-53; I Thessalonians 4:13-17) that culminates this dispensation of grace.<sup>11</sup>
- During this dispensation of grace, there is no difference between Jew and Gentile, male and female, or free person and slave (I Corinthians 12:12-13; Galatians 3:28). We all stand guilty before God in our sin, and everyone who believes the gospel of salvation (I Corinthians 15:1-4; Ephesians 2:8-9) is saved by grace through faith apart from works, including the works of the Law of Moses.

God, therefore, did not change His mind or His plan. He interrupted His prophetic plan to reveal His hidden plan—the mystery—that He had prepared in eternity past. This is significant, and is a truth that is not taught in very many churches or by any denominational doctrine. The mystery, as revealed through Paul, explains the eternal purpose of God and why no prophecies concerning Israel and its future kingdom have been fulfilled since shortly after the time of Peter’s proclamation at Pentecost.

**To me [Paul], the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable [unsearchable] riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church [the body of Christ] to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him. (Ephesians 3:8-12)**

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<sup>11</sup> The close of this dispensation will also signify the time of “the fulness of the Gentiles” (Romans 11:25). God is dealing with individual Gentiles now through His gospel of grace as revealed through Paul. Later, He will partially judge the Gentile nations during the time of great tribulation and then completely judge them at the close of the millennial kingdom.

## Chapter 4

### The Ten Commandments

I was not taught in church to obey the entire Law of Moses, but I was taught that, at the very least, we are to obey the Ten Commandments. Brethren, we are not bound to the Ten Commandments because they are part of the Law of Moses. If we try to keep part of the Law, then we are obligated to keep the whole Law of Moses (Galatians 3:10-14; 5:1-6). That does not mean that principles of the Ten Commandments or other parts of the Law do not apply to us (e.g., loving our neighbors as ourselves<sup>12</sup>—Leviticus 19:17-18; Romans 13:8-10). For the sake of clarification, however, let us take a brief look at the Ten Commandments.

A fact often overlooked by many believers and others who claim that we should obey the Ten Commandments (and that our nation's laws should be based on them) is that the punishment for disobeying four of the commandments was the death penalty. These are breaking the sabbath requirements (Exodus 31:15), striking or cursing your mother or father (Exodus 21:15, 17), murder (Exodus 21:12), and adultery (Leviticus 20:10). Bearing false witness could also result in the death penalty, if such false testimony resulted in the unjust death of another person (Deuteronomy 19:18-21).

Who, today, is willing to apply the death penalty for anything other than murder? As a believer, I am not an advocate of the death penalty because God is Judge (Romans 12:17-21; Ephesians 4:32); however, I abide by the laws of my state and nation even if they include the death penalty. As for the consequences associated with breaking the other six commandments, I have included in the following discussion a representative reference (in italics) after the initial commandment reference from Exodus 20:3-17 (in some instances, the consequence is included with the commandment).

Our local, state, and federal governing authorities issue laws as statutes, ordinances, codes, mandates, etc., and we are to abide by them (Romans 13:1-7; I Peter 2:13-17).<sup>13</sup> The laws and their consequences are administered through people; that is, people (judges and juries) are involved in the determination of guilt and application of the resulting penalty stipulated by each law. The same was true for the fourth through ninth commandments. The first three commandments, however, were judged by God, and the record in the Old Testament indicates the severity of God's judgments (e.g., Exodus 32:1-35; Numbers 16:1-50; 21:5-6; 25:1-5). Only the tenth commandment, regarding coveting, did not have a specified penalty; the guilt of coveting was manifested through other commandments.

Although we are not under the Law of Moses and subject to its associated penalties, the intent and purpose of nine of the commandments (excluding keeping the sabbath) were true long before the Law was instituted and continue to hold true for believers in this dispensation of grace. They are unchanging principles of God, and He expects His children to believe them and live accordingly.

1. First commandment: You shall have no other gods before Me (Exodus 20:3; *Deuteronomy 6:14-15*). This principle applies to us (Galatians 4:8-9). This commandment seems straight forward and most believers likely think that they are being obedient. However, it is closely tied

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<sup>12</sup> See my study **Love Our Neighbors as Ourselves** that discusses how this commandment of the Law of Moses applies to us today.

<sup>13</sup> See my study **Governing Authority** that examines how God wants us to respond to our government and its leaders and whether every law should be obeyed.

to the second commandment for which many of us are guilty of disobeying, thereby demonstrating that we are being disobedient to this commandment.

2. Second commandment: You shall not make yourself an idol or worship idols (Exodus 20:4-6; *Exodus 20:5*; see also *Exodus 32:34-35*). This principle applies to us (I Corinthians 8:1-6). Unfortunately, many brethren have obsessions that can be likened to idol worship. Our lives show that we essentially consider many things on the same level with, or even above, God—we cannot seem to live without them and they have a controlling influence over us. In this sense we are putting other gods before God, thus breaking the first commandment.

Our modern idol worship can consist of obsessing over or paying homage to angels, persons in the Bible (other than God and our Lord Jesus Christ), celebrities, athletes, political figures, money, nature (including domestic animals), good luck charms (including crosses and images of Jesus), our constitutional rights or perceived Christian rights, and even our nation and its flag. We need to examine ourselves regarding obsessions—do they replace or compete with our worship of God?

3. Third commandment: You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain (Exodus 20:7; *Deuteronomy 5:11*). This principle applies to us (II Thessalonians 1:11-12; Ephesians 4:29-30; 5:6; II Timothy 4:3-4). Most of us realize that using God’s name (or “Christ” or “Jesus”) in a curse against someone or something is wrong (Leviticus 19:12), yet many of us do it anyway. However, please consider that taking any oath in the name of God is also wrong (Matthew 5:33-37; James 5:12).

Furthermore, attributing something to God that is contrary to, or in addition to, the written word of God, including perceived revelations received through “a whisper in my ear” or through an imagined or fabricated dream, vision, or other special means (Colossians 2:18) is also using God’s name in vain because God’s word to us is complete. In the context of this study, anyone saying that we should obey the Law of Moses, or even parts of it, are also taking the name of God in vain (Galatians 1:6-12; 3:1-3).

4. Fourth commandment: Keep the sabbath day holy (Exodus 20:8-11; *Exodus 31:15*). The sabbath was instituted by God prior to the giving of the Law (Exodus 16:22-26) and was incorporated into the Law with a specific set of requirements. The Law of Moses contains holy days, weeks, months, and years that Israel was commanded by God to observe according to specific requirements. However, there are no sabbath days or any other holy days, weeks, months, seasons, or years to observe in this dispensation of grace (Galatians 4:9-11; Colossians 2:16-17). Please think about this one because most brethren do not understand that this is the case and, therefore, disregard Paul’s admonitions about holy observances. The sabbath and other holy observances will be investigated in greater detail in the next chapter.
5. Fifth commandment: Honor your father and your mother (Exodus 20:12; *Exodus 21:15, 17*). This principle applies to us (Ephesians 6:1-2). Honoring a parent, as stated in the Law of Moses, is much more than a subjective attitude, because dishonoring a parent included cursing or striking a mother or father, which were subject to the death penalty.

This commandment, even in principle, can be especially difficult to obey for children whose parents are not worthy of their love and affection due to neglect or to physical or emotional

abuse. We are children as long as we are under the care of our parents and, as believing children, are commanded to obey them in the Lord for this is the right thing to do. Even so, it is my opinion that separating ourselves from our parents through appropriate means (through the help of adult advocates as allowed by law) may be an alternative option to protect ourselves from a sinful environment (I Corinthians 5:9-13). As believers who are parents, we should never treat our children in such a way (e.g., mental or physical abuse) that would lead them to want to separate from us (Colossians 3:21; Ephesians 6:4).

6. Sixth commandment: You shall not murder (Exodus 20:13; *Exodus 21:12*). This principle applies to us (Romans 1:28-32; I Timothy 1:8-11). Bear in mind, also, that wishing someone was dead or even hating someone is considered by God as the same as murder (Matthew 5:21-22).
7. Seventh commandment: You shall not commit adultery (Exodus 20:14; *Leviticus 20:10*). This principle applies to us (I Corinthians 6:9-10). Even looking at one who is not our spouse with lustful thoughts is the same as adultery (Matthew 5:27-28).
8. Eighth commandment: You shall not steal (Exodus 20:15; *Exodus 22:1-9*). This principle applies to us (Ephesians 4:28). We may think that we do not steal, but do we manipulate our taxes to our illegal or unethical advantage, falsify our timecards, use employer materials for unauthorized personal use, or have a personal bank account that our spouse is unaware of? In what other ways do we steal?
9. Ninth commandment: You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor (Exodus 20:16; *Deuteronomy 19:18-21*). This principle applies to us (Ephesians 4:25, 31). This has always been a common problem that we demonstrate through starting or spreading rumors or by speaking falsely (lying) about others to gain revenge or an advantage for ourselves. The use of social media has made it even easier to do these things.
10. Tenth commandment: You shall not covet anything that belongs to your neighbor (Exodus 20:17). This principle applies to us (Romans 7:7-8; Ephesians 5:3; Hebrews 13:5). Coveting is a subjective state of mind—a conscious thought or desire. Therefore, this commandment does not have a specified punishment associated with it in the Law of Moses.

The Bible, however, does talk about the consequences of coveting, greed, and unjust gain (Psalm 10:3-4; Proverbs 11:6; Isaiah 57:17; Mark 7:20-23; Luke 12:15; Ephesians 5:3-5; Colossians 3:5-7; II Peter 2:1-3). Coveting is our desire to have something that belongs to someone else and can quickly lead to other sinful actions directly addressed by prior commandments of the Ten Commandments such as stealing, adultery, murder, and bearing false witness. Perhaps that is why it is the last commandment.

The love of money—a form of greed—is also coveting because it drives us to want more of it regardless of how we get it. It is the root of many of our problems (I Timothy 6:6-10) as demonstrated by living above our means, through our gambling or gaming activities, participating in get-rich-quick schemes, or supporting an unethical, immoral, or illegal lifestyle. God has promised to provide for our needs if we depend on Him (Philippians 4:18-19; II Corinthians 9:6-11) and we are exhorted to be content with what we have (I Timothy 6:7-8).

Brethren, we ought to be thankful that we are not under the Ten Commandments in this dispensation of the grace of God. The Ten Commandments, along with the entire Law of Moses, were set aside through our Lord's death for us and no longer apply to us or anyone else. We should not,

therefore, expect nonbelievers to try to obey them. However, the Law of Moses revealed our sin as well as the righteousness of God and, if used properly, demonstrates the principles of God's righteousness that apply to all of His people in all ages.

## Chapter 5

### The Sabbath

**“Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the 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.”** (Exodus 20:8-11)

Keeping the sabbath day holy is the fourth commandment of the Ten Commandments. In church I was taught that we are to keep the Ten Commandments and that the sabbath day is the same as Sunday for us. I hope that I have adequately demonstrated that we are not to obey the Law of Moses in this dispensation of the grace of God and, therefore, we are not to keep the Ten Commandments because they are part of the Law of Moses. Now we will look at the sabbath according to Scripture and see what was required for obedience and that it is not equivalent to Sunday worship. In fact, there are no holy days now.

#### The Sabbath Day

##### *What is the Sabbath?*

The word *sabbath* means to rest, and the sabbath day is usually understood to be either Saturday or Sunday, depending on denominational doctrine. However, according to Scripture, there is more than one sabbath and it is not always restricted to a day, as we shall see. We will examine the sabbath day first.

The sabbath day observance on the seventh day of the week was first instituted by God for His people of Israel after they escaped from Egypt, but before God gave His covenant to Moses (Exodus 16:22-30). It was later incorporated into the Law of Moses by God as one of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:8-11). According to Scripture, for the Hebrews a day began in the evening of one day and ended in the evening of the next day (see a sabbath example in Leviticus 23:26-32). By our calendar, this would mean that the seventh day began Friday evening and ended Saturday evening.

Very soon after the people of Israel entered the wilderness, they complained about the unavailability of food. Their complaints demonstrated a lack of faith in the power of God after witnessing His mighty judgments on Egypt and the miracles that were performed during their escape (Psalm 78:11-14). God responded by miraculously providing bread (manna) in the morning and meat in the evening for the people to gather, prepare, and eat.<sup>14</sup> He set restrictions, however, to test their faith (Exodus 16:1-21).

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<sup>14</sup> Most translations refer to the meat as quail, and God may have provided it only the first evening to satisfy the selfish desires of the people because it is not mentioned again as a daily occurrence. Later, the Israelites demanded meat again; God provided it once again and then judged the people for their rebellion (Numbers 11:4-6; Psalm 78:17-31). The manna, later referred to as the bread of angels, was sufficient for their physical sustenance while in the wilderness (Psalm 78:23-25). I believe that this was to show the people they had spiritual needs, also; that is, they needed to depend on God for everything and do all that He told them to do (Deuteronomy 8:1-3; Matthew 4:1-4).



The people were to gather and prepare only what was needed for each day for their families, and were to gather and prepare twice as much on the sixth day. The double portion on the sixth day was for eating one portion that day and the other portion on the seventh day. God designated the seventh day as a holy sabbath (Exodus 16:23).

The people were not to gather or prepare any food on the sabbath day (God did not provide any on that day), nor were they to leave their place of habitation on the seventh day (Exodus 16:29)—they were to rest from labor on the seventh day (Exodus 16:30). Despite some of the people failing the test by disobeying God’s requirements (Exodus 16:19-20, 27-28), this miraculous provision by God continued throughout Israel’s 40-year sojourn in the wilderness prior to entering their promised land (Exodus 16:35).

When God first instituted the sabbath at the beginning of their time in the wilderness, there was no mention that the sabbath observance was based on the creation account of God working six days and resting the seventh day. Because the books of Genesis through Deuteronomy were written during or after Israel’s sojourn in the wilderness, it is very likely that the people of Israel were completely unaware of God’s creation account until the book of Genesis was written (most likely after God instituted the sabbath day). It would also not be surprising if they had been working seven days a week during their bondage in Egypt (Exodus 1:8-14; 5:5-14).

### ***A Holy Day***

The fourth commandment says that God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, and tied the sabbath directly with His creation (Exodus 20:11). In the creation account, long before God established the sabbath day for His people, He said that He rested from all His work on the seventh day and sanctified that day (Genesis 2:1-3).

When God made the sabbath day observance a part of the Ten Commandments, it was given to Israel as a sign between God and them forever so that the people would know that it was God who sanctified them (Exodus 31:12-16). It was also a sign between God and them to recognize and remember that God made heaven and earth in six days and ceased from His labor on the seventh day and was refreshed (Exodus 31:17).

Furthermore, the sabbath day commandment was given so that the people would remember that God had rescued them, through His mighty power, from their slavery in Egypt (Deuteronomy 5:15). The people, therefore, were to keep the sabbath day holy—it was to be holy to them and to the Lord God (Exodus 20:8; 31:14-15).

### ***The Requirements of the Sabbath Day***

At its inception soon after the people entered the wilderness, they were not to gather or cook food on the sabbath nor leave their dwellings. Clarifications and additional requirements were included in the sabbath day observance when it was incorporated into the Law of Moses as follows:

- Everyone was to accomplish all of their work during the first six days of the week (Exodus 20:9; 31:15).

- No family member, person serving the family, or even a visitor to the family was to do any work on the seventh day (Exodus 20:10). It was to be a day of complete rest in all the dwellings of Israel (Exodus 35:2; Leviticus 23:3).
- The cattle (i.e., as beasts of burden) were not to be put to work (Exodus 20:10).
- No one was to gather wood or start a fire in their dwellings (Numbers 15:32-36; Exodus 35:3). Just as people could eat food on the sabbath day that was collected and prepared on the sixth day, I believe we can assume that they could have and maintain a fire for warmth in their dwelling as long as it was started and the wood was collected prior to the sabbath day.
- A specified offering was to be given to the Lord God each sabbath day (Numbers 28:9-10). This was in addition to the daily burnt offering and its drink offering (Numbers 28:1-3; Leviticus 24:1-8).

On the sabbath day God required a burnt offering consisting of two male lambs (one year old and without defect) and a grain and drink offering. The necessary fire would have been started and the wood to maintain it would have been gathered prior to the sabbath day to meet the requirements of the Law. Apparently, the offering of sacrifices by the Levitical priests was not considered to be work but as part of their worship and service to God. None of the worship activities conducted by the Levites was considered to be work under the Law of Moses because they were set aside by God to serve Him and the spiritual needs of His people (Numbers 1:47-54; 3:5-10; Deuteronomy 21:5; Matthew 12:5).

Interestingly, there is no command in the Law of Moses for people to gather for worship on the sabbath day or any other specific day of the week. The sabbath was to be observed as a complete day of rest in their own dwellings. The sabbath was referred to as a holy convocation, or assembly (Leviticus 23:3). *Perhaps* that meant that the assembly of the family in each dwelling could include spiritual discussion and praise to God; however, resting from laborious work on the sabbath day in obedience to God was a form of worship—a holy convocation—in itself. Communal worship appears to have been limited to the designated feast days (that are addressed later) that were to be observed at the places specifically designated by the Lord God; that is, at the location of the mobile tabernacle and later at the temple in Jerusalem according to the Law of Moses (Deuteronomy 12:5, 11, 13-14, 17-18, 26; Exodus 40:17-38; I Kings 6:11-13; 8:1-5). Furthermore, it appears that only the males of Israel were to attend the assemblies (Deuteronomy 16:16-17).<sup>15</sup>

### ***The Sabbath in the Time of Jesus***

There is nothing in the Law of Moses or evidence in Old Testament Scripture that the Israelites gathered for worship or sacrifices in any local towns or villages; worship was limited to the tabernacle and later to the temple in Jerusalem on designated feast days. Although I am not certain, the practice of worshipping in synagogues on the sabbath day as recorded in the New Testament (Matthew 12:8-14; Acts 13:14-15, 44; 17:1-3) may have been a system developed by the religious leaders of the people because it was in disobedience to the sabbath ordinances defined in the Law (i.e., everyone was to stay in their own dwelling on the sabbath). Likewise, the reference to a sabbath day's journey in Acts 1:12, which was not mentioned in the Law, may have also been devised by the religious leaders to give the people an

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<sup>15</sup> Women, however, were involved in worship in a manner that is not described in the Law. Their involvement is alluded to in that they could not enter the sanctuary until the completed time of purification after giving birth (Leviticus 12:1-4).

excuse to go to the synagogues. This system of worship likely was an economic benefit to the religious leaders and is discussed further in Chapter 9.

Therefore, it appears that the purpose and requirements of the sabbath day were altered to fit the purposes of the religious leaders, perhaps to exercise dominance over the people in the name of God. This is not hard to imagine, considering how the word of God is altered or misrepresented today by people (some of whom are believers) who falsely proclaim themselves as ministers of God for power or financial gain (II Corinthians 11:12-15; Galatians 3:1-5; Colossians 2:8; I Timothy 4:1-3; 6:3-5; II Timothy 4:1-4).

This observation about synagogues and a sabbath-day journey begs the following question, however. Was Jesus disobeying the fourth commandment when he healed people on the sabbath instead of staying in His place of dwelling to rest? I am certain that the answer is “No” and I humbly ask you to consider the following explanation as I understand it.

Jesus was born under the Law of Moses and came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets (Galatians 4:4; Matthew 5:17-19). He fulfilled the righteousness of the Law because He was sinless (II Corinthians 5:21), so we know that He obeyed all the requirements of the Law including the sabbath requirements. However, He was accused by religious leaders of breaking the sabbath by miraculously healing people and allowing His disciples to pick and eat grain (because they were hungry) on that day (Matthew 12:1-14; Luke 13:10-17).

His responses revealed what could be done on the sabbath even though such specifics were not recorded in the Law of Moses, including such things as picking and eating raw grain (the disciples had no means to gather and prepare food on the sixth day), helping out a neighbor in need, and healing the sick. We must remember, however, that the sabbath-day requirements said that all the people were to remain at their places of dwelling and do no laborious work. We also know that the Levitical priests were to perform sacrifices and offerings on the sabbath, and that their service to God was not considered to be laborious work.

Although Jesus apparently worked as a carpenter as a young man (Mark 6:3), His time of ministry to His people was completely devoted to that ministry. The same is true for His disciples. They had their own jobs and dwellings before Jesus chose them, but then they devoted their entire time to following Jesus and ministering with Him (Matthew 4:18-22; 8:21-22; Acts 1:21-22). In essence, then, they had no dwellings of their own in which to rest on the sabbath (Matthew 19:27-29); they were supported by those whom they served just as the Levites were (Matthew 8:19-20; 10:5-15).

Jesus was prophesied to be the high priest—the mediator between God and the children of Israel (Psalms 110:1-7; Hebrews 2:17 – 3:2; 4:14-16; 5:5-10; 7:11-28), and redeemed Israel will be a kingdom of priests (Exodus 19:5-6; Isaiah 61:1-6; I Peter 2:4-10; Revelation 1:6). Therefore, Jesus’ ministry on earth with His disciples was a foretaste of what is to come when Israel is redeemed and Christ will physically rule as King of Israel and the King of kings (Ezekiel 37:24-28; Acts 2:29-36; Revelation 17:14; 21:22-27). Just as the work of the Levites under the Law was not considered to be laborious work as they ministered to God, including sacrificing on the sabbath, the ministry of Jesus and His disciples was not

defined as laborious work. Therefore, the things they did on the sabbath were in accordance with what was allowed by God under the Law.

### ***Promises and Consequences***

No specific promises were directly associated with keeping the sabbath day holy. The people were to keep it holy because God told them to do so and why. If they kept God's *entire* covenant to them, including keeping the sabbath day holy, then they would reap the blessings God promised to them in the land that He was soon to give them. What if they disobeyed the sabbath day commandment?

Brethren, keeping the sabbath day holy was extremely important to God—the Almighty God. I believe it immediately followed the first three commandments because it exemplified the importance of worshiping God in the manner He required of His people (Exodus 20:1-7).

**“Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”** (Deuteronomy 6:4-5)

Disobeying the sabbath day commandment had dire consequences. We have to look beyond the first presentation of the Ten Commandments provided in Exodus 20 to see what those consequences were.

**The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, “But as for you, speak to the sons of Israel, saying, ‘You shall surely observe My sabbaths; for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you. Therefore you are to observe the sabbath, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people. For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest, holy to the Lord; whoever does any work on the sabbath day shall surely be put to death. So the sons of Israel shall observe the sabbath, to celebrate the sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant.’”** (Exodus 31:12-16)

The death penalty stipulated in the Law of Moses for breaking the sabbath requirements was not a surprise to Israel. After God first instituted the sabbath soon after Israel escaped Egypt, He revealed that death was the penalty for disobedience.

**Now while the sons of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering wood on the sabbath day. Those who found him gathering wood brought him to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation; and they put him in custody because it had not been declared what should be done to him. Then the Lord said to Moses, “The man shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp.” So all the congregation brought him outside the camp and stoned him to death with stones, just as the Lord had commanded Moses.** (Numbers 15:32-36)

I distinctly remember the pastor of a church I was regularly attending preaching to his congregation in a series of Sunday sermons on the Ten Commandments that God expects us to obey them. He did not say what the Law of Moses required for obedience to the fourth commandment, and he did not mention that death was the consequence for disobedience. Nor did he say that death was the penalty for breaking three other commandments. Brethren, he was unknowingly doing a great disservice to God and to his congregation. He was teaching us to obey the Ten Commandments but disregarding what they

actually said and how God expected the people of Israel to obey them as well as the remainder of the Law of Moses.

## The Sabbath Year

In addition to the sabbath day, God also designated every seventh year in Israel's promised land to be a sabbath year (Leviticus 25:1-7). For six years, the people were to sow their fields, prune their vineyards, and gather their crops. They were to let the land lay fallow in total rest during the seventh year for the entire promised land. Furthermore, the people were not to reap the produce from the natural growth that occurred during the sabbath year.

Quite naturally, the people wondered what they were to eat during the sabbath year. God said that He would provide three years' worth of crop produce during the sixth year, thus providing enough food for the sixth year, the sabbath year, as well as the following year when the people sowed a new crop and waited for its produce. God, therefore, would control the weather and abundance of the crops to enable the people to live securely in their land. There was one condition, however. God would provide for them if the people of Israel obeyed His covenant—the commandments, statutes, and ordinances of His Law.

**You [Israel] shall thus observe My [God's] statutes and keep My judgments, so as to carry them out, that you may live securely on the land. Then the land will yield its produce, so that you can eat your fill and live securely on it. But if you say, "What are we going to eat on the seventh year if we do not sow or gather in our crops?" Then I will so order My blessing for you in the sixth year that it [the land] will bring forth the crop for three years. When you are sowing the eighth year, you can still eat old things from the crop, eating the old until the ninth year when its crop comes in.** (Leviticus 25:18-22)

Please consider that the seventh-year sabbath for the land was based on the same principle as the seventh-day sabbath for the people. That is, the foundation of the observance was derived from the creation account, only that the sabbath year was based on years instead of days. I believe that this should cause us to reconsider the common interpretation of the creation account as consisting of six 24-hour days, followed by 24 hours of rest. A careful examination of the Hebrew word translated as *day* in the creation account (Genesis 1:1 – 2:4) will reveal that it is described in at least five different ways (see Genesis 1:5, 8, 14, 16; 2:4)<sup>16</sup> and that in only one instance, in Genesis 1:14 where it says "for days and years," does the reference to *day* describe or imply a 24-hour day.<sup>17</sup>

I am convinced that the creation account is worded as it is to establish an easily understandable basis for both the seventh-day sabbath and the seventh-year sabbath that God included in His covenant to the people of Israel. That is, a literal six 24-hour-day creation is not the point of the creation account in Genesis; the account was described in such a way as a type, or foreshadowing, of the future sabbath observances. Considering that the creation account was written by inspiration of the Holy Spirit while Israel was in the wilderness (or later), this perception should not be dismissed. For until the people were

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<sup>16</sup> The word *day* is described in six different ways if we consider that God is still resting from His creation work (Genesis 2:2-3). God did not describe the seventh day as having an evening and morning (thus signifying a beginning and an end) as He did for the other days. If so, then it could be concluded that it is still the seventh day (the Bible does not say that He went back to work on the eighth day).

<sup>17</sup> See my study **Creation—What Does Scripture Say?** where I examine the first two chapters of Genesis from a nontraditional, yet scriptural, perspective.

in the wilderness, there is no mention of a sabbath day or year, or any other kind of sabbath, to observe in the Bible.

It is also worth considering the fact that Paul, the apostle of the Gentiles, never referred to the creation as occurring in six days (literal or otherwise) because that would have had no meaning or spiritual significance to the Gentiles to whom he was preaching. The sabbath was for Israel and not for the Gentiles. Nor is there a record of him speaking as such to the Jews that he witnessed to in the synagogues because he knew that they, like us, were no longer bound by the jurisdiction of the Law (Acts 13:38-39). However, we will see that Paul does say that there are no holy days or years (or any other holy occasions) to observe in this dispensation of grace.

### ***Promises and Consequences***

Unlike the sabbath day commandment, there are promises directly associated with keeping the sabbath year in accordance with God's requirements. As noted above, God would miraculously provide (by His order or command) three times the annual produce in the sixth year to fully supply the people and their livestock to account for the sixth year, the sabbath year, and the following year when the people were allowed to sow their crops again (Leviticus 25:20-22). Additionally, obedience would mean that the people would live securely in their land.

**“You [*Israel*] shall keep My sabbaths and reverence My sanctuary; I am the Lord. If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments so as to carry them out, then I shall give you rains in their season, so that the land will yield its produce and the trees of the field will bear fruit. Indeed, your threshing will last for you until grape gathering, and grape gathering will last until sowing time. You will thus eat your food to the full and live securely in your land.”** (Leviticus 26:2-5)

What if the people did not abide by the sabbath year commandments? If the sabbath year requirements were not met, then it is logical to assume that the people of Israel would not always have sufficient food and water to sustain them and their livestock every year—their land would be subject to droughts. Indeed, this was the case (Jeremiah 14:1-12).

Because God's requirements for the sabbath year were part of the Law of Moses, and that the people were to obey God's covenant in its entirety, then disobeying the sabbath year requirements would mean that they would not realize the promise of living securely in their land (Leviticus 25:18; 26:5). We have the following record of the consequences of Israel not observing the sabbath years.

Not only had Israel stopped keeping the sabbath years, the people had become so corrupted in their idol worship that they refused to listen to the prophets that God had sent them and had forgotten about the Law of Moses entirely (II Chronicles 36:15-16; II Kings 22:8-13; Nehemiah 8:1-8). God had warned the people of Israel that if they deserted Him and rejected His covenant that He would cause them, among other judgments, to be captured by their enemies and their land would rest for as many years as they did not observe the sabbath year (Leviticus 26:14-39).

God fulfilled His promised judgment by causing the kingdom of Babylon (the Chaldean people) to rise up against and destroy the land of Judah and its capital (God's designated capital) of Jerusalem (Jeremiah 25:1-11). Those who survived were taken back to Babylon to serve as slaves. The people of Judah were in exile for 70 years, after which God caused the king to allow them to return to their land. This 70-year period covered the years that Israel did not observe the sabbath years (II Chronicles

36:17-23; Jeremiah 29:10-14). This apparently means that Israel had not observed the sabbath year 70 times since the nation entered the promised land.

**Therefore He [the Lord God] brought up against them [the kingdom of Judah] the king of the Chaldeans [King Nebuchadnezzar] who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young man or virgin, old man or infirm; He [God] gave them all into his hand. All the articles of the house of God [the temple], great and small, and the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king and of his officers, he brought them all to Babylon. Then they burned the house of God and broke down the wall of Jerusalem, and burned all its fortified buildings with fire and destroyed all its valuable articles. Those who had escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon; and they were servants to him and to his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia [King Cyrus], to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its sabbaths. All the days of its desolation it kept sabbath until seventy years were complete. (II Chronicles 36:17-21)**

This 70-year exile implies that the sabbath year had not been observed over a total period of about 490 years (70 x 7 years), but not necessarily the previous 490 consecutive years. By this time the twelve tribes that had settled the promised land had split into two kingdoms, which occurred after the reign of Solomon (I Kings 11:9-13, 26-35; 12:16-24). The tribe of Judah (soon joined by the tribe of Benjamin) became the kingdom of Judah (known as Judea in the New Testament) with its capital in Jerusalem. The other tribes became the kingdom of Israel (what was left of it was referred to as Samaria in the New Testament) with its capital in the city of Samaria. Some of the seventy unobserved sabbath years may have occurred before the nation split, but all of them apparently occurred in the land of Judah (Samaria served other gods and became the enemy of God).<sup>18</sup>

There are many different opinions and interpretations about this 490-year period indicating that much effort expended by many people has gone into trying to calculate the exact time period of missed sabbath years from scriptural and historical information in an attempt to prove the historical accuracy of Scripture. This effort may be an example of striving over words (II Timothy 2:14) and that the details may not be significant to us. That is, we can accept by faith that the 70-year exile accounted for seventy missed sabbath-year observations (II Chronicles 36:21) without figuring out which particular sabbath years were ignored. What we need to understand is that God established a sabbath year in the Law of Moses and He fulfilled His promise to punish Israel if they disobeyed His command.

### **Other Sabbaths**

We have looked at the seventh-day sabbath and the seventh-year sabbath. There are other sabbath observances described in the Law of Moses. Each one had a specific purpose with certain required offerings made to the Lord God. All of them were holy convocations (assemblies) and days during which no laborious work was to be conducted (Leviticus 23:1-2).

- The Lord's Passover, starting on the fourteenth day of the first month, was a sabbath day (Leviticus 23:4-8).

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<sup>18</sup> God will reunite Judah and Israel, when He redeems the full nation of Israel, sometime after the rapture (Ezekiel 37:15-23; Micah 2:12-13).

- The seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread followed the Passover; the seventh day was a sabbath day (Leviticus 23:4-8).
- A memorial day, observed by blowing trumpets on the first day of the seventh month, was a sabbath day (Leviticus 23:23-25).
- The Day of Atonement, observed on the tenth day of the seventh month, was a sabbath day (Leviticus 16:29-34; 23:26-32).
- The seven-day Feast of Booths began on the fifteenth day of the seventh month (five days after the Day of Atonement); the first day of the feast and the day after the feast (the eighth day) were sabbath days (Leviticus 23:33-36, 39-43).

The consequence for a person doing any work on the Day of Atonement was to be “cut off” from his people and destroyed, which meant death (Leviticus 23:29-30). As death was the penalty for working on the seventh-day sabbath, it applied to all of the designated sabbath days. Brethren, God was serious about His people obeying His covenant, and especially His sabbaths.

**The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, “On exactly the tenth day of this seventh month is the day of atonement; it shall be a holy convocation [*assembly*] for you, and you shall humble your souls and present an offering by fire to the Lord. You shall not do any work on this same day, for it is a day of atonement, to make atonement on your behalf before the Lord your God. If there is any person who will not humble himself on this same day, he shall be cut off from his people. As for any person who does any work on this same day, that person I will destroy from among his people. You shall do no work at all. It is to be a perpetual statute throughout your generations in all your dwelling places. It is to be a sabbath of complete rest to you, and you shall humble your souls; on the ninth of the month at evening, from evening until evening you shall keep your sabbath.”**  
(Leviticus 23:26-32)

### **No Sabbath (or Other Holy Days) Today**

Besides the sabbath day feasts and observances listed above and sabbath year observances, the Law of Moses contains other holy days and weeks that Israel was commanded by God to observe according to specific requirements (Exodus 34:18-26; Leviticus 23:9-21). Additionally, every fiftieth year was to be a year of jubilee, with its own set of requirements, and was to be holy to the people (Leviticus 25:8-12).

Some Christian denominations and churches have incorporated the sabbath, Passover, and other holy days that are designated in the Law of Moses (or have been added by the orthodox Jewish faith) as their holy days. Most celebrate Christmas and Easter as holy days, as well as holy weeks or other periods of time associated with those holy days (holidays). However, brethren, there are no sabbath days or any other holy days, weeks, months, seasons, or years to observe in this dispensation of grace.

**But now that you [*brethren*] have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again? You observe days and months and seasons [*times*] and years. I [*Paul*] fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain.** (Galatians 4:9-11)

**Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a [*religious*] festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day—things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.** (Colossians 2:16-17)



Paul was extremely distressed that the Galatian brethren, to whom he had ministered on several trips, had been convinced by false teachers to place themselves under the Law of Moses and its works instead of living by faith in accordance with the gospel of the grace of God (Galatians 3:1-5). The Law did not specify any holy seasons to observe, so it appears that the Galatians had incorporated pagan holidays into their worship along with at least some of the holy observances of the Law.

It appears that the Colossian brethren were also being influenced by false teachers who were trying to convince them to abide by the Law of Moses (Colossians 2:8, 18-23). Paul reminded them that they were complete in Christ and that the Law had been taken out of their (our) way (Colossians 1:24-29; 2:9-14). He instructed them to disregard judgment by those who thought they should be observing the sabbath or other holy observances of the Law.

It is fine if businesses choose to be closed one or two days a week. However, if they claim to be closed on Sunday (or Saturday) in obedience to God's command to keep the sabbath day holy, they are using Scripture incorrectly and are misrepresenting God—they are actually disobeying Him. They may receive ridicule from the public and consider it to be suffering for the Lord. In effect, however, they are bringing suffering upon themselves and are unknowingly taking the name of God in vain and causing people to blaspheme God (Romans 2:23-24).

The practice of fallow farming likely is good for the land. When fallow farming, farmers usually do not sow a portion of their land (not all their land as required in the Law) and rotate those portions each year until such time as the entire farm has been fallowed. However, it should not be done in obedience to Scripture because we are not under the Law of Moses. Furthermore, it is doubtful that any farmer obeys the sabbath year requirements, and none of the associated promises will be realized regardless.

### **Is the Sabbath a Type for Us?**

If we understand that the sabbath day in the Law of Moses does not apply to us in this dispensation of grace, can we at least assume that it is a type that applies to us. That is, did the sabbath foreshadow a *Christian sabbath* that we can incorporate into our worship?

Taking one or two days off from work every week (or other work/time-off schedule) has its advantages in both mental and physical health. In truth, however, many of us usually cram as many activities as possible into our days off; few people actually rest. Some professions (particularly in academia) provide for *sabbaticals* in which an employee can take a period of time—sometimes a full year—off from work to pursue other activities that will enhance their contributions to their employer.

These breaks from our normal work likely have their roots in the sabbath day and sabbath year in the Law of Moses, at least in some cultures. As we have seen, however, we are not subject to the Law of Moses. Therefore, the sabbath days and sabbath year observations designated in the Law cannot be claimed as reasons for taking a day or a year off from our work. There is no Christian sabbath in Scripture.

I was taught that we are to rest in Christ, based on Matthew 11:28-30 and Hebrews 4:1-16. Does that not make the sabbath day a type for us? The Apostle Paul never spoke of a *sabbath* or a *rest* in his letters to us members of the body of Christ (Romans through Philemon). So what can we learn from these two passages?

**“Come to Me [*Jesus*], all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”** (Matthew 11:28-30)

In this passage, Jesus did not make any reference to a sabbath day or a sabbath rest. He was speaking of a spiritual rest. In the context of this statement, Jesus had been speaking to a crowd about John the Baptist and how he was rejected by the people (Matthew 11:7-19). Jesus went on to say how the Jewish cities in which He (Jesus) had been performing miracles were going to be judged for rejecting His witness to them (Matthew 11:20-24). It is not clear if He was still talking to the crowd when Jesus praised His Father for revealing Himself to those who were chosen of God (Matthew 11:25-27).

Because the people of Israel continued to reject God and His Son, the closing passage of Matthew 11 does not appear to be a general invitation to the crowd (He may not have been speaking to the crowd at this time). Instead, I believe that He was explaining the spiritual rest that the people who were saved would realize, and that it was also prophetic (Jeremiah 31:23-25). That is, the redeemed children of Israel would truly and finally know spiritual rest in the future kingdom when Christ is ruling as King (Jeremiah 31:10-14).

Regarding the passage in Hebrews, the author of the book of Hebrews (who may have been Paul) was writing to the Jewish brethren in the prophetic last days (Hebrews 1:1-2) that began with the birth of Jesus and will end when all of God’s last-day promises are fulfilled at the final judgment at the great white throne.<sup>19</sup> Although the book of Hebrews contains much information that we can learn from and apply to our walk as believers, it was written specifically to the Jewish believers of that time who were looking forward to their promised kingdom, as well as to the Jews who will be saved after the rapture (Hebrews 8:7-13). One purpose of the book was to prove to the Jewish brethren that Christ is indeed the promised Messiah of Israel and the Son of God, and that He is much greater than what they had under the Law (e.g., Hebrews 8:1-6; 9:11-28).

The sabbath rest spoken of in Hebrews 4:9, which is described as a spiritual rest in the context of Hebrews 11, has not been fulfilled. It looked forward to the time when Israel will be redeemed and established in their promised kingdom. Israel will experience all the blessings that were promised if they obeyed God’s covenant, because the Law will be written on their hearts and they will be perfect (Hebrews 8:10-12). It is possible that this prophesied *sabbath rest* is the same as the *rest* that Jesus spoke about as recorded in Matthew 11.

Brethren, we have no such promise in this dispensation of grace. The sabbath rest in Hebrews has no application to us because it will apply to the redeemed people of Israel in the future kingdom. On the other hand, if we believe the gospel of salvation, we have peace *with* God—we are no longer His enemies (Romans 5:1-2, 10; Ephesians 2:11-16). Furthermore, as believers we can know and experience the peace *of* God each day if we rely on Him (Philippians 4:6-9). Being at peace with God and experiencing the peace of God is not a fulfillment of the sabbath rest that is promised to Israel.

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<sup>19</sup> See my study **The Mystery (God’s Secret Plan)** that includes a description of the prophetic last days and the interruption of God’s prophetic plan by His dispensation of grace revealed through Paul.

## When Should We Worship?

As we have seen, the sabbath day was not designated as a day to gather together to worship God. Instead, it was a day of complete rest at home, and a day that the Levitical priests were to conduct a specific sacrifice and offering to the Lord God. We, on the other hand, are encouraged to meet regularly to worship together. We have instructions on church leadership (I Timothy 3:1-13; 5:17-22; Titus 1:5-9) and examples of churches that met in homes (Romans 16:3-5; Colossians 4:15; Philemon 1:1-2).

While some brethren believe that we should worship on Sunday because they think that Sunday is the Christian sabbath, others believe that we should worship on Sunday as a commemoration of Christ's resurrection, which occurred on the first day of the week (Luke 24:1). However, we have been given what we call *communion* to remember Christ's death, burial, and resurrection and to examine our spiritual conduct as a child of God (I Corinthians 11:23-32). It is not to be done on a specific day but "for as often" as we do it (I Corinthians 11:26). In truth, however, we can remember and be thankful for our Lord's work at the cross for us whenever we pray or meet for worship (i.e., without a communion service). Furthermore, we should not wait until we partake of communion with our fellow brethren to examine our own conduct (Romans 12:1-3; I Corinthians 10:12). This service is discussed further in Chapter 11.

According to the Hebrew and modern Jewish calendar, as well as the calendar used by the United States and some other countries (e.g., Canada and Japan), the seventh day of the week is Saturday. For most countries, however, the seventh day is Sunday. Generally, Christians and Christian denominations have designated Sunday as the day of worship and made it equivalent to the Jewish sabbath day. The prevailing thought is that God reassigned the sabbath from the seventh day to the first day of the week because of one reference about Paul and the brethren with him gathering on the first day of the week.

**On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to leave the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight. (Acts 20:7)**

During Paul's ministry as recorded in the book of Acts, Paul made it a point to speak to the Jews first (Acts 17:1-3). He did this in the Jewish synagogues when they gathered for worship on the sabbath (seventh) day. In the reference in Acts 20:7, Paul met with his fellow brethren on the first day of the week after a set of events described by a specific timeline.<sup>20</sup> It is possible that he spent the previous day preaching in a synagogue. They met together to eat, and Paul used the opportunity to minister to them; he did so until midnight. Scripture does not say, however, that from that day forward they met the first day of every week to eat and then worship together for the remainder of the day.

One other passage often used to support worship on the first day of the week is I Corinthians 16:1-4. Paul instructed that each of the Corinthian believers was to set aside and save some money the first day of every week (probably designating a specific frequency as a form of self-discipline). Paul was writing to brethren—predominantly Gentiles—who met for worship in the Greek city of Corinth (i.e., the context was not about Jews, Israel, or the Law), so the first day of the week may have been referring to either Sunday or Monday. This money would then be gathered during Paul's next visit and he would take it as a

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<sup>20</sup> This passage is in the context of Paul's ministry to the Jews (Acts 20:6; see also Acts 9:15), and the first day of the week probably would have been Sunday, regardless of what the Gentile population considered the first day of the week to be.

gift to the Jewish brethren in Jerusalem.<sup>21</sup> The passage does not say that each person's weekly saving was part of a weekly offering collected when the believers met for worship. Furthermore, although usually interpreted as such, this passage does not say that the Corinthian brethren regularly met for worship on the first day of the week even though that could have been the case.

Brethren, God specifically designated the seventh day of the week for observing the sabbath by the people of Israel. Nowhere in Scripture does God or His apostles say that we should worship on the first day of the week or that the first day is holy. God did not change the sabbath day from the seventh day to the first day.

As members of the body of Christ, we can gather at any convenient time on any day of the week to worship together. Most churches I attended had services of some type on Sunday morning and evening and Wednesday evening. This is fine as long as none of those times are considered holy or as required by God. Over the years, I have led weekly Bible study meetings (churches in homes) on Sunday mornings and evenings and other evenings during the week, whatever was most convenient for those who attended the studies. None of those times were considered to be holy, but in every instance my desire has been to give honor and glory to God and to our Lord Jesus Christ.

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<sup>21</sup> The Jewish believers in Jerusalem were not only being severely persecuted for their faith by the nonbelieving Jews (Acts 8:1-3; I Thessalonians 2:14), but had sold all of their possessions in the time after Pentecost in obedience to the command of Jesus and in accordance with God's prophetic plan for Israel (Matthew 19:16-26; Luke 12:22-34; Acts 2:44-45; 5:1-11). The fact that the Jewish brethren were poor and needed help from the Gentile brethren is an indication that God had set aside Israel and His promises to the nation, because of its unbelief, until after this dispensation of grace (Romans 11:25-32).

## Chapter 6

### Promises and Consequences

God gave His covenant—all of the commandments, ordinances, and statutes of the Law of Moses—to the people and nation of Israel to set them apart unto Himself and from the other nations of the world. It was not because Israel deserved the favor of God but because He had chosen to do so (Deuteronomy 7:6-8). He had made promises to the fathers of the nation—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—and He began fulfilling those promises by bringing Israel out of captivity in Egypt to enter into their promised land of Canaan (Genesis 13:14-17; 50:24; Exodus 6:4; Deuteronomy 4:37-38).

God gave His righteous Law to the people of Israel for them to live by in their promised land. There were wonderful promises and blessings that Israel would receive if the people obeyed the entire Law. On the other hand, there were severe consequences if they disobeyed any of the Law. The people emphatically said that they would obey God and His Law (Exodus 19:5-8; 24:3-8; Deuteronomy 5:27). They revealed their pride by making this claim, however, considering how rebellious they were during their sojourn in the wilderness after escaping Egypt (Acts 7:35-43). Did Israel obey the Law?

#### Promises if Obeyed

Many promises and blessings of God were associated with keeping His covenant and are described and often repeated from Exodus 19 through the book of Deuteronomy. I am certain that the following list of promises is not comprehensive because there are so many references involved; I am leaving it to you to explore Scripture. Please note that the covenant of God, and the associated promises if it was obeyed, was directed specifically to the nation of Israel and no one else. Also, it was to be obeyed so that Israel would be blessed in the land that God was about to give to them.

If the people of Israel obeyed all of God's commandments, ordinances, and statutes contained in the Law of Moses, then:

- Israel would be God's people—His possession (Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 14:2; 26:18).
- God would dwell and walk among them (Exodus 29:45-46; Leviticus 26:11-12).
- They would be a kingdom of priests (consecrated to God) and a holy nation (Exodus 19:5-6, 10-14; Deuteronomy 14:2; 26:16-19; 28:9).
- It would be righteousness for them (Deuteronomy 6:25).
- They would live long lives and multiply greatly (Deuteronomy 5:31-33; 6:1-3; 8:1).
- There would be no infertile people or livestock (Exodus 23:26; Deuteronomy 7:14).
- There would be no miscarriages or sickness (Exodus 23:25-26; Deuteronomy 7:15).
- They would be blessed in the land that God had promised to them (Deuteronomy 7:12-24; 8:6-10; 28:1-14; Leviticus 26:1-13). Blessings would include the following:
  - The offspring of themselves and their livestock would be blessed.
  - They would be fruitful and multiply.
  - The land would be bountiful. God would provide rain when needed so that the land would yield its produce and the trees would bear their fruit. They would have an abundance of food.
  - They would abound in prosperity in all things; they would lend to many nations but not borrow from them.

- Harmful animals would be removed from the land.
- They would live securely and in peace.
- The nations would fear them; their enemies who rise against them would be defeated.
- God would establish Israel as the preeminent nation in the world (Deuteronomy 26:19; 28:1).
- God would keep His covenant with Abraham and lovingkindness to a thousandth generation (Deuteronomy 7:9).

It would not be surprising if most people believed that all these promises are impossible and, therefore, not real—merely nice ideas but actually a false hope. Certainly, nothing in the history of mankind remotely portrays anything so perfect. After all, the people would have to be perfect to obey everything in the Law. Brethren, God does not lie, and we will see that His promises were true and will be fulfilled according to His sovereign will.

### **Consequences if Disobeyed**

The promises noted above were conditional. God would fulfill His promises to the people of Israel *if* they obeyed *all* of His commandments, statutes, and ordinances, serving Him with joy and a glad heart (Deuteronomy 28:47). If the people disobeyed, however, not only would they not receive the blessings listed above but would be cursed in all those things; they would bring upon themselves the consequences for their unfaithfulness by experiencing the opposite of each blessing. The consequences are detailed and severe, and I encourage you to read the following passages to understand how seriously God responds to disobedience: Deuteronomy 7:9-11, 8:11-20, and 28:15-68, and Leviticus 26:14-39.

Besides curses by God directly corresponding to the promises and blessings listed above, consequences for disobedience to the Law would also include the following:

- If the people forgot the Lord their God despite being miraculously brought out of Egypt, being fully provided for during their 40-year sojourn in the wilderness, and all that He was going to do for them in their promised land, they would become proud and serve other gods; therefore, God would destroy them as He was about to do to other nations (Deuteronomy 8:18-20).
- God would repay those who hate Him and destroy them (Deuteronomy 7:9-10).
- They would be at the mercy of their enemies, and their sons and daughters would go into captivity (Deuteronomy 28:32, 41).
- They would serve their enemies and become a horror, a proverb, and a taunt among all people where the Lord drives them (Deuteronomy 28:37, 47-48).
- They would be overtaken by the curses of God and destroyed (Deuteronomy 28:45).
- The Lord would bring extraordinary plagues and chronic sicknesses on their descendants (Deuteronomy 28:58-59).
- If they continued to disobey God after these judgments (i.e., did not repent and turn back to God), He would punish them seven times more for their sins (Leviticus 26:18-28).

Those who think that our nation should obey the laws of God should think again. Brethren, we ought to be thankful that we are not required to obey the Law and that we live during God's dispensation of grace. We also need to remember, however, not to take advantage of our freedom from the Law by continuing to live sinful lives (Galatians 5:1, 13-26; Romans 6:1-14). Israel was punished because they lived according to the flesh. We are to no longer live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit (Romans 8:12-13).

**But I [Paul] say, walk [live] by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. (Galatians 5:16-18)**

### **Did Israel Obey the Law?**

After saying that they would obey the commandments of God (Exodus 19:8; 24:3, 7), the people of Israel built themselves an idol of gold in the image of a calf and worshiped it as the god who delivered them from Egypt. They did so in Moses' absence while He was receiving the Law from God (Exodus 32:1-6). They were severely punished for this disobedience (Exodus 32:25-28). This egregious event, however, was only one example of a very long history of Israel's disobedience to God as recorded in the Old Testament.

Israel was a rebellious people who continually provoked God through their blatant disobedience of His covenant (Isaiah 65:1-7). God called them stubborn and obstinate children because of their rebellion against Him (Ezekiel 2:1-7). In his defense before the Jewish religious council, Stephen correctly proclaimed that the people of his day—including the men he was talking to—were the betrayers and murderers of the Righteous One (Christ the Messiah), and were just as rebellious against God as their fathers of old who resisted the Holy Spirit and killed God's prophets and did not obey the Law of Moses (Acts 7:51-53).

Israel reached such a low point in their rebellion against God through their idol worship and rejection of His commandments that they even sacrificed their children to Gentile gods (Leviticus 18:21; II Kings 17:7-17; Psalm 106:34-39; Jeremiah 32:35; Ezekiel 16:20-22). Consequently, they suffered the many curses that God had promised for their disobedience.

By the time that Jesus was born among His own people, Israel was merely part of a province of the Roman empire and their king was a servant of the Caesar. The nation bore no resemblance to the nation that occupied the promised land by the power of God after receiving His Law and agreeing to obey it.

### **Israel's Future Obedience**

Many churches and denominations in America teach that our nation will realize the same promises and blessings given to Israel if only we obey God. Please forgive my ignorance, but perhaps Christians in other nations believe the same thing about their own nation. Brethren, we cannot appropriate these promises to ourselves in this dispensation of the grace of God. America (or any other nation) is not Israel, nor is the body of Christ (in which all believers today belong—I Corinthians 12:12-13, 27) the same as Israel. Believers in this dispensation of grace have no promised land or national promises.

Perhaps Christians in this and other countries want to claim these promises because they were not fulfilled for Israel. Perhaps they think we can get our country to obey God even though Israel never did so. This line of thinking diminishes the sovereignty of God. He has always accomplished what He has promised to do, but in His due time—according to His eternal plan and purpose. This thinking is also a denial that all people (believers and nonbelievers) are sinners by nature—no one is able to obey the Law of Moses.

Today, the State of Israel is a political nation and not God's chosen nation; it is alienated from God. The descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are still blinded to the truth of God because of their unbelief (II Corinthians 3:12-16). God, however, will yet fulfill His promises to Israel (Ezekiel 37:24-28; Romans 11:26-32; II Peter 3:3-13). He will miraculously redeem Israel and will put the Law within the hearts of His people. They will be perfected by the working of God and will automatically know God and obey Him in all things. The people of Israel will be a kingdom of priests as prophesied (I Peter 2:4-10; Revelation 1:4-6). In fact, all of the promises to Israel that were associated with obedience to the Law will be fulfilled. But not yet.

**“For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into their minds, and I will write them on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be My people. And they shall not teach everyone his fellow citizen, and everyone his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for all will know Me, from the least to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their iniquities [unrighteousness], and I will remember their sins no more.”**  
(Hebrews 8:10-12; see also Jeremiah 31:31-34)



## Chapter 7

### Different Laws

The Apostle Paul said a great deal about the Law of Moses in his letters. He explained that the Law was righteous but that no one was able to keep it. Because it was perfect and revealed the righteousness of God, it was a curse to us—it condemned us to spiritual death. That is why God released us from it.

Therefore, we are no longer under the jurisdiction and condemnation of the Law of Moses (we are free from its curse—Galatians 3:13-14; 5:1, 13) but under the administration of God’s grace (Romans 5:20-21; 6:14; Ephesians 3:1-12). Because we are justified by faith apart from the works of the Law (Romans 3:28; Galatians 3:11), we are not to try to keep any of it; otherwise, we would have to keep all of it (Galatians 3:10; 5:3). We know this now by faith. We know that there is no condemnation of sin for those who are in Christ (Romans 8:1).

#### Other Laws in the Letters of Paul

When Paul spoke of law during his ministry and in his letters, he was not always referring to the Law of Moses. In fact, he referred to many different laws. Therefore, we need to be careful to understand the context in which he used the word *law*. Please consider the following examples pertaining to law and read the context of the references for further understanding.

- We are justified by a *law of faith* instead of a *law of works* as contained in the Law of Moses (Romans 3:27-28).
- We have two natures. Through our spiritual nature in Christ we are serving the *law of God* (His righteousness), but through our flesh—the nature we were born with—we are serving the *law of sin* (Romans 7:21-25; 8:6-8).
- We are no longer under the condemnation of sin through the Law of Moses. As believers, the *law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus* has set us free from the *law of sin and of death* (Romans 8:1-4).
- Instead of recognizing their sinfulness and inherent inability to obey the Law of Moses, Israel pursued a *law of righteousness* through their own efforts instead of by faith (Romans 9:30-33).
- Believers are under the *law of Christ* (I Corinthians 9:19-21). Bearing one another’s burdens fulfills the *law of Christ* (Galatians 6:2).

In these passages, I think that the *law of faith*, the *law of God*, the *law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus*, and the *law of Christ* are all names for the same *law*. These and the other different laws are not written systems of specific requirements with specific consequences as in the Law of Moses or our civil laws. Perhaps they could be thought of in a similar way as the law of gravity—they have not been prepared or instituted by mankind but are real and we experience them. They are spiritual laws that define our standing before God. We are justified by a law of faith instead of a law of works. We are to serve the law of God (i.e., live according to righteousness—Romans 6:12-14) through our nature in Christ instead of the law of sin through our human nature.

Paul also spoke of civil law. He exhorted the brethren to submit to governing authorities and their laws because all authorities are established by God (Romans 13:1-7).<sup>22</sup> He also chastised the Corinthian believers for taking each other to court in lawsuits (I Corinthians 6:1-8).

### Laws in the Letter of James

James referred to the commandment “Love your neighbor as yourself” as the *royal law* (James 2:8). This commandment was first given as part of the Law of Moses (Leviticus 19:17-18), and the name *royal law* illustrates its importance in summing up the entire Law of Moses. That is, if people truly obeyed it and the companion command to love God with their entire being, then they would have fulfilled the Law (Matthew 22:34-40; Luke 10:25-28).<sup>23</sup>

James also spoke of abiding by the *perfect law*—the *law of liberty* (James 1:19-25; 2:12). I believe he was referring to the Law of Moses, but how could that be if the Law was a curse and nailed to the cross, and that we now have freedom from the curse of the Law? We need to remember that the Law of Moses was, and is, perfect and righteous—if it could be kept then it would truly have been liberating (recall all the promises associated with keeping the Law). It was not kept because of sin, however, and the disciples understood that they could not keep it (Acts 15:10). So, we need to understand the context of the book of James.

Brethren, James was not writing to the members of the body of Christ, which consists of believing Jews and Gentiles without distinction in this dispensation of the grace of God. He was writing to the twelve tribes of Israel who were dispersed abroad from Israel (James 1:1). Because Paul was appointed by God through our ascended Lord Jesus Christ to go to the Gentiles as well as the Jews living in the Gentile nations (Acts 9:15-16; 13:13-47; 17:1-3), James’ letter was not directed toward the same Jews.

The direct applicability of James’ letter is to the people of Israel *after* the rapture; therefore, his letter is primarily prophetic. At the time it will apply, most or all of the people of Israel will be dispersed from their own land until God brings them back and redeems them. That is, they will not have their own land until God, through His will and in fulfillment of His promises, reestablishes them in their promised land (Ezekiel 36:22-28; 37:21-28; 39:25-29). Today’s State of Israel is a political nation (not the nation of God) that occupies only a portion of the former land of Canaan, and is not the kingdom described in Scripture.

The believing Jews to whom James was writing will be perfect—sinless, unlike us who will continue to sin until we die. They will be liberated from sin and its consequences because God will fulfill His promise to cleanse them from all sin and write the Law on their hearts so that they automatically and completely obey it (Ezekiel 36:25-27; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 8:7-12). However, until the nation is fully cleansed by God (which will include severe judgment of those who do not believe the witness of God—Amos 9:7-10; Zechariah 13:8-9), nonbelieving Jews will coexist with believing Jews just as occurred throughout Israel’s history. Consequently, James’ letter provides distinctions between believing and nonbelieving Jews. The same holds true for the three letters of John.

**“Therefore say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord God, “It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations**

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<sup>22</sup> Peter exhorted the Jewish kingdom brethren in the same way (I Peter 2:13-17).

<sup>23</sup> See my study **Love Our Neighbors as Ourselves** that explores this commandment.

**where you went. I will vindicate the holiness of My great name which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst. Then the nations will know that I am the Lord," declares the Lord God, "when I prove Myself holy among you in their sight. For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe [shall keep] My ordinances. You will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be My people, and I will be your God."'" (Ezekiel 36:22-28)**

Please consider the following passages from the letters of James and John and think about how their letters and the message they contain differ from the message in the letters written by Paul. Keep in mind that we are no longer under the Law but under grace in this dispensation of the grace of God.

- Salvation will be by faith *plus* doing the works of the Law of Moses; faith will be perfected through works (James 2:14-23). A person will be justified by works and not by faith alone (James 2:24-26). This confirms what Jesus said in Matthew 7:21-23 and John 5:25-29.
- People will be judged by the Law of Moses. If they keep the entire Law, which is summed up by the royal law "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," then they will be judged with mercy (their salvation will be fully confirmed and realized). However, judgment will be merciless if they do not keep the whole law—the law of liberty (James 2:8-13). The *books* that will be opened at the final judgment to judge the lost apparently will be the books of the Law of Moses because they will condemn in sin everyone who was not saved through faith (Revelation 20:11-12; see also John 5:45-46).
- If a person lacks wisdom, he will receive it if he asks of God in faith (James 1:5-8; see also Matthew 7:7-8).
- A sick person will be healed through prayers of the church elders, and if the sickness was due to his sins (i.e., he was not saved), then his sins will be forgiven also (James 5:14-15; see also Matthew 9:1-8; Mark 16:17-18; Luke 10:8-11).
- If a nonbelieving person says that he has no sin or has not sinned, then it will be evidence that the truth is not in him. If he confesses his sins, then God will forgive him and cleanse him from all unrighteousness (I John 1:8-10). This confession and cleansing will pertain to salvation and does not describe a daily confession.
- If a person says that he has come to know Christ but does not keep His commandments, then he will be confirming himself as a liar and the truth will not be in him (I John 2:3-6). Keeping His commandments will include keeping the Law of Moses (Matthew 19:16-19; 23:1-3).
- If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father will not be in him (I John 2:15-17).<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> As with the others, this point does not apply to us. Believers today (members of the body of Christ) are in the world but not of it (I Corinthians 5:9-10; Philippians 3:20-21), and we are exhorted to not be conformed with the world (Romans 12:1-2). However, because we continue to sin, it is easy for us to get caught up in the things of the world. We will not lose the love of God, though, because nothing can separate us from His love because we are in Christ (Romans 8:1, 38-39).

- Because of the spiritual anointing a person will receive at salvation (by God through His Holy Spirit), he will have no need to be taught about the things of God because he will have been taught all things through his anointing (I John 2:27; see also Jeremiah 31:31-34).<sup>25</sup>
- No one who abides in Christ will sin; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him (I John 3:4-6).
- No one who is born of God (saved) will practice sin; he will be unable to sin (I John 3:9; 5:18; see also Ezekiel 36:25-27).
- A child of God will be easily discerned from a child of the devil, because anyone who does not practice righteousness or love his brother will not be of God (I John 3:10).
- A believer will receive whatever he asks of God because believers will keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight (I John 3:22; 5:14-15; see also Matthew 21:21-22). Because they will be perfected by God, what they ask for will be in accordance with the will of God (John 14:12-15; 15:7, 16; 16:23-28).
- The one who keeps God's commandments will abide in God and God will abide in Him through the Holy Spirit (I John 3:23-24; 4:12-15).
- Everyone who loves are those who will be born of God and know God (I John 4:7-13).
- Believers will know the love of God because they will (automatically, by nature) keep His commandments (I John 5:3).
- Whoever is born of God will overcome (resist) the sinful world through faith (I John 5:4-5).
- Anyone who does not abide in the teaching of Christ (concerning who He is—the Son of God, Messiah of Israel, and savior of the world) will not have God (II John 1:6-9; see also I John 3:23-24; 4:12-15; Matthew 16:13-17; John 1:41; 5:24).
- The one who does good will be of God; the one who does evil will not have seen God (i.e., is not of God—III John 1:11).

These points draw a definite distinction between the people of God, all of whom will be sinless, and everyone else. Brethren, we (members of the body of Christ) will continue to sin until we die because we have two natures working within us (Romans 7:21-25), and it can be difficult and often impossible for us to distinguish between those who are saved and those who are not saved. We will not be perfected until we die or are caught up to meet our Lord (I Corinthians 15:50-57; Philippians 1:6).

Although there are principles that can be drawn for our walk and truths to learn about God and our Lord in the letters of James and John (and also of Peter and Jude), none of the points listed above apply to us as members of the body of Christ. All of the above statements and promises apply to the believing remnant of Israel, all of whom will be saved (and miraculously perfected) after the rapture when God begins restoring His nation of Israel to its promised land and to Himself.

Believers of all time—children of God in every dispensation—have been and will be saved by the propitiatory work accomplished for us by Christ at the cross (Romans 3:21-26). This truth was not known, however, until it was revealed to us by our glorified Lord Jesus Christ through the Apostle Paul. Furthermore, nowhere in these letters (James, I & II Peter, I, II, & III John, Jude, or even Hebrews) do we find that people are or will be saved simply by believing the gospel of salvation; that is, that Christ died

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<sup>25</sup> We have no such anointing when we are saved. We are spiritually baptized (fully identified with Christ) by the Holy Spirit into Christ the moment we believe the gospel of salvation, but we are not changed into a sinless person as promised for the believing people of Israel in the future. Salvation at Pentecost was a foretaste of this future anointing (Acts 2:37-47).

for our sins, was buried, and rose from the dead. Brethren, we are saved by grace through faith apart from works of righteousness in this dispensation of grace.

Although Christ's death, burial, and resurrection were proclaimed, as well as His sacrifice for sin and the sprinkling of His blood to cover sin (I Peter 1:2; I John 1:6-8; 2:1-2; 4:10), salvation for the people addressed by James, Peter, and John was, and will be, through faith *plus* obedience to the commandments of God—the Law of Moses (James 2:10-26; I John 2:3; 3:23-24; 5:1-3).<sup>26</sup> The message to believe by faith was that Christ was sent from God and was the Son of God (I Peter 2:4-8; I John 4:14-15; 5:1, 9-10), and that Israel's future kingdom was still going to be fulfilled (I Peter 1:10-13; II Peter 3:8-13; James 5:7-8). This was the same message preached by John the Baptist and the twelve disciples, and verified by Jesus Himself during His earthly ministry (Matthew 3:1-2, 11-12; 4:17, 23; 10:5-7; 16:15-17; John 5:24; 6:40; 8:24; 9:35-38; Acts 2:22-36; 3:17-26).<sup>27</sup>

Please carefully consider the following passages by James and John to the people of Israel. They were not talking about the importance of exercising our faith by obeying God in our daily walk as we are so often taught. Instead, they were describing salvation and the distinction between those who are saved and those who are not saved. That is, righteous works will be proof of a person's salvation; the lack of those works will be proof of a person's unbelief and lost condition.

**What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? (James 2:14)**

**You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead. (James 2:24-26).**

**Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He [Christ] is righteous; the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother. (I John 3:7-10)**

Let us take a closer look at James 2:26 where it says, "For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead." Although this verse is used to encourage (or shame) believers to exercise their faith through good works (i.e., put their faith to good use so that it does not languish), it says that faith without works is *dead*. A person's body is not merely listless and not of much use without the spirit; rather, it is *dead*. Therefore, the dead faith described in this verse is not the idle faith of a slacking or disobedient believer but a false, or fake, faith that a professing believer would claim even

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<sup>26</sup> In addition to obeying the Law, the works of salvation also required repentance and water baptism for the remission of sins as well as selling all possessions (Matthew 19:21; Mark 1:4; 16:16; Luke 3:3; 12:22-34; Acts 2:37-45).

<sup>27</sup> See my studies **The Mystery (God's Secret Plan)**, **The Two Messages of Our Lord Jesus Christ**, and others that provide more explanation about why Paul's message about salvation and our future hope was different than that of Jesus on earth and His twelve disciples.

though he is not saved (as demonstrated by Ananias and Sapphira—Acts 5:1-11). James and John were telling the believers how to discern the false brethren among them.

Now, compare the above passages with what we know through the Apostle Paul. We are justified by faith apart from any works of righteousness. Paul was specifically referring to the works of the Law of Moses, but it applies to any works that people may think are necessary to become right with God—to earn their salvation.

**Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law [of Moses].** (Romans 3:27-28)

**Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work [for righteousness], but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited [accounted] as righteousness.** (Romans 4:4-5)

**For by grace you [believers—children of God] have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.** (Ephesians 2:8-9)

I want to make it clear that no one has ever been saved through works of righteousness. The majority of Israelites were not saved because they pursued an imagined law of righteousness. That is, they thought they could become righteous by keeping the Law of Moses (even though they were not doing so), and they did so apart from faith (Romans 9:30-33). Their self-righteousness proved their lack of faith. *Before* Paul was saved, he, as a Pharisee, considered himself to be blameless according to the Law (Philippians 3:2-6). He was no different than the other Pharisees and scribes that our Lord judged as hypocrites for their self-righteousness (Matthew 23:1-36).

As believers, we are exhorted to do good works *after* we are saved (Galatians 6:9-10; Ephesians 2:10; Colossians 1:9-10; II Thessalonians 3:13). However, because we still have a sin nature, something the future Jewish brethren will not have, we will exhibit both righteous works and unrighteous works (Romans 6:12-14; 7:21-25). Our faith, therefore, cannot be justified or judged by our works in this dispensation of grace.

## Chapter 8

### Jesus and His Disciples

#### Was Jesus Under the Law?

Jesus was God in the flesh (John 1:1-3, 14; Philippians 2:5-8; Colossians 2:9). He was born as a Jew. He came to His own—the people of Israel—as the Son of God and as their long-promised Messiah (*the Christ*) and King (Matthew 2:1-6; 16:13-17; 27:11; Luke 1:35; John 1:41). However, most of His own people did not believe who He was and did not receive Him as such (John 1:11). Consequently, He did not reign as King of the Jews and as the King of kings and Lord of lords. God will fulfill that prophecy later.

As a Jew, born of parents who were Jews,<sup>28</sup> Jesus was subject to the covenant of God. He was, therefore, bound (required) to obey all the commandments, statutes, and ordinances of the Law of Moses. However, He would not have needed to offer any sacrifices for sins because He was sinless (II Corinthians 5:21). As with most of the people of God in the Old Testament, we do not have a record of our Lord's daily obedience to specific requirements of the Law. Scripture, however, does state that Jesus was born under the Law and that His parents submitted to the requirements of the Law pertaining to His birth as a Jewish male. Furthermore, Jesus told the healed leper to present the offering that Moses commanded (Matthew 8:1-4), and He observed the Passover at what we refer to as *the last supper* (Luke 22:14-16).

**But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born [made] of a woman, born [made] under the Law, so that He [*Christ*] might redeem those who were under the Law [*i.e., Jews*], that we [*Gentiles*] might receive the adoption of sons.** (Galatians 4:4-5; see also Romans 1:1-4)

**And when eight days had passed, before His circumcision, His name was then called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb. And when the days for their [her—*Mary's*] purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they [*Joseph and Mary*] brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord”), and to offer a sacrifice according to what was said in the Law of the Lord, “A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.”** (Luke 2:21-24; see also Exodus 13:2, 11-12; Numbers 3:13; Leviticus 12:1-8)

It is important to understand that Jesus was required to obey, and was obedient to, the Law of Moses. We saw earlier that the Pharisees accused Jesus of breaking sabbath requirements, but He demonstrated that He was not doing so. The Pharisees had misrepresented or altered the Law of Moses to fit their hypocritical agenda (Mark 7:5-13). The passage of Mark 7:18-19 is often used to say that Jesus declared all foods as *clean*, thus implying that He and His disciples could have eaten pork, for example. Unfortunately, a sentence, in parentheses, has been *added* to most modern Bible versions by their editors saying as much. The KJV correctly does not have the added sentence because it is not in the original Greek texts.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Joseph was not Jesus' biological father (Jesus was truly the Son of God), but was identified by God as His human father because Joseph was in the royal line of David in accordance with prophecy (Matthew 1:1-25; Luke 3:23).

<sup>29</sup> At some point an editor or editors of a Bible translation apparently decided to add the parenthetical sentence because Paul later said that all foods can be eaten (I Timothy 4:1-5; Romans 14:14), and most subsequent

For one thing, the context of Mark 7:18-19 is not about food but is about the character of our heart (Mark 7:14-23; Matthew 15:10-20). Also, if Jesus had declared all foods to be clean at that time, He would have contradicted what He previously said during what we refer to as the *Sermon on the Mount* in Matthew 5:17-19. Furthermore, we know that Peter did not misunderstand what Jesus meant because he continued to obey the dietary restrictions of the Law (Acts 10:9-16, 28). Jesus was obedient to the Law of Moses to the letter. The dietary requirements of the Law, as with all aspects of the Law, were not set aside until God ushered in His dispensation of grace through Paul. More on the subject of diet is included in Chapter 10.

Christians today want to follow Jesus and concentrate on the record in the gospel accounts (Matthew through John) for their guidance. To truly follow Jesus, however, means that we would have to be obedient to the Law of Moses and expect the promises and consequences associated with obedience or lack thereof.<sup>30</sup> The people of Israel failed at this attempt because of their self-righteousness, and we should not think that we are any better than them.

On the other hand, the Apostle Paul exhorted members of the body of Christ to follow him *as he followed Christ* (I Corinthians 11:1; see also I Corinthians 4:15-17; II Thessalonians 2:13-15; 3:7-9; II Timothy 1:13).<sup>31</sup> This is rarely taught in our churches, but please think about it. We cannot be sinless as Jesus was, we are not to obey the Law of Moses, we are not to preach the good news of the imminence of Israel's promised kingdom, we are not to sell our possessions, we are unable to heal the sick and raise the dead, and we cannot claim for ourselves the commands and promises that He specifically gave to His disciples in accordance with prophecy. Brethren, we are unable to follow Jesus the man.

Paul reminded the Corinthian believers that they (and we) are no longer to recognize Christ according to the flesh (i.e., as Jesus the man) but as our risen and glorified Lord Jesus Christ (II Corinthians 5:14-16). Through Paul's letters, we learn what Christ accomplished for us at the cross and how God expects us to walk worthy of (as becoming) our salvation (Ephesians 4:1-3; Colossians 1:9-12).<sup>32</sup> Paul emphasized the personal qualities exhibited by our Lord that we ought to incorporate into our thinking and our daily walk, such as His humility and love (Philippians 2:1-8; Colossians 3:12-17). If we abide by the teachings and exhortations of Paul, and emulate the example of his life as a believer, then we will be following Christ as God intended for us to do, and imitating God as His beloved children (Philippians 4:8-9; Ephesians 5:1-2).

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translations incorporated that sentence because it seemed appropriate. This is an example of how personal bias can influence Bible translations (including the KJV), especially if the editors do not understand the difference between prophecy and the mystery in Scripture in general, or between the Law and grace in particular.

<sup>30</sup> Following Jesus in accordance with the gospel accounts would also mean that we would need to obey *all* of His commandments that were directed to His disciples and the people of Israel (Matthew 28:20; John 14:15) — commandments that do not apply to members of the body of Christ in this dispensation of grace. These would include obeying the Law of Moses, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, repentance and water baptism for the remission of sins, selling all possessions, expecting to receive what we pray (ask God) for, healing the sick and raising the dead, etc. (Matthew 10:7-8; 21:21-22; 23:1-3; 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-18; Luke 12:22-34; John 4:1-2; 14:12-15).

<sup>31</sup> See my study **Follow Paul** that explains how following his example is also following Christ as God desires.

<sup>32</sup> See my study **Walk Worthy** that addresses how we should live each day in response to God's gift of salvation.



## Were the Disciples Under the Law?

Just as Jesus was born under the Law of Moses and lived according to its commandments, statutes, and ordinances, His twelve disciples (and all who were saved during His earthly ministry) were also under the Law and were expected by God to obey it. As we see in the book of Acts, our Lord's death and resurrection did not nullify this requirement for the Jewish kingdom brethren. That is, they continued to obey the Law during the time covered by the book of Acts.

**Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples, saying: "The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them." (Matthew 23:1-3)**

**"Go therefore and make disciples of [teach] all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:19-20)**

**When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. (Acts 2:1; see the equivalent *Feast of Weeks* in Exodus 34:22, Numbers 28:26-31, and Deuteronomy 16:9-12)**

**Some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue. Therefore, being sent on their way by the church, they were passing through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and were bringing great joy to all the brethren. When they arrived at Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them. But some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses." (Acts 15:1-5)**

**After we arrived in Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. And the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. After he had greeted them, he began to relate one by one the things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. And when they heard it they began glorifying God; and they said to him, "You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews [in Jerusalem] of those who have believed, and they are all zealous for the Law [of Moses]; and they have been told about you, that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs [of the Law]. (Acts 21:17-21)**

(See also Acts 10:9-16, where it indicates that Peter was abiding by the Law regarding what was clean and unclean.)

By the time we see these references to continued observance of the Law in Acts 15 and Acts 21, Peter was no longer the leader of the apostles. James, an apostle and brother of Jesus (both born of Mary—Matthew 13:55; Galatians 1:18-19) but not one of the twelve apostles, was now the spokesman (leading apostle) for the believing remnant of Israel (Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; I Corinthians 15:5-7). Also, former Pharisees who had been saved and emphasized that the Gentile believers should be circumcised held significant influence over the Jewish brethren. Their accusation against Paul that he was teaching

Jews saved under his ministry not to obey the Law (Acts 21:21) was actually true (see Acts 13:38-39; Galatians 5:2-6, 11), and *perhaps* Paul was able to convince them that God had set aside the Law of Moses and ushered in His dispensation of grace (Galatians 2:1-10).

These events indicated that God was effectively setting Israel aside or, more probably, had already done so. Peter had been promised by Jesus that he would be the leader of the twelve disciples and that his decisions would be according to the will of God (Matthew 16:13-19). Indeed, at Pentecost and shortly afterward Peter was the spokesman for the twelve apostles (Acts 2:14, 37-39; 3:11-26; 4:5-12; 5:1-11, 27-32). Even later, God was working through Peter regarding the conversion of Cornelius, who was a Roman centurion and a Gentile. That conversion, however, did not follow the pattern that had been previously established by God. The differences with Cornelius were that Peter did not preach the gospel of Israel's promised kingdom to him, Peter did not call on him to repent of his sins, and Cornelius was saved and received the gift of the Holy Spirit *before* he was baptized (Acts 10:34-48; compare with Acts 2:37-39; Mark 16:14-18).

It is significant that Cornelius' vision and subsequent salvation was *after* Paul was saved and appointed as the apostle of the Gentiles.<sup>33</sup> Peter recounted his experience with Cornelius to support Paul as Paul described and defended his ministry to the Gentiles before the new leaders of the Jewish brethren (Acts 15:1-11; Galatians 2:1-10).<sup>34</sup> It appears, then, that God effectively blinded Israel and set aside their kingdom promises at the time He saved Paul on the road to Damascus. The gospel of the kingdom likely was no longer preached to anyone by the close of the period of time covered by the book of Acts.

### **Did Jesus Fulfill the Law?**

**“Do not think that I [*Jesus*] came to abolish [destroy] the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.”** (Matthew 5:17-18)

Jesus fulfilled the righteous aspect of the Law of Moses during His life on earth because He was sinless and did everything in accordance with the will of God (John 4:34; 17:1-4). However, did the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord abolish (destroy, or do away with) the Law of Moses? That is, did its usefulness and application by God permanently end at that point? We know through Paul that the Law was a curse to us and condemned us to death, and we also know that it was figuratively nailed to the cross and taken out of our way. Does not the fact that it was set aside by God mean that it was abolished?

First, the Law was not taken out of our way at the time of our Lord's crucifixion and resurrection. It was not revealed that it had been set aside by God until after the Apostle Paul began his ministry—this truth was part of our glorified Lord's progression of revelations to Paul sometime after his salvation. As the record in Acts demonstrates, the Jewish kingdom brethren (originally led by Peter and later by James

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<sup>33</sup> Unlike the other apostles, Paul did not witness Jesus as He walked among His disciples after His resurrection (I Corinthians 15:3-11). However, the ascended and glorified Lord Jesus Christ appeared to Paul (then known as Saul of Tarsus) while he was headed to Damascus to imprison the believing Jewish followers of Jesus (Acts 9:1-9; 22:1-10; 26:12-18).

<sup>34</sup> The twelve apostles at Pentecost, with Peter as the leader, will be resurrected to serve with Christ during His millennial kingdom (Matthew 19:27-28).

the brother of Jesus), continued to adhere to the Law until such time as the dispensation of grace was fully instituted by God for all people. As I understand it, the twelve apostles and those saved directly under their kingdom ministry (i.e., the preaching of Israel's promised kingdom with Christ as King) were the last kingdom brethren and the last ones to rightfully adhere to the Law of Moses.

Second, let us take a closer look at our Lord's statement in Matthew 5:17-18. Jesus said that He did not come to earth to abolish the Law and the Prophets but to fulfill, and nothing written in the Law will be removed from it until all is accomplished. Until what is accomplished? Until everything spoken in the Law *and* in the Prophets is fulfilled. An investigation of the message in the books of the Old Testament prophets will show that everything points to the future fulfillment of all of God's promises associated with Israel's promised land and their kingdom. Because of Israel's continued disobedience that ultimately led to the crucifixion of Christ and the stoning of Stephen, however, Israel was temporarily blinded and set aside by God until after He is finished with dealing with the Gentiles in this dispensation of grace (Romans 11:25-32). God is still dealing with us and has not begun fulfilling *any* of the remaining prophecies regarding Israel since the time of Pentecost and shortly thereafter.

Brethren, the Law has not been abolished because God has not accomplished everything contained in the Law and the Prophets. It has only been temporarily removed. The prophetic last days spoken of by the Old Testament prophets and by our Lord and His disciples began to be fulfilled with the birth of Jesus. As prophesied, those last days include everything that happened through the events of Pentecost (Acts 2:14-36) as well as all of the unfulfilled events from that time through the judgment at the great white throne described in Revelation 20:11-15. We are not in any part of the prophesied last days today because they were interrupted by the current dispensation of the grace of God that He had planned since *before* the foundation of the earth (I Corinthians 2:6-8).

Our Lord's crucifixion was not a surprise to God—it was prophesied in Old Testament prophecies and confirmed by Jesus Himself that it would happen (Psalm 22:1-18; Matthew 16:21; Luke 24:6-7). Our sovereign and Almighty God knew in advance that mankind would reject Him and that His chosen nation would reject Him, His Son, and the witness of the His Holy Spirit; therefore, He had prepared a remedy for our sin from the very beginning of creation. God chose to reveal His plan—referred to as *the mystery* as previously discussed—in due time through Paul.

### **The Future of the Law of Moses**

Again, the Law of Moses has not been abolished. It was first made known to no longer be in effect with the revelation to Paul (obedience to the Law has never been a requirement for members of the body of Christ), and soon was no longer applicable to any Jews after God blinded Israel and fully set the nation and its promises aside during this dispensation of grace. Consequently, the Law of Moses will have no direct application to anyone again until after the rapture when God resumes His work through the nation of Israel in accordance with prophecy.

To clarify, when God redeems His people of Israel in the future, He will completely and forever cleanse them of their sin and change them. With their new hearts of flesh,<sup>35</sup> they will no longer have a

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<sup>35</sup> Please consider the following important difference. The believers in the future kingdom, including those who are resurrected into the kingdom, will have bodies of flesh. We will not be part of that kingdom on earth (at least not for the first 1,000 years). Whether we die or are caught up (raptured) to be with our Lord, our fleshly bodies will be

sin nature and will automatically do everything in accordance with the will of God. They will not only be considered righteous by God but will be experientially righteous in all things. Furthermore, they will be the kingdom of priests that God promised when He initially gave Israel the Law. Please bear with me as I repeat the following passages; they are provided to emphasize the role of the Law in the fulfillment of God's prophetic plan for Israel.

**“Therefore say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord God, “It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you went. I will vindicate the holiness of My great name which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst. Then the nations will know that I am the Lord,” declares the Lord God, “when I prove Myself holy among you in their sight. For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe [shall keep] My ordinances. You will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be My people, and I will be your God.”’”** (Ezekiel 36:22-28; see also Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 37:24-28)

**“‘Now then, if you [Israel] will indeed obey My [God's] voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you [Moses] shall speak to the sons of Israel.”** (Exodus 19:5-6; see also Isaiah 61:1-6; I Peter 2:4-10; Revelation 1:4-6)

The Law and the Prophets will not be fulfilled until sin is abolished at the judgment at the great white throne after the 1,000-year reign of Christ over New Jerusalem and the nations. As noted earlier, I am convinced that the books of the Law of Moses will be used to judge the lost (unrighteous) souls of all time at that final judgment (James 2:8-13; Revelation 20:11-15). Only after that judgment, when there will be no more sin, will the Law no longer be necessary. The purpose of the Law and the words of the prophets will have been fully accomplished, and Christ will then turn the kingdom over to God the Father (this is a truth revealed only through the Apostle Paul as part of the mystery—I Corinthians 15:20-28).

Even though the Law will no longer be necessary, will it be abolished? I cannot say for sure, because the Law is the word of God, and God's word stands forever (Isaiah 40:8; Psalm 119:160). However, when God writes the Law of Moses on the hearts of the people of Israel, He refers to it as a *new covenant* (Jeremiah 31:31-34). That is, for His people it will replace the *old covenant* (the Law) thus making it obsolete or no longer needed (Hebrews 8:13). One reason for becoming obsolete is that the people will never have to offer sacrifices for sin because they will be sinless (Hebrews 10:11-18).

**For if that first covenant had been faultless,<sup>36</sup> there would have been no occasion sought for a second. For finding fault with them [Israel], He says, “Behold, days are coming, says the Lord, when I will effect a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; not like**

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changed to spiritual (non-fleshy) bodies (I Corinthians 15:50-53). This is explained further in my study **The Mystery (God's Secret Plan)**.

<sup>36</sup> This is not saying that the Law of Moses was faulty, for it was and is righteous. Instead, the Law proved that the people of Israel could not keep it—it found fault in them (Hebrews 8:8).

**the covenant [*Law of Moses*] which I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; for they did not continue in My covenant, and I did not care for them, says the Lord. For this is the [*new*] covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into their minds, and I will write them on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be My people. And they shall not teach everyone his fellow citizen, and everyone his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for all will know Me, from the least to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their iniquities [*unrighteousness*], and I will remember their sins no more.” When He said, “A new covenant,” He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear. (Hebrews 8:7-13)**

The above passage says that a new covenant will make the first covenant obsolete. This new covenant, which is also described in Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Ezekiel 36:22-28, has not been implemented yet because the people of Israel have not yet been redeemed (see Chapter 11 for more information on the new covenant). Even when God institutes the new covenant for His redeemed people sometime after the rapture (but before Christ’s millennial kingdom is established), the old covenant (the Law) will still be used to judge the lost as previously noted. Therefore, although it will be truly obsolete for His people, the Law will continue to be God’s basis for judging sin for as long as there is sin in the world.

Recall that Jesus said that He did not come to earth to abolish the Law and that nothing would be removed from the Law until all that was written in the Law and the Prophets was accomplished. Even in this statement, He was not saying that the Law would be abolished when all was accomplished. When all things in Christ (including all believers of all time) are brought together as one (Ephesians 1:9-12), we will all be righteous in all things. It would seem, therefore, that the righteousness of the Law will never be abolished even though the Law as a whole will be obsolete and no longer needed. Perhaps the answer will be revealed to us when we are with our Lord.

### **Jews and the Law Today**

Despite the efforts of Satan and the abhorrent sinfulness of mankind (e.g., the Holocaust), Jews are still with us today according to God’s will and His grace. Many are living in the State of Israel, and perhaps more are living in other nations around the world. In other words, the State of Israel is not composed entirely of Jews and not all of the Jews live there—no prophecies regarding Israel have been fulfilled. Because of their unbelief, God hardened (blinded) Israel and temporarily set the nation aside, but He is not slack in His promises. God will restore and redeem Israel and will fulfill all of His promises to them after the close of this dispensation of His grace.

But what about the Jews today? Should they be obeying (or trying to obey) the Law of Moses? The answer is “No.” Because of what Christ accomplished at the cross as revealed to us through His Apostle Paul, no one is under the Law—everyone is under grace. There is no difference between Jews and Gentiles in this dispensation of grace (Romans 10:8-13; I Corinthians 12:12-13; Galatians 3:23-28). Consequently, the religious efforts and observances by Jews in an attempt to obey the Law of Moses are in vain. Their only hope, which is the only hope of everyone today, is to believe the gospel of salvation—that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised up (resurrected) from the dead. Please consider the following points from Scripture:

- Israel was blinded by God and temporarily set aside as His favored nation. God is not working through Israel or any other nation in this dispensation of grace. Instead, He is working through individual believers—each of us is an ambassador for Christ (II Corinthians 5:20).

**For I [Paul] do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial [temporary] hardening [blindness] has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. (Romans 11:25)**

- Paul knew that God had blinded Israel and set the nation aside, but was so passionate about his nonbelieving Jewish kinsmen that he was willing to give up his own salvation if it would result in the salvation of Israel. This was not God’s plan, however.

**I [Paul] am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen [fellow Jews] according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen. (Romans 9:1-5)**

- Religious Jews have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. Those who are zealous for God are still seeking their own righteousness (Romans 9:30-33).

**Brethren, my heart’s desire and my prayer to God for them [Israel] is for their salvation. For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. For not knowing about God’s righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law [Law of Moses] for righteousness to everyone who believes. (Romans 10:1-4)**

- When Moses (the Law) is read by nonbelieving (though religious) Jews in this dispensation of grace, a veil lies over their heart; the truth of God cannot be understood.

**Therefore having such a hope, we use great boldness [plainness] in our speech, and are not like Moses, who used to put a veil over his face so that the sons of Israel would not look intently at the end of what was fading away. But their minds were hardened [blinded]; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant [the Law] the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ. But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart; but whenever a person [it—Israel] turns to the Lord, the veil is [will be] taken away. (II Corinthians 3:12-16)**

Even before they understood that the Law was fully set aside for them, the Jewish brethren in Jerusalem admitted that they could not keep the Law (Acts 15:6-11). Unlike today in this dispensation of grace, however, the faith of the Jewish believers at that time and again in the future will be demonstrated through their works—their obedience to the Law of Moses. All believers today, whether Jew or Gentile, are saved by grace through faith apart from works—we are justified by faith and not by works of the Law.

## Chapter 9

### Changes to the Law of Moses

#### Changes Forbidden by God

**“Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I [Moses] am teaching you to perform, so that you may live and go in and take possession of the land which the Lord, the God of your fathers, is giving you. You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you.”**  
(Deuteronomy 4:1-2)

**“Do not think that I [Jesus] came to abolish [destroy] the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.”** (Matthew 5:17-18)

When Moses delivered the law of God to the people of Israel, he said that it was complete and that nothing was to be added to or taken away from it—there were to be no changes. During His ministry on earth to the people of Israel, Jesus confirmed that nothing in the Law of Moses would change until everything spoken of in the Law and the Prophets is accomplished.

There is much in the Law and the Prophets that has not been accomplished or fulfilled, and will not be completely fulfilled until the final judgment at the great white throne that will occur at the close of the millennial kingdom. Although we know through the Apostle Paul that the Law was nailed to the cross and that its jurisdiction has been taken out of our way (Colossians 2:13-14; Romans 6:14; Galatians 3:1-3, 10-14), God has not changed the content of the Law. It still reveals our unrighteousness and will be used to condemn the unsaved people at the final judgment (Romans 3:19-26; 7:4-12; Galatians 3:19-22; Revelation 20:11-15; John 5:45-46).

#### Changes Occurred

Even though the Law of Moses was not to be changed, it is evident during the time of our Lord’s ministry to His people that changes to the Law had been made. That is, many things that were being done as if they were in accordance with the Law were contrary to it. Those changes, which had become traditions, were made by the religious leaders of Israel. They had, in fact, rejected the Law of Moses and had created their own version of the Law.

**“Do not think that I [Jesus] will accuse you [nonbelieving Jews] before the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?”** (John 5:45-47)

The following changes, whether added to or taken away from the Law or otherwise altering it, are revealed directly or indirectly in the books of Matthew through Acts. Please think about them and see if we are guilty of doing similar things to the completed word of God.

#### ***Religious Leaders***

In the Law of Moses, God had set apart the tribe of Levi, led by the high priest, to administer the Law to the people of Israel and perform the worship requirements associated with the tabernacle, and later,

the temple of God (Numbers 3:5-9; 8:5-11; 16:8-9; Deuteronomy 10:8-9; 21:5). However, by the time that Jesus ministered to His people, it appears that the Levites no longer had authority regarding the Law of Moses. Although the high priest, presumably a Levite as required by the Law, was still the supreme religious leader, we read of the scribes and the Pharisees as the ones who had become the most influential religious leaders of Israel (Matthew 5:20; 12:38; 23:1-3). They, or their predecessors, had changed particular aspects of the Law to suit their own purposes.

The following paragraphs provide some brief background, as I understand it, on the religious leaders of Judea during Jesus' ministry. The high priest in the time of His crucifixion, who judged Jesus to be a blasphemer deserving of death, was Caiaphas (Matthew 26:57-66; John 11:47-53). Scripture does not say that he was a descendant of Aaron, who was a Levite and the first high priest of Israel (Hebrews 5:4), as stipulated by the Law of Moses (Exodus 29:1-9; Numbers 25:10-13; see also I Chronicles 23:12-13).

For clarification, Aaron is not referred to as a *high priest* in the Old Testament but as *the chief priest* (Ezra 7:5). He was a high priest, however, because he foreshadowed Christ who is the high priest of Israel (Hebrews 5:1-10). The first time a high priest was called as such is recorded in Numbers 35:25-28, and there was only one high priest of Israel at a time (Joshua 20:6).

Scripture does mention the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas (Luke 3:2). Annas was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, which means that Caiaphas was not a blood relative of Annas and, consequently, likely not a blood relative of Aaron (John 18:12-13; Acts 4:5-6). We do not know if Annas was a descendant of Aaron, either. Therefore, it appears that the qualifications to be a high priest no longer included being a descendant of Aaron, thus signifying a change to the Law.

All of the other priests also were to be from the tribe of Levi and were to serve Aaron and his descendants (Numbers 18:1-7). The first mention of a priest being a chief is about the priest Eleazar (a son of Aaron—Numbers 3:2-4) who was the chief of the leaders of the tribe of Levi (Numbers 3:32) and succeeded Aaron as the high priest of Israel upon Aaron's death (Numbers 20:23-28). We first read of a *chief priest* in II Kings 25:18, long after the Law was instituted, but there are no references to *chief priests* in the Old Testament as is often done in the New Testament.<sup>37</sup> It appears that the Law was altered to accommodate having numerous chief priests serving at the same time. Chief priests are frequently mentioned in association with the scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 2:4; 16:21; 27:62-63; John 18:1-3).

Scribes are not mentioned in the Law of Moses or before God instituted His law through Moses. Initially, their role included compiling and keeping documents for the kings and priests of Israel (II Samuel 8:15-17; II Kings 22:8-13). Later, Ezra the high priest *and* scribe became skilled in the Law of Moses (Ezra 7:1-6, 11; Nehemiah 8:1-8); perhaps all such scribes were also priests. Although Ezra was a man of God and used by Him to restore the Law to Israel, Jeremiah prophesied of scribes as those who changed (made into a lie) the Law (Jeremiah 8:8). Scribes are collectively cast in a bad light in the New Testament (Matthew 7:28-29).

Pharisees and Sadducees (or people equivalent to their sects) are not mentioned until the New Testament. Like the scribes, the Pharisees took it upon themselves to be the lawyers and teachers of the

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<sup>37</sup> In only one instance is a specific chief priest mentioned in the New Testament (Sceva, whose sons were exorcists—Acts 19:11-14); in all other cases, *chief priests* are mentioned as a collective group and always in a negative context.



Law without the requirement of being of the tribe of Levi (Matthew 22:34-35; Luke 5:17; Acts 5:34; Philippians 3:5). They were a sect that judged others according to their strict interpretations of the Law—interpretations that were marred by their own sin (John 8:1-11; Matthew 15:1-3; 23:4, 27-28). The Sadducees were a sect of religious leaders who did not believe in the resurrection of the dead (Mark 12:18). Jesus lumped the chief priests, scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees together as those who were adulterating the word of God and misleading the people of Israel in the name of God.

**“You [*scribes and Pharisees*] hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you: ‘This people honors Me [*God*] with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me. But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.’”** (Matthew 15:7-9)

The purposes of the scribes and Pharisees in particular included usurping the responsibility of administering the Law from the Levites, likely for power and monetary gain (Mark 11:15-18; Luke 16:10-15). Jesus had much to say about their hypocrisy in Matthew 23:1-33 (see also Matthew 3:7; 16:1-4). Among other things, He referred to them as fools, snakes, and blind guides who turned their proselytes (converts) into sons of hell (Matthew 23:15-17, 24, 33). Consequently, Jesus warned His disciples to beware of the scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees and their teaching (Matthew 16:6, 12; Mark 12:38-40).

**Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples, saying: “The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; therefore all that they tell you, do and observe,<sup>38</sup> but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them.”** (Matthew 23:1-3)

Before the Apostle Paul (formerly Saul of Tarsus) was saved, he was a Pharisee who was educated by a leading Pharisee named Gamaliel (Acts 5:34; 22:3; 23:6). In accordance with his understanding of the Law of Moses, he believed that he was doing the will of God in his efforts to destroy the followers of Jesus (Galatians 1:13-14; Philippians 3:2-6; Acts 9:1-2; 22:4-5). In fact, he was the leading (chief) enemy of Christ before God saved him on the road to Damascus (I Timothy 1:12-15; Acts 9:1-16).

Brethren, we have one word of God (II Timothy 3:16-17) and yet we have many Christian denominations, all of which vary from each other in doctrines and traditions. Just like the chief priests, scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees, our religious leaders, theologians, clergy, and Bible teachers too often teach the precepts of man instead of the truth of God’s word. We are warned to beware of false teaching in the name of God (Galatians 1:6-12; 3:1-3; II Timothy 3:1-5; 4:3-4).

### ***Worship***

During the time of our Lord’s ministry, the people of Judea worshiped in synagogues on the sabbath. In the context of this point, a synagogue was a local building in which Jews met on the sabbath day to worship God in some manner (Matthew 4:23; 12:9-10; Luke 4:16; Acts 13:13-15). Such buildings are only mentioned in the books of Matthew through Acts. In a few instances, the Greek word translated as *synagogue*<sup>39</sup> refers to an assembly or congregation of people (Acts 13:43; James 2:2).

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<sup>38</sup> The people were to do what the Law of Moses commanded, not what the scribes and Pharisees interpreted the Law to mean.

<sup>39</sup> The word *synagogue* is translated from the Greek word *sunagōgee* (*The Englishman’s Greek Concordance of the New Testament*, George V. Wigram, Hendrickson Publishers, 2002, word reference number 4864).

The only places of worship described in the Old Testament were the tabernacle, which was specified under the Law of Moses, and the temple of God built by Solomon and later rebuilt after Israel's exile in the kingdom of Babylon. They were referred to as the house of God because He dwelt there in spirit form among His people (Exodus 23:19; 25:8; 29:43-46; I Kings 6:11-14). There was nothing equivalent to a synagogue mentioned or described in the Law of Moses, so it appears that worshiping in a synagogue was an addition to the Law.

As explained in Chapter 5, there are several different sabbath day observances described in the Law of Moses (Leviticus 23:1-44), and God's requirements for observing them were detailed and absolute. Those requirements included remaining in one's own dwelling to rest from doing any laborious work (Exodus 16:29; 35:2-3; Leviticus 23:3). The punishment for disobeying any of the requirements was death (Exodus 31:12-16). Leaving home on the sabbath day, therefore, was in direct disobedience to the Law.

It was common for Jesus to enter synagogues on the sabbath.<sup>40</sup> However, Scripture sometimes says that He entered *their* synagogues—He did not refer to them as God's synagogues (Matthew 4:23; 12:9; 13:54). He was entering the synagogues of the people and not houses of God, implying that the synagogues were established through their religious leaders and not as directed by God. If that is the case, why did our Lord go into them at all? He was taking the opportunity to teach where people were gathered to worship God (in their own manner), just as Paul also did (Mark 1:38-39; John 18:19-20; Acts 17:1-3).

**And Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about Him spread through all the surrounding district. And He began teaching in their synagogues and was praised by all. And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read. (Luke 4:14-16)**

There are two references about a synagogue in the book of Revelation, and both mention a synagogue of Satan (Revelation 2:9; 3:9). In these instances, John was prophetically writing to Jewish churches (assemblies, but not referred to as synagogues) that will exist after the rapture but before God has fully cleansed Israel from its sin. The churches will be persecuted by people from the synagogue of Satan—fellow Jews who falsely claim to be children of God while serving Satan. Because of the false teaching of the synagogues in the time of the ministry of Jesus and His disciples, I believe that those entities foreshadowed the future synagogue of Satan (Matthew 6:1-5; 10:17; 23:34-35).

Brethren, our church buildings today are only buildings. God considers any gathering of believers to be a church, and all believers are members of the church that is the body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:12-13, 27; Ephesians 1:22-23). There are no sabbath days (or any other holy days) in this dispensation of grace (Galatians 4:9-11; Colossians 2:16-17), so we can worship God anytime and anywhere.

### ***A Sabbath Day's Journey***

Because the people worshiped in synagogues on the sabbath, it meant that they had to leave their dwellings to get to the synagogues. Apparently, this was accounted for or justified by the religious leaders by creating a sabbath day's journey that allowed the people to travel a certain distance to get to and from their local synagogue on the sabbath day. This allowance for the journey, which was not

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<sup>40</sup> See Chapter 5 that explains why Jesus could go to synagogues on the sabbath.

included in the Law of Moses, was an addition to the Law because the people were to remain in their own dwellings on the sabbath.

**Then they [the disciples] returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. (Acts 1:12)**

One might say, however, that because the disciples walked a sabbath day's journey that such a journey must have been in accordance with the Law of Moses. There is no indication in Scripture that Jesus ascended into heaven on the sabbath day, so the record in Acts was merely saying how far the disciples walked after the ascension in a term of measurement that was familiar to the people of Judea at that time.

It appears, therefore, that the sabbath day's journey was a workaround option aimed to avoid breaking the Law of Moses. Brethren who erroneously think that we should obey the Ten Commandments do the same thing by not instituting the consequences for breaking them and by changing the sabbath day (without adhering to the specified requirements) to Sunday to meet their desires. Worse, however, is how many of us justify such things as lying, stealing, slander, and hatred despite what Scripture says (Ephesians 4:25-32).

### ***Washing of Hands***

The Law of Moses contained explicit requirements about what the Israelites could and could not eat (*clean* versus *unclean* animals, birds, fish, and insects) and certain restrictions regarding how to prepare food (Leviticus 11:1-47; Deuteronomy 14:3-21).<sup>41</sup> However, it did not say that the people were to wash their hands, whether ceremonially or otherwise, while eating their food. This requirement was added sometime later and had become a tradition upheld by the religious leaders.

**Then some Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, "Why do Your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread." And He answered and said unto them, "Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?" (Matthew 15:1-3)**

Washing one's hands in this context may seem to be a minor thing, but not to God and our Lord Jesus Christ. How many seemingly minor (and some major) traditions have we added to the word of God regarding our worship of Him? Please consider, among other things, calling church buildings the houses of God, turning our worship into a ritual or work, displaying crosses or the sign of the fish, observing holy days, enduring penance (self-punishment), and praising angels (Galatians 4:9-11; Colossians 2:16-23).

### ***The Feast of Dedication***

Several feasts or festivals are described in the Law of Moses that the Israelites were required to observe (Exodus 34:18-26; Leviticus 23:4-43; 25:8-12). However, neither the Feast of the Dedication mentioned in John 10:22, nor anything equivalent to it, is contained in the Law. Apparently, this particular feast (also called the Feast, or Festival, of Lights in sources other than the Bible) commemorated the supposed purification of the temple, the removal of the old polluted altar, and the

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<sup>41</sup> The only restrictions regarding how to prepare *clean* food are provided in Leviticus 11:31-40 and Deuteronomy 14:21. The Kosher requirements and restrictions for handling and preparing food today are much more numerous.

restoration of the worship of Jehovah by Judas Maccabeus in 164 B.C.<sup>42</sup> The Feast of Dedication, therefore, was added to the Law. The tradition is continued to this day through the observance of Hanukkah (or Chanukah).

**At that time the Feast of the Dedication took place at Jerusalem; it was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple in the portico of Solomon. (John 10:22-23)**

The above passage does not say that Jesus observed this feast, only that it was taking place at that time when He was in the temple. Jesus would have been guilty of disobeying the Law of Moses, thereby sinning against God the Father, had He observed it. Please consider the Christian holidays that we observe today and whether we are instructed to do so in Scripture. Have we not also added holy observances to the word of God, such as Christmas and Easter, and equating Sunday to the sabbath day?

### ***Selling in the Temple***

As mentioned earlier, some of the changes to the Law made by the religious leaders were for monetary gain. An example is provided for us regarding our Lord's aggressive response toward the buying and selling of items required for sacrifices and offerings that was being conducted in the temple of God—the temple had become a place of business. This appears to be a demonstration of anger and yet Jesus was sinless. I believe this is an example of being angry at sin and yet not in a sinful way (Ephesians 4:26-27; Galatians 1:6-10; 3:1-5).

**And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves. And He said to them, "It is written, 'My [God's] house shall be called a house of prayer'; but you are making it a robbers' den." (Matthew 21:12-13; see also Mark 11:15-18)**

Unfortunately, Christianity is viewed by many today as big business, and not without some merit. The word of God is misappropriated and abused by some for the purpose of monetary gain, prestige, and power (I Timothy 6:3-5). We need to endeavor to not fall into or be associated with such a trap that is dishonoring to God and our Lord Jesus Christ (I Timothy 6:6-10; Colossians 2:8; II Corinthians 11:12-15).

### ***Punishment for Adultery***

In the account in John 8:1-11, the scribes and Pharisees brought a woman before Jesus who had been caught in the act of adultery. They tested Jesus by saying that she should be stoned according to the Law of Moses and asking Him what He would do. They left without condemning her when He told them that the one among them without sin should cast the first stone. Jesus did not condemn the woman, either, and sent her off instructing her to sin no more (i.e., to stop her immorality).

Did Jesus disobey the Law by not agreeing with the accusers? No, because they were misusing the Law, for it specified that both the man *and* the women were to be put to death. She had been caught in the act of adultery, so the man involved was known. By judging only the woman, the scribes and the Pharisees had altered the Law to suit their own purposes, perhaps to cover up or justify their own immorality.

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<sup>42</sup> *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, Merrill F. Unger, Moody Press, Chicago, Third Edition (Thirty-second Printing), 1980.

**If there is a man who commits adultery with another man's wife, [even] one who commits adultery with his friend's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.** (Leviticus 20:10; see also Deuteronomy 22:22)

How often do we alter or ignore the word of God to justify our own beliefs or our own sin? We are quick to judge others without recognizing our own sin and hypocrisy (Matthew 7:1-5). Too often, we think and act just as the scribes and Pharisees did.

### ***Love Your Neighbor***

A command of the Law of Moses, and reiterated throughout Scripture, was to love your neighbor as yourself. As mentioned in Chapter 7, it was of such importance that, when combined with the command to love God completely, its true and full obedience meant that the entire Law was fulfilled (Matthew 22:34-40; Romans 13:8-10). Furthermore, *neighbor* meant anyone they (or we) had contact with, including strangers and even their (our) enemies (Romans 12:14-21).

**“You shall not hate your fellow countryman [brother, *Israelite*] in your heart; you may surely reprove your neighbor, but shall not incur sin because of him [*share in his guilt*]. You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons [children] of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord.”** (Leviticus 19:17-18)

**“When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the native [*born*] among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt; I am the Lord your God.”** (Leviticus 19:33-34)

However, the people were being taught otherwise by their spiritual leaders—they were being taught to hate their enemies. The teachers of the Law of Moses were altering Scripture to suit their purposes. They sounded authoritative by quoting a commandment from the Law, but only part of it; they ignored or hid the rest of it and added their own interpretation to it.

**“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I [*Jesus*] say to you, love your enemies and pray for [*bless*] those who persecute [*curse*] you, so that you may be sons [children] of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?”** (Matthew 5:43-47)

Pastors, Bible teachers, and others today often do the same thing, either because they misunderstand the purpose and meaning of a verse or passage or to intentionally mislead those being taught for some type of personal gain. They quote partial truths from Scripture while ignoring the context or changing the meaning. When a person says “The Bible says” to prove a point or position, we need to examine Scripture to see if it actually says it and if it is being properly used or applied (II Timothy 2:15; Acts 17:10-11).

## Traditions or the Truth?

The changes and misuse of the Law of Moses addressed above were among others that were not specifically described in Scripture (Mark 7:3-4). Jesus accused the scribes and the Pharisees of invalidating the word of God through their *many* traditions.

**He [Jesus] was also saying to them [the scribes and Pharisees], “You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God [the Law] in order to keep your tradition. For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘He who speaks evil of father or mother, is to be put to death’; but you say, ‘If a man says to his father or his mother, whatever I have that would help you is Corban (that is to say, given to God),’ you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or his mother; thus invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that.”** (Mark 7:9-13; see also Matthew 15:4-6)

Brethren, we need to keep these things in mind and evaluate how we treat the word of God. If we are honest, we will see that we, like the scribes and Pharisees, have changed the word God through additions and subtractions or simply ignore the teaching and commands directed to us to suit our own purposes. Some of those changes, directly related to the Law of Moses, are addressed in the next chapter.

How many Christian traditions do we follow that either are not found in Scripture or do not apply to us as members of the body of Christ in this dispensation of the grace of God? We need to examine what we are being taught and what we believe, and endeavor to handle the word of God accurately and to walk in a manner worthy of our salvation in Christ (I Thessalonians 5:21-22; Ephesians 4:1-3; Colossians 1:9-12).

**Be diligent [endeavor] to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling [rightly dividing] the word of truth.** (II Timothy 2:15)

## Chapter 10

### Christianity Today

**When you were dead in your transgressions [sins] and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He [God] made you alive together with Him [Christ], having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us [i.e., the Law of Moses], which was hostile [contrary] to us; and He [God] has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.** (Colossians 2:13-14)

**But now we have been released [delivered] from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter [the Law].** (Romans 7:6)

#### Christians and the Law Today

Are we still under the Law of Moses and required by God to obey it? I hope I have sufficiently demonstrated through Scripture that believers are not under the Law of Moses but under grace in this dispensation of the grace of God. Unfortunately, most Christian denominations and churches have incorporated various aspects of the Law into their doctrine and worship. We have the propensity to pick and choose which features, commands, and promises appeal to us without regard to the context of those truths. Furthermore, we seem to ignore all the consequences associated with not obeying the Law in its entirety.

Although not a comprehensive list, please consider the following ways in which Christianity today misappropriates components of the Law of Moses. Some have already been addressed; however, I have included them here to emphasize how Christian denominations and churches have molded requirements and promises of the Law into our worship in sincere yet mistaken ways. When we do so we are unwittingly demonstrating our misunderstanding of, or perhaps even our rebellion against, God and His word.

#### ***The Ten Commandments***

Even though God released us from the requirement of obeying the Law of Moses—including the Ten Commandments—by the work of Christ at the cross, many believers still think that we (and everyone else) should obey the Ten Commandments. They are considered sacred and are often present in some physical form in many of our churches. Many believers also agree that monuments or plaques of the Ten Commandments should remain at (or added to) public places, considering them fundamentally necessary in helping turn this country back to God.

As demonstrated earlier, *principles* of nine of the Ten Commandments (excluding keeping the sabbath day holy) apply now just as they did before God gave His Law to His people Israel through Moses. However, the Law of Moses included the entire Ten Commandments as well as all of the other commandments, statutes, and ordinances that Israel was required to keep or else suffer the consequences. We are in no position to say that God wants our country or the world to obey the Ten Commandments. When we do so we are misrepresenting God and contradicting Him, and are no better than the Pharisees who Jesus judged as hypocrites (Matthew 23:1-36).

Monuments presenting the Ten Commandments first started to be placed as donations in public parks, at schools, and in front of city and state municipal buildings by the *Fraternal Order of Eagles* beginning in 1955. The first donation occurred in 1955 at Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and was attended by director Cecil B. DeMille and actor Yul Brynner of the movie *The Ten Commandments*. This was prior to the theatrical release of the movie, which occurred in 1956. Several sites in my internet search on this subject indicate that the placement of the monuments across the country at that time apparently was financed by Cecil B. DeMille or the film production company to bring publicity for the pending release of his movie. The original placement of these monuments across the country, therefore, was for advertising purposes and not to convey godly or Christian morality or spirituality.

Since that time more monuments have been erected in public locations by Christian organizations and individuals with the intent of bringing God to the attention of the people—to remind them of the country’s supposed Christian roots and to turn them to God. In recent decades much litigation has occurred involving the removal of the monuments from public places because of interpretations of the constitutional separation of church and state. As removal of the public monuments began, so did the cry of *Persecution!* by Christian organizations that legally challenged the removals. Consequently, many individual Christians began claiming that perceived Christian rights supposedly guaranteed by the Constitution were being eroded.<sup>43</sup>

Brethren, this is not an issue that should be considered as persecution. In fact, believers should not want the placement of monuments, plaques, or inscriptions of the Ten Commandments anywhere, public or private (e.g., homes or churches). I say this for the following reasons:

- Displaying the Ten Commandments implies that we, the children of God, are or should be obeying them.
- God has taken the Law of Moses, including the Ten Commandments, out of our way. What authority do we have to tell the world that it should obey the Ten Commandments?
- Because of our sin nature, we cannot obey the Ten Commandments anyway, just as the Israelites could not obey them. We should not expect, therefore, the nonbelieving world to obey them and turn to God.
- Are we going to impose God’s penalties for disobeying each of the commandments through our legal system?
- Any religious monument is, in effect, an idol. By fighting the removal of monuments of the Ten Commandments, Christians are saying that the monuments themselves are important, thus making them idols.

Nonbelievers are unable to understand the word of God and cannot know what applies to them and what does not do so. Brethren, only the children of God have the ability to understand God’s word because we have the Holy Spirit dwelling in us (I Corinthians 2:14-16; Ephesians 1:15-21; Colossians 1:9-10). Unfortunately, too often we get a lot of things wrong because our sin gets in the way, mostly through pride and succumbing to false teaching (Romans 16:17-18; Galatians 1:6-9; I Timothy 6:3-5; II Timothy 4:1-4). Consequently, it is easy for us to send the wrong message to our fellow brethren and nonbelieving friends and strangers. Urging anyone to obey the Ten Commandments is a wrong message.

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<sup>43</sup> See my studies **Christian Suffering** and **Governing Authority** that address Christian rights and persecution from a scriptural perspective.



If we want to display Scripture in our own home or church, we have much to choose from that applies directly to us as members of the body of Christ and can claim as our own. For example, my wife and I have a framed cross-stitch of the gospel of salvation (from I Corinthians 15:1-4 that she stitched) in our home. I had scriptural notes at my desk at work to remind me that I was really working for God and, therefore, needed to do my best for my employer and coworkers.<sup>44</sup> Let us not support or encourage the placement of inscriptions of the Ten Commandments anywhere, because doing so implies that we should obey them to be obedient to God.

### ***The Christian Sabbath***

Keeping the sabbath day holy is the fourth commandment, and doing any work on that day was to be punished by death. In my youth I was taught that Sunday is equivalent to the sabbath day of the Ten Commandments. I heard pastors and others pray in church thanking God for “this sabbath day” during which everyone was gathered for worship. Brethren, there is no sabbath day or Christian sabbath in this dispensation of grace as previously explained in Chapter 5. If we proclaim Sunday as our sabbath day, we are effectively, though misguidedly, putting ourselves back under the Law of Moses.

### ***Holy Days***

I also addressed holy days other than the sabbath in Chapter 5. Because we are no longer obligated to keep the Law of Moses, there are no holy days, weeks, months, seasons, or years for us to observe in this dispensation of grace. Despite these Scriptural facts, the majority of believers celebrate Christian holy days and weeks. Instead of incorporating specific holy days and weeks from the Law of Moses, we have developed new ones, such as Christmas and Easter.

**However at that time, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those which by nature are no gods. But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again? You observe days and months and seasons and years. I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain.** (Galatians 4:8-11)

Brethren, there are no commandments for us to observe our Lord’s birthday or the days associated with His death, burial, and resurrection, nor are there any examples in Scripture of believers doing so. The origins of both Christmas and Easter—religious celebrations that began centuries after our Lord ascended into heaven—were closely tied with pagan rituals and worship, and the holidays continue to be so. Despite the efforts of many believers to justify these holidays as holy days by directing attention to the *true meanings* of Christmas and Easter, these justifications do not stand the test of Scripture and the holidays would have been included in Paul’s rebuke to the Galatian brethren had they existed in his day.

Some other national holidays such as Thanksgiving, Memorial Day, Veterans Day, and the 4<sup>th</sup> of July are also considered to be holy days by some American brethren. Some Christian denominations and independent churches here and around the world also try to incorporate (usually modified) observances from the Law including the Passover, the Day of Atonement, and Pentecost, while sometimes adding other Jewish holidays that are not in the Bible.

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<sup>44</sup> I was not advertising my faith or spirituality. A person would have had to sit at my desk to see my notes.

This is a serious issue, brethren, and one for which I have been judged for teaching. God provided everything we need to know in His word for us to believe, live each day, and worship Him in accordance with His will (II Timothy 3:16-17). When God says that there are no longer any holy observances, we need to believe Him and not incorporate observances from the Law or add them as we desire.

Is it possible to observe holidays without considering or treating them as holy days? I believe so, if we are careful. There are aspects of most, and perhaps all, current national holidays that can be enjoyed (or considered in remembrance) that can be done so without involving them in our worship of God. Brethren, we can be thankful any and every day that our Lord Jesus Christ—the Son of God—came to earth, died for our sins, and was resurrected for our justification and eternal life. We should not need special days to remember these things.

Please consider one more thought on this subject. If there is a particular time of day, or day of the week, that we personally want to devote ourselves to things of the Lord, that is acceptable as long as we do not consider those times or days as holy or in fulfillment of a commandment of God. Our personal discipline in our worship is between us and God and is not subject to judgment by others (Romans 14:5-9).

For example, there are no specific times for prayer designated in the Law of Moses or in Paul's letters to us, but we have examples in Scripture where children of God prayed at certain hours of the day (Psalm 55:16-17; Daniel 6:10; Acts 3:1; 10:9). Paul mentioned prayer often in his letters, but never referred to praying at a specific time of day (II Timothy 1:3). If we set aside certain times for the Lord, however, we need to be careful; we must not turn those times into works by taking pride in them or doing them to be seen by others (i.e., as a supposed witness to others or to demonstrate our spirituality—Matthew 6:1-6).<sup>45</sup>

### ***Churches as Temples***

Our Christian churches are often, but incorrectly, referred to as *houses of God*. Most of our church buildings have a sanctuary where the congregation meets for worship, and many have some form of altar in front of the pulpit. These are drawn from the sacred rooms and altar in the Old Testament tabernacle and temple,<sup>46</sup> when God considered these buildings to be His earthly sanctuary (His house) among His chosen people (Exodus 25:8-9; 29:43-46; I Kings 6:11-13). There are no sacred rooms or any other sacred place today because God is not dwelling among us.

In churches I attended, the altar was a table (usually ornate) that normally held an open Bible, candles, and other items important to the particular church or denomination. It was also used as a place to set the items used during a communion service, as well as being the initial meeting place for congregants who came forward during the pastor's invitation to salvation or prayer. If we have a table in our room of worship, I believe that it is inappropriate to call it an altar.

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<sup>45</sup> What is our real intent when we meet for Bible study or prayer in restaurants and other public places where our worship activities are on display for the people around us? Think about it.

<sup>46</sup> All required components of the tabernacle of God and how it was constructed are meticulously described in Exodus Chapters 25 – 27 and Chapters 35 – 40. The temple of God built by King Solomon (it was later rebuilt after its destruction and Judah's exile) is described in I Kings Chapters 5 – 8.

We do not know what kinds of buildings, or rooms of buildings, that presumably large groups of believers (i.e., too many to meet in a home) met in to worship God. We do know, however, that some churches (assemblies of believers) were small and did meet in homes. If a regular house was used, it is very likely that the room in which the brethren met was not considered to be a sanctuary and that it did not have an altar. If this was true for a home church, I submit that it was true for larger buildings or rooms used as meeting places. There was no need to copy the tabernacle or temple because the brethren were not subject to the Law as taught by Paul and his coworkers.

No instructions are provided in Scripture for what a church building should look like or contain. Strictly speaking, churches in this dispensation of grace are not buildings at all but are the group of believers that meet together for worship (Romans 16:3-5; Colossians 4:15; Philemon 1:1-2). Furthermore, each individual believer is a member of the church which is the body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:12-13). The smaller assemblies of believers, therefore, are representative sub-churches of the one true church consisting of all members of the body of Christ.

**The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Prisca [Priscilla] greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.** (I Corinthians 16:19)

**And He [God] put all things in subjection under His [Christ's] feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him [God] who fills all in all.** (Ephesians 1:22-23).

**Now you [brethren] are Christ's body, and individually members of it.** (I Corinthians 12:27)

Additionally, all believers of all time (beginning with Adam) are being built together into a dwelling of God by His Spirit, which is a holy temple in the Lord (Ephesians 2:19-22). The church that is the body of Christ, therefore, is only a part of the holy temple of God briefly mentioned by Paul. We should not even try to simulate this spiritual temple by constructing a sacred physical building. If there are enough brethren to meet for worship and fellowship in a building, that is good; however, let us not consider it to be a sacred building for it is just a building. If someone's home is of sufficient size, that is good, also.

### ***Priestly Garments***

The pastors (or *Reverends*) or other designated spiritual leaders of some Christian denominations and independent churches wear distinctive robes when leading a church service or other religious function (e.g., baptisms, weddings, and funerals). The robes are usually impressive and often have colors and accessory items that hold various symbolic meanings and importance. This practice is drawn (and modified) from Exodus 28 where the Lord God provided a detailed description of the garments the priests were required to wear in their service to God when in His presence.

Because the Law has been set aside, such requirements also no longer apply to us. Paul never includes the title of *priest* when describing church leadership, and never refers to believers in this dispensation as priests. It is presumptuous for our spiritual leaders, who have no greater access to God than any other believer (we are all one in Christ—Ephesians 2:13-18; Galatians 3:23-28), to assume the same role as the Levitical priests under the Law of Moses.

## ***Dietary Restrictions***

The Law of Moses includes a list of all types of animals that God described as *unclean* and were not to be eaten by the Israelites (Leviticus 11:1-23; Deuteronomy 14:3-21). Many Jews today still abide by these restrictions, or have modified them, and refer to *clean* foods prepared in a *clean* manner (which is also described in the Law—Leviticus 11:31-40; Deuteronomy 14:21) as a *Kosher* diet. According to Jewish tradition, Kosher food is food that is fit and proper for Jews to eat. Some believers also live according to a Kosher diet for reasons including its perceived health benefits and to be obedient to God.

There is nothing wrong, *per se*, in following a Kosher diet if it is not done religiously or in obedience to the Law of Moses; however, it may be difficult (or impossible) to separate the Kosher diet from the Jewish religion or the Law of Moses because those are its normal associations. As with the rest of the Law of Moses, the dietary restrictions contained in the Law no longer apply to us. Paul affirmed that no foods are forbidden in this dispensation of grace (Romans 14:14; Colossians 2:16-17).

**But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude; for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer. (I Timothy 4:1-5)**

We must be careful, however, not to knowingly offend anyone over food we eat or serve. To do so reveals our own arrogance (or obliviousness) and is a form of judgment against them. That is, even though we know all foods are okay to eat (i.e., nothing is *unclean*), not everyone has the same spiritual understanding or the same commitment to health. For example, it would be inconsiderate and wrong to serve ham or shrimp to a Jew who is abiding by a Kosher diet, any food contrary to any nonbeliever's religious diet (e.g., beef to a Hindu), foods that are restricted by the diet of a vegetarian or vegan, an alcoholic beverage to an alcoholic person, foods that would be harmful to a person with diabetes, etc. We need to consider others as more important than ourselves (Philippians 2:3-4).

The above statement about all foods being okay to eat needs clarification. The verse I Timothy 4:3 refers to food *created by God* and includes foods that were formerly considered to be *unclean* under the Law (e.g., pork and shellfish). Some of our foods are so processed and chemically based (including some vegetarian foods) that they are not healthy for us to eat or drink—they are developed by man or contaminated through manmade processes and consuming too much can lead to various health problems. Furthermore, even natural food should be eaten with moderation—God has not given us license to eat or drink as much as we want (Proverbs 23:19-21; Romans 13:13-14; Ephesians 5:18). To do so is not only a bad reflection on God and our Lord Jesus Christ through our lack of self-discipline, but can result in obesity and alcoholism and their associated health issues and diseases. Although the passage of I Corinthians 6:18-20 describes our body as a temple of the Holy Spirit regarding sexual immorality, I believe the same principle applies to any abuses of our body, including those involving eating and drinking.

Sacrificing animals to idols was common at the time by the Gentiles, and some brethren believed that they should not eat meat that was sacrificed to idols, which was forbidden under the Law of Moses (Exodus 34:11-16; see also Acts 15:19-20, 28-29). Paul addressed this concern with the Corinthian

brethren concluding that, although it did not matter that the meat was from a sacrifice, eating such meat should not be done if it offended a fellow believer (I Corinthians 8:1-13). Furthermore, even though no foods are unclean because we are not under the Law, Paul exhorted the brethren who understood that it was okay to eat all food not to cause those who did not yet understand to stumble in their faith or service to God by eating certain foods (Romans 14:1-23). Again, we need to consider others as more important than ourselves. We can, however, take opportunities to humbly (i.e., without judgment) share with our fellow brethren (from Scripture) that there are no longer food restrictions in this dispensation of grace.

It seems that more and more people, including brethren, are adhering to vegetarian and vegan diets for various reasons. This is fine for believers if we are not doing so in obedience to a commandment of God, for He revealed to us that we can eat meat. Unfortunately, it is not uncommon for believers who eat meat (i.e., the flesh of any animals) to judge those who choose to be some form of vegetarian. Likewise, vegetarian brethren may judge believers who eat meat. For the reasons stated above, neither should judge the other (Romans 14:1-3).

I must add another item for your consideration of which I am uncertain regarding obedience to God. God told Noah and his family after the flood that they could eat any animal—every beast of the earth, every bird of the sky, everything that creeps on the ground, and all of the fish of the sea—along with the green plants that they had already been eating. Apparently, the descendants of Adam were vegetarian until that time (Genesis 9:1-3).<sup>47</sup> They could eat everything except one thing: the blood of the animals because blood represents life itself (Genesis 9:4-6). This restriction was later incorporated into the Law of Moses by the Lord God (Leviticus 17:14; Deuteronomy 12:20-25).

When the Jewish leaders (apostles and elders—Acts 15:1-2) of the kingdom believers in Jerusalem acknowledged the apostleship and ministry of Paul to the Gentiles (i.e., the gospel of the uncircumcision—Galatians 2:1-10), they asked that Paul teach the brethren not to eat blood (Acts 15:19-21, 28-29). The context of this request was to avoid offending the Jews in the Gentile cities who were abiding by the Law. Paul never specifically contradicted this request in his letters to us, so *perhaps* the pre-Law commandment to Noah might remain to this day. I do not know the answer but refrain from eating blood or blood-based foods that are common in some cultures; however, I do not judge those who do eat them.

Before closing this subject, please consider the following thought regarding the account of Peter and the Gentile Cornelius recorded in Acts 10:1-48. In some type of vision to Peter, God revealed that nothing was considered unholy or unclean anymore by showing him all kinds of animals and creatures together (Acts 10:9-16). Was God changing a requirement of the Law of Moses at this point by telling Peter he could eat anything? I believe that He was not doing so because Jesus said that nothing would change in the Law until everything in the Law and the Prophets had been fulfilled.

It is important to understand that when Peter experienced this vision, Paul had already been saved and had been appointed by God as the apostle of the Gentiles. That is, God had already instituted His

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<sup>47</sup> Later, as part of the Law of Moses, God differentiated between *clean* and *unclean* animals regarding what His people could eat (*unclean* animals ate blood or other dead animals); now, in this dispensation of grace, no animals are *unclean*. See my studies **Adam, Noah, and Creation—What Does Scripture Say?** that provide background scriptural context that I hope you will consider.

dispensation of grace and had set aside the Law of Moses but had not revealed these truths to Peter and the other apostles yet. Also, the vision was not really about food but about showing Peter that the Gentiles were no longer considered to be unholy or unclean by God so that he could go to and meet with Cornelius who was a Roman centurion (Acts 10:1-2, 28-29).

I do not believe that Peter understood the full significance of his vision or the subsequent salvation of Cornelius and his friends at the time these things occurred (Acts 10:44-47; 11:17). Peter realized it later when he recalled this event during Paul's defense of his ministry before the other apostles, for it was through Paul that God revealed His eternal purpose to the other apostles (Acts 15:1-12; Galatians 2:1-9; Ephesians 3:1-12). Therefore, God was not revising the Law through the vision to Peter, but was preparing him to hear the message of grace through Paul, which included that the Law had been set aside and that there was no longer a difference between Jews and Gentiles. Peter learned and understood these truths from Paul, but was later confronted by Paul for his hypocrisy (Galatians 2:11-21), something that perhaps all of us are guilty of regarding the word of God and our walk as believers.

### ***Tithing***

Some denominations and independent churches require or strongly encourage their members to tithe a percentage of their personal income (either gross or net income) *to the Lord* as commanded by God, usually ten percent. This church ordinance is based on the Law of Moses where tithing of possessions (e.g., crops, herds, money) in specific measures or portions was instituted to support the priestly tribe of Levi that God set aside to serve Him as well as those who were in need (Leviticus 27:30-34; Numbers 18:21-32; Deuteronomy 14:22-29). Although the designated tithe for certain things was ten percent, there were multiple tithes. It appears, therefore, that the required tithe totaled substantially more than ten percent of a person's possessions or earnings.

We are not required to tithe in this dispensation of grace—we have no such commandment or ordinance from God. The Apostle Paul never mentions tithing in his letters to us. That certainly does not mean that we are not to give a portion of what we have *back to God*. The principle of giving to or supporting those who minister to us and helping those who are in need applies to us just as the principles of nine of the Ten Commandments apply to us (Romans 12:10-13; I Corinthians 16:1-4; I Timothy 5:17-18). Paul never said how much we should give, but said that we should give as we are able (or, in accordance with how we prosper—I Corinthians 16:2). He commended the Macedonian brethren for giving more than they were able to help the Jewish brethren in Jerusalem who were in need (II Corinthians 8:1-5; Romans 15:26-27).

**Now this I [*Paul*] say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do [give] just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. (II Corinthians 9:6-7)**

Whatever we decide to give to those who minister the word of God to us or to help people (believers and nonbelievers) who are in need is between us and God. Our giving can be in the form of money, food, clothing, or other items as God has prospered us. If we are unable to give something tangible, then I believe that giving our time to help others is also giving back to God. Whatever we give, we should do so with love and not out of compulsion or obligation. Neither should we do so to be noticed by others, to receive some type of repayment, or to get a tax break because it would no longer be a gift from our

heart (Matthew 6:1-4). If we believe that we should tithe in obedience to God, we are putting ourselves back under the Law of Moses.

### ***Water Baptism***

Nearly all Christian denominations, as well as most independent churches, either require or strongly encourage members to be baptized with water for some particular purpose. Reasons for being baptized include one or more of the following: obedience to God's command; to be saved; for the remission of sins; to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit; to follow Jesus in baptism; as a symbol of our Lord's death, burial, and resurrection; to become a member of the family of God; to become a member of the local church; as a witness to nonbelievers; etc. Methods regarding how a person should be baptized also vary greatly depending on denominational or church doctrine. But should we be water baptized at all?<sup>48</sup>

Perhaps few brethren understand that water baptism is rooted in the Law of Moses and that it was implemented through John the Baptist and later Jesus and His disciples in fulfillment of prophecy. In accordance with the Law, priests were required to purify themselves with water before entering the holy rooms in the tabernacle and temple (Exodus 29:1-4; 30:17-21; 40:12). The washing of water symbolically cleansed them of their sin so that they could approach the presence of God without dying because of their sin.<sup>49</sup> Prophetically, Israel will be a kingdom of priests as previously discussed. God will *sprinkle water* (either literally or figuratively) on the people of Israel to cleanse them of all sin (Ezekiel 36:25), and they will automatically do all things in accordance with God's will. Therefore, every child of God in the future kingdom will be considered as a priest.

Of all the reasons listed above for being water baptized, only the first four can be supported by Scripture. However, even those four reasons do not apply in this dispensation of grace. The other reasons for being baptized have been developed through denominational or church doctrine. Personally, I was water baptized twice. The first time was as an infant because it was required, for reasons I do not know, by the church my parents attended. The second time was as teenager and I was taught that it was in obedience to God, to follow Jesus in baptism,<sup>50</sup> to be a witness to nonbelievers, and to become a member of that specific church. I now consider those baptisms as contrary to the will of God.

When John the Baptist and Jesus' disciples performed water baptism, it was in obedience to God and it was for the remission of sins (following sincere repentance). Therefore, water baptism was required for salvation (Matthew 3:5-6; 28:19-20; Mark 1:4-5; 16:15-16). Beginning at Pentecost, those who repented of their sins and were baptized also received the gift of the Holy Spirit as prophesied (Joel 2:28-29; Acts 2:17-18, 37-38).

We need to recognize that the gospel associated with this baptism for remission of sins was the gospel of the kingdom (Matthew 3:1-6; 4:17; 10:5-8; Mark 16:15-16). The good news was that Israel's

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<sup>48</sup> See my study **Should We Be Baptized?** that addresses all the baptisms in Scripture and why Paul refers to *one baptism* in Ephesians 4:4-6.

<sup>49</sup> Sprinkling of water for purification also applied to people other than the priests (Numbers 19:14-19; Psalm 51:5-9). This is why the preaching of water baptism by John the Baptist was not considered unusual by the people of Israel—they were expecting someone who would come to baptize them (John 1:19-25; see also Matthew 3:7).

<sup>50</sup> Jesus was not baptized for repentance and remission of sins because He was sinless. Instead, He was baptized to fulfill all righteousness and was identified as the Son of God by God the Father at His baptism (Matthew 3:13-17). No one else could be proclaimed as such when baptized, so we cannot follow Jesus in baptism.

long-promised kingdom was imminent, if only Israel repented and turned to God (Acts 1:4-8). The people of Israel did not do so during our Lord's ministry to them; instead, they crucified Him. However, shortly after Pentecost, the Apostle Peter reiterated their need to repent so that Jesus, their Messiah, would return and establish His kingdom (Acts 3:17-26). They continued to reject the witness of God, however, as demonstrated by the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:51-60).

Brethren, the gospel of the kingdom is not our good news. The overall good news to us is the gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20:24; Ephesians 3:1-3) and it is centered on the gospel of salvation, which is that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised up from the dead. For us, therefore, Christ's death is good news. Please compare this with Peter's messages to the people of Israel where he accused them of killing their Messiah and that they needed to repent for doing so (Acts 2:22-23, 36-39; 3:11-21). The Apostle Paul never preached to the Gentiles (or the Jews to whom he also ministered) that they killed their Messiah and must repent and be baptized for the remission of sins so that God would send Jesus to establish His kingdom. This perspective is not taught in very many churches, but I encourage you to search the Scriptures and see for yourself.

The purpose of water baptism changed beginning with the salvation of Paul because his baptism occurred *after* he believed the words of our glorified Lord (i.e., after he was saved by grace) and *after* he miraculously regained his sight (Acts 9:1-19). The Bible does not say that he was told by Christ or the disciple Ananias to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins. Paul baptized some brethren early in his ministry and performed many miracles as a witness to the Jews to prove to them that his apostleship and message were from God (I Corinthians 1:12-25; II Corinthians 12:12). Sometime during his ministry, however, water baptism was set aside by God entirely.

For further clarification, when Paul traveled to a Gentile city, he would go to the synagogue first to explain to the Jewish worshipers who Christ was according to the Law and the Prophets (Acts 13:13-41; 17:1-3). Because the Jews required a sign to believe God (I Corinthians 1:22-25), Paul performed miracles and baptized with water (Acts 16:13-15, 25-34; 18:1-8). This continued until the Jews proved their disbelief and Paul announced that the word of God was going to the Gentiles (Acts 13:44-47; 18:5-6; 28:23-28). After the time period covered by the book of Acts, Paul no longer went to the synagogues and could no longer perform miracles; the sign gifts had ended because God was no longer working with or through the nation of Israel (I Corinthians 13:8-13; Philippians 2:25-27; I Timothy 5:23; II Timothy 4:20).

Although he baptized some people for a short time, Paul was not sent to baptize as the other apostles were sent to do (I Corinthians 1:17; compare with Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:14-16; Acts 2:37-38). When God had fully set Israel and His promises to the nation aside because of its continued disbelief, it was revealed to Paul through Christ that there is only one baptism in this dispensation of grace.

**There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling [salvation]; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.** (Ephesians 4:4-6)

This *one baptism* is a spiritual baptism performed by the Holy Spirit to identify us with Christ (Romans 6:3-7); that is, the Holy Spirit is the baptizer—He baptizes us into the body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:12-13; Galatians 3:27-28). This is a very important point, brethren, because at Pentecost those who repented and were water baptized were then baptized by Christ with the Holy



Spirit as promised; that is, Christ was the baptizer (Matthew 3:11; Acts 1:4-5; 2:38). Our one spiritual baptism has nothing to do with imparting spiritual gifts to us as occurred at Pentecost.

Brethren, water baptism is not a part of God's instructions to us in this dispensation of grace. If we believe and teach that we should be water baptized, for whatever reason, we are putting ourselves back under the Law of Moses and are being disobedient to God.

### ***Christian Nationalism***

**If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.** (II Chronicles 7:14—KJV)

It is not unusual to see the above verse referenced or fully written (usually in the *King James Version*) on highway billboards and on posters or hand-held signs at sporting and other events with substantial media coverage across the United States. The message that is sincerely trying to be conveyed is that if America returns to its Christian roots and obeys the commandments of God, then God will restore our land to Himself. Unfortunately, this and similar verses are being taken out of context and never were intended for anyone but the nation of Israel. It is using Scripture incorrectly and is seriously wrong.

There is a widely believed but gravely mistaken impression among many Americans, including believers and those who falsely profess to be Christians (through various denominational conceptions of Christianity or how to become a Christian), that the United States was founded as a Christian nation. This is the very heart of a long-standing evangelical or conservative Christian movement in this country currently referred to by some proponents as *Christian nationalism*.<sup>51</sup> Brethren, America never has been and never will be God's chosen nation or a Christian nation in any scriptural sense. We are not Israel, nor are we spiritual Israel, and cannot claim God's promises to that nation.

In the above verse, the Lord God had appeared (by some means—a dream or vision) to King Solomon after Solomon had completed construction of the temple of God in Jerusalem. Israel was prosperous at the time, mostly because God was honoring His promises to the former King David, who was Solomon's father (II Samuel 7:12-17; I Kings 2:1-4). God warned Solomon that if He had to punish the people of Israel and their land for their sins, He would forgive them and restore their land only if they humbled themselves before God and turned from their wicked ways (II Chronicles 7:11-14). In this communication from God, He was reiterating the promises and consequences associated with His requirement for full obedience to His entire covenant with Israel—the commandments, statutes, and ordinances of the Law of Moses.

Although Solomon was used mightily by God, he was disobedient and the people of Israel were disobedient (I Kings 11:9-13). Because of his disobedience, God divided Israel into two kingdoms during the reign of Solomon's son and the nation was never restored. In accordance with prophecy, however, the nation will be restored in the future (after the rapture). The tribes of Israel will be reunited by the will of God in the land that He promised them (Ezekiel 36:22-28; 37:15-28).

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<sup>51</sup> I was first exposed to similar teaching propagated by the Christian organization *Moral Majority* in the late 1970s, but the same concepts go back to the time of the Puritans in New England, long before we were a sovereign nation, and later through the expansionist principles of *Manifest Destiny*.

Brethren, it is very presumptuous—and wrong—to claim for ourselves the promises given exclusively to the nation of Israel. It is also presumptuous for us to think we can succeed where Israel failed. Furthermore, to claim these promises means that we would have to completely obey the Law of Moses—we would need to become sinless. Trying to do so ignores the fact that we have a sin nature and will continue to sin, and nullifies the work of Christ at the cross for us.

There is nothing about *Christian nationalism* that is in accordance with the will of God. The proponents of this movement do not obey the Law of Moses because they cannot do so (nor should they even try to do so). To try to get the rest of the country to be obedient to God denies their own disobedience and is extremely hypocritical. God is not working through a nation or nations today but through individual believers regardless of the nation in which they live. Each child of God is an ambassador for Christ, representing Him in this sinful world (II Corinthians 5:20-21; Philippians 3:20-21).

### **Christians and the Law Summarized**

There are undoubtedly more ways in which Christianity has incorrectly appropriated aspects of the Law of Moses into our doctrine and worship. Yes, there are principles of the Law that apply to us just as they did before God gave His Law through Moses. However, the literal commandments, statutes, and ordinances of the Law applied only to the nation of Israel and none of the associated promises or consequences are directed to us. We need to keep in mind that God does not want us to obey the Law because He released us from it.

Each of the above examples represents or is the basis for some form of work, but we are justified by faith apart from works. When we incorporate them into our worship, we are not unlike the scribes and Pharisees who misused the Law for their own purposes and, consequently, misled the people of Israel. We are not to put ourselves back under the Law or develop our own doctrine to modify or replace it.

**You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law [*of Moses*], or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? (Galatians 3:1-3)**

## Chapter 11

### Old and New Testaments

As noted in the beginning of this study, the standard division of the Bible is between the Old and New Testaments. The name *Old Testament* is generally considered to be the Law of Moses because it is referred to as the *old* or *first* testament (covenant) in the New Testament (II Corinthians 3:14-15; Hebrews 9:15). But what does the name *New Testament* refer to? It is usually drawn from the account of the last supper, when Jesus was observing the Passover with His disciples in accordance with the Law of Moses (Luke 22:7-16).

**And in the same way He [Jesus] took the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup [wine]<sup>52</sup> which is poured out [shed] for you is the new covenant [testament] in My blood.”** (Luke 22:20)

When considering the most common English Bible versions, the word *testament* appears to be limited to the New Testament of the KJV and the *New King James Version* (NKJV). Other versions replace the word with *covenant*, which is equivalent and probably more appropriate when considering the context of similar uses in the Old Testament.<sup>53</sup> Consequently, the standard Bible division titles *Old Testament* and *New Testament* are holdovers from the KJV.

So, what is a covenant? Generally, a covenant is a binding agreement or legal contract between two or more parties, especially for the performance of some action. Rental agreements and mortgages (or any bank loans) are covenants, as are home-owner agreements. In many professions an employee signs an agreement with the employer, and some, particularly government jobs, also require the verbal pledge of an oath before beginning employment. Depending on the culture, people getting married often recite marriage vows. These are all types of covenants.

There are many covenants in the Bible. The primary ones that have the most wide-ranging application include covenants God made with Noah (Genesis 9:8-17), Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3; 22:15-18), and David (II Samuel 7:8-17). God’s covenant with Noah was an everlasting covenant and is still in effect. His covenants with Abraham and David, both involving Israel’s prophesied kingdom, have yet to be fulfilled. This study has focused on the covenant that God made with Israel through His prophet Moses—the Law of Moses. The people of Israel agreed to obey the Law, and we have seen the promises and consequences depending on their obedience.

Although the title *Old Testament* refers to the Law of Moses, we have seen that the Law was not instituted until after God delivered Israel from bondage in Egypt, so everything in Scripture up to that time is not covered by the Law. Furthermore, we have seen that Jesus and His disciples were under the jurisdiction of the Law and that His disciples continued to obey the Law through the book of Acts in obedience to Jesus’ commands. We do not learn that we are no longer under the Law but under grace until it is explained in the letters by the Apostle Paul (and as he began preaching—Acts 13:38-39). From a

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<sup>52</sup> Or, *fruit of the vine* (Matthew 26:29).

<sup>53</sup> In the KJV, the Greek word *diatheke* (*The Englishman’s Greek Concordance of the New Testament*, George V. Wigram, Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2002, word reference number 1242) is translated as *testament* 13 times and as *covenant* 20 times. It is always translated as *covenant* in my copies of the NASB, *New International Version*, and *English Standard Version*, and all but twice in my NKJV (translated as *testament* in II Corinthians 3:14 and Hebrews 9:16, but *covenant* would also have been correct).

practical standpoint, therefore, the Old Testament continued through the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and into Acts.

What about the period of time covered by Paul's letters, from the time of his salvation through the moment we are caught up to meet our Lord (the rapture)? I have already briefly explained this to be the dispensation of the grace of God as part of the revelation of the mystery by our glorified Lord Jesus Christ to Paul. And what about after the rapture? As I discussed to some degree, after that time God will redeem His chosen nation Israel and write the Law of Moses on their hearts and He refers to it as a *new covenant* (testament). But what is this new covenant based on?

## A New Covenant

As noted above, Jesus referred to the new covenant with His disciples after eating the Passover, which is also recorded in Matthew 26:28, Mark 14:24, and I Corinthians 11:25 (the communion service) where He said that the wine represented the new covenant in His blood that would be shed for many. The account in Matthew 26:28 specifically says that His blood would be shed for the forgiveness of sins. Has this covenant been fulfilled? To begin answering this question, we need to go back to the Old Testament.

Only once is a new covenant mentioned in the Old Testament—by the Prophet Jeremiah—and it is a replacement of the previous covenant, which is the Law of Moses. The Prophet Ezekiel also refers to the same new covenant without calling it as such (Ezekiel 36:22-28; 37:24-28). Even before those prophecies, Moses, after leading Israel in the wilderness for 40 years, also prophesied about Israel's future rebellion against God, their subsequent restoration by God and the forgiveness of their sins—the same new covenant later prophesied by Jeremiah and Ezekiel (Deuteronomy 29:4, 22-28; 30:1-6).

**“Behold, days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant [*Law of Moses*] which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the Lord. “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the Lord, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the Lord, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.” (Jeremiah 31:31-34)**

Why was there a need for Israel to have a new covenant? As we have seen, the Law of Moses—the *first covenant* in this context (Hebrews 8:6; 9:15)—was righteous but it condemned Israel and the whole world to spiritual death because of our sinfulness. The Bible records how Israel repeatedly rebelled against God through their disobedience, idol worship, and persecution and putting to death of God's prophets (including John the Baptist), His Son, and the disciple Stephen. Because the Law in itself could not make anyone righteous, therefore, it was unprofitable (Hebrews 7:14-22). Something else was needed to fulfill the requirements and promises of the Law, but God had that all worked out from the beginning.

Moses, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel spoke of this new covenant that involved the complete forgiveness of Israel's sins so that they would serve God completely and perfectly (Deuteronomy 30:6; Jeremiah

31:33-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27; 37:24). The book of Hebrews explains to the Jewish kingdom brethren how these prophecies will be fulfilled; that is, what God provided to enable the fulfillment of them. Please consider the following passages that speak of the new covenant and how they refer back to these prophecies and the Law of Moses.

**But now He [Christ] has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second. For finding fault with them [people of Israel], He says, "Behold, days are coming, says the Lord, when I will effect a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; not like the covenant [Law of Moses] which I made with their Fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; for they did not continue in My covenant, and I did not care for [turned away from] them, says the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the House of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put [imprint] My laws into their minds, and I will write them on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be My people. And they shall not teach everyone his fellow citizen, and everyone his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for all will know Me, from the least to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more." When He said, "A new covenant," He has made the first [the Law] obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear. (Hebrews 8:6-13)**

**For this reason He [Christ] is the mediator of a new covenant [testament], so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant [testament—Law of Moses], those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. For where a covenant [testament] is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it [testator]. For a covenant is valid only when men are dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it lives. Therefore even the first covenant was not inaugurated without blood. For when every commandment had been spoken by Moses to all the people according to the Law, he took the blood of the calves and the goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, "This is the blood of the covenant which God commanded you." And in the same way he sprinkled both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry with the blood. And according to the Law, one may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. (Hebrews 9:15-22)**

**Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He [Christ], having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time onward until His enemies be made a footstool for His feet. For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us; for after saying, "This is the covenant that I [God] will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws upon their heart, and on their mind I will write them," He then says, "And their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." Now where there is forgiveness [remission] of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin. (Hebrews 10:11-18)**

The following information and conclusions can be drawn from these passages:

- Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, one that is better than the Law of Moses (Hebrews 8:6-7; 9:15).
- This new covenant is between God and Israel (Hebrews 8:8-12). God will:
  - Put His laws (the Law of Moses) into their minds and write them on their hearts (Hebrews 8:10; 10:16).
  - Be Israel's God and they will be His people (Hebrews 8:10).
  - Forgive the people of Israel and will not remember their sins (Hebrews 8:12; 10:17).
- The new covenant will make the old one (the Law) obsolete (Hebrews 8:13).
- The Law required the shedding of blood of animals to cover the sins of the people (Hebrews 9:18-22); however, those sacrifices never took away their sins (Hebrews 10:11).
- The new covenant required shed blood, also—Christ's blood (Hebrews 9:15). His sacrifice at the cross was for sins for all time (Hebrews 10:12-14).
- With forgiveness through Christ's shed blood, there is no longer any offering for sin (Hebrews 10:18).

I hope it is evident that the shedding of Christ's blood at the cross is the basis for this new covenant, for through it Israel would be forgiven and would realize all of the promises stated in the Law of Moses. This brings us back to the last supper where our Lord compared the wine to His blood of the new covenant that was about to be shed. He was referring, therefore, to the same new covenant prophesied in the Old Testament and later explained in the book of Hebrews.

Christ's blood has been shed, but has the new covenant been fulfilled? Not yet. Complete fulfillment will not occur until God restores Israel to its promised land and redeems the people by imprinting the Law on their minds and writing it on their hearts. The people will be completely and forever forgiven of their sins through the shed blood of Christ. Has any part of it been fulfilled?

### **The Last Supper (and Communion)**

It is a fact that Christ died on the cross and shed His blood for our forgiveness, and that His sacrifice covers sins for all time (Hebrews 10:10-12; Romans 3:25). Everyone who believes the gospel of salvation—that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised up from the dead—is saved from the consequences of their sins because of the shed blood of Christ (Romans 3:21-26; 5:6-11; 6:3-11; 8:1-4). But is this what Jesus was talking about at the last supper?

Please consider all three accounts of our Lord's words at the last supper regarding the new covenant or testament.

**For this [wine] is My blood of the covenant [new testament], which is poured out [shed] for many for forgiveness [the remission] of sins.** (Matthew 26:28)

**And He [Jesus] said to them, "This [wine] is My blood of the covenant [new testament], which is poured out [shed] for many.** (Mark 14:24)

**And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup [wine] which is poured out [shed] for you is the new covenant [testament] in My blood."** (Luke 22:20)

Jesus was not proclaiming the gospel of salvation at this time—He did not do so until He did through Paul. As noted in the previous section, the new covenant He was referring to was the same new covenant prophesied by Jeremiah and spoken of by Moses and Ezekiel. That is, Jesus was proclaiming to His disciples that He was about to shed His blood and that it would be for the forgiveness of the sins of His people so that they could inherit their prophesied kingdom. His shed blood, therefore, was required to fulfill those prophesies. Furthermore, the *many* mentioned in Matthew 26:28 and Mark 14:24 were the *called* or *sanctified* of Israel (Hebrews 9:15; 10:14) and not Jews and Gentiles without distinction.

Both the old covenant (the Law) and the new covenant, referred to by Jesus and explained in Hebrews, were between God and His chosen nation of Israel. According to God's covenant with Abraham, God would make him into a great nation (Israel) and that the Gentile nations would be blessed through his seed—Christ (Genesis 12:1-3; 22:18; Galatians 3:16). The covenant with Abraham, therefore, will be fulfilled when the new covenant with Israel is fulfilled. The Gentile nations are not being blessed in this dispensation of grace, for Israel has not been redeemed by God and there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles. God's covenant with David will also be fulfilled when the new covenant is fulfilled when Christ (the son of David—Matthew 1:1) rules over Israel and the Gentile nations as the King of kings and Lord of lords (Ezekiel 37:24-28; Revelation 19:16; 20:5).

But what about the communion service, as we call it, that was spoken of by Paul? Does it not say the same thing as Jesus said at the last supper, thus making a direct application to us? What does Scripture say?

**While they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out [shed] for many for forgiveness [remission] of sins. But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom."** (Matthew 26:26-29; see also Mark 14:22-25)

**When the hour had come, He [Jesus] reclined at the table, and the apostles with Him. And He said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I shall never again eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He said, "Take this and share it among yourselves; for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine from now on until the kingdom of God comes." And when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup which is poured out [shed] for you is the new covenant in My blood."** (Luke 22:14-20)

**For I [Paul] received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant [new testament] in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. (I Corinthians 11:23-26)**

Regarding the communion service, Paul began by reminding the Corinthian believers that he had received from the Lord—our glorified Lord Jesus Christ through a revelation—the observance that he was about to further explain or reinforce. Keep in mind that Paul did not talk about his own personal thoughts or his interpretation about the last supper or communion—he told the Corinthians what our Lord instructed him to say. What Paul conveyed to the Corinthian brethren, and us, differed from that which Jesus said to His disciples. In what way, and why did he do so? Please consider the following:

- At the last supper in observance of the Passover, Jesus said that His blood was about to be shed for many for the remission of their sins. As discussed above, the *many* would be from among the people of Israel when God redeemed His people. In the communion service, however, Paul left out the forgiveness of sins part even though Christ died for our sins; our observance is not about Israel's future redemption.
- At the last supper, Jesus said that He would not eat the Passover feast again until He would do so in His Father's kingdom. He was referring to the prophesied kingdom that was proclaimed as *at hand* (imminent) by John the Baptist, Jesus Himself, and His disciples (Matthew 3:1-2; 4:17; 10:7; see also Acts 3:17-26), and for which they would be resurrected to serve with Him (Matthew 19:27-28).
- Jesus did not tell His disciples to repeat the eating of the bread and the drinking of the cup, and there is no record in Scripture that they did so. It was a one-time occasion associated with that specific Passover observance so that the disciples would remember what Jesus was about to do for them. The revelation by Christ to Paul, however, said *for as often as we eat the bread and drink the cup*, meaning that the observance was to be repeated (although not at any particular time because there are no holy days in this dispensation of grace).
- At the last supper, Jesus said to eat the bread and drink of the cup in remembrance of Him. Even though He told them He would be put to death, they did not yet understand this (Luke 24:36-47). They did, however, expect the kingdom to be established soon because that is what they had been preaching (Matthew 10:5-7; see also Acts 1:6).
- Paul said to partake of communion to proclaim Christ's death until He comes, which Jesus did not say to His disciples. It is to be done to remind ourselves of His sacrificial death on the cross for us and repeated until the rapture when Christ comes to gather us unto Himself (instead of His coming to establish Israel's promised kingdom).
- Furthermore, Paul revealed that it was also to be an occasion of self-examination of our individual conduct as we humbly remember what Christ did for us at the cross, something that Jesus did not mention at the last supper (I Corinthians 11:27-32).

There are important differences, therefore, between what Jesus told His disciples at the last supper and what our glorified Lord Jesus Christ instructed Paul to tell us. But did not Paul quote part of the new covenant? Yes, he did, and I believe it was included because the new covenant included the forgiveness of sins. Although that forgiveness was directed to the people of Israel, it was later, through Paul, that we find out that Christ's work at the cross was for the forgiveness of sins for all of God's people, whether Jew or Gentile, apart from Israel's promises and for all time.

Brethren, we should always be humbled and thankful for what Christ accomplished for us at the cross, and the communion service shared with our fellow brethren is one way to do so. However, we must be careful not to abuse the occasion as the Corinthian brethren were doing (I Corinthians 11:20-22,



33-34) or turn it into a holy observance (a supposed ordinance of God) with denominational or religious symbolism or requirements, as I am afraid many of us have done. If we do, then we have turned it into a work of self-righteousness that God did not intend for us to do.

### **Another New Covenant**

Paul mentions a *new covenant* twice in his letters. The first time is in the context of communion, and is referring to the same new covenant that Jesus did at the last supper as discussed above. While only calling it a *covenant*, He also referred to that same new covenant in the context of God fulfilling His promise to Israel in the future (Romans 11:25-27). However, the second time Paul used the term *new covenant* appears to have revealed a different covenant.

**Such confidence we [Paul and Timothy] have through Christ toward [before] God. Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant [testament], not of the letter [Law of Moses] but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. (II Corinthians 3:4-6)**

Before addressing this passage, one may ask how there could be more than one *new covenant* in Scripture. As we have seen in this study, there is more than one law in Scripture as well as more than one kingdom, gospel, baptism, and return of Christ.<sup>54</sup> These and other terms have more than one meaning because of the differences between what is revealed through prophecy versus the mystery and what applies to Israel versus the body of Christ (us). Therefore, it should not be a surprise that there is more than one new covenant.

In II Corinthians 3:6, Paul said he was a minister of a new covenant that is not of the Law of Moses but of the Holy Spirit. Because God has set aside the Law during this dispensation of His grace and saves us by His grace through faith apart from works of the Law (or any works), then the new covenant was referring to God's administration of grace. It encompasses all of the content—the purpose, commandments, and promises—of the gospel of grace as revealed by Christ to the Apostle Paul.

The new covenant revealed through Paul, however, is related to the new covenant prophesied in the Old Testament and spoken of by Jesus at the last supper. In what way? We saw above that the prophesied new covenant is based on the shed blood of Christ for the remission of sins. Brethren, Christ's work at the cross is the center or foundation of the entire Bible even though it was not explained until Paul did so. Our new covenant, therefore, incorporates the foundation of Israel's new covenant—Christ's shed blood for the forgiveness of our sins.

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<sup>54</sup> See my studies **The Two Messages of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Which Gospel?, Should We Be Baptized?**, and others that show how important is it to understand the context of a subject in Scripture.

## Chapter 12

### Closing Thoughts

#### Law and Grace

This study is primarily about the Law of Moses, but it cannot be complete without comparing the Law to the grace of God that was revealed later. Therefore, without fully describing the gospel of grace, I have inserted comparisons when appropriate. Hopefully, those comparisons demonstrate that we are no longer governed by the Law but by the grace of God. Additional studies addressing the gospel of grace in greater depth are referenced throughout this study and I encourage you to read them.

In this study we have seen that God gave His covenant, consisting of commandments, statutes, and ordinances, to His chosen nation of Israel after He delivered them from bondage in Egypt. He did so through His prophet Moses, and this covenant was later referred to as *the Law of Moses* or simply as *the Law*. This Law demonstrated the righteousness of God and instructed exactly how He expected the people of Israel to live in the land of Canaan promised to their forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that He was about to give them. The Law contained amazing promises and severe consequences, depending on whether the people fully obeyed it.

After a long history of rebellion against God, culminating in the crucifixion of its Messiah and soon followed by the stoning of Stephen, God hardened (blinded) Israel and ushered in His dispensation of grace. Through the death of our Lord at the cross, as revealed to us through the Apostle Paul, God instituted salvation by grace through faith apart from doing the works of the Law.

I hope that believers today realize that sacrifices for our sins are no longer required because Christ's work on the cross was God's all-sufficient sacrifice for sin. However, it is not fully understood that we are not subject to the Law of Moses. Our actions often show that we prefer to remain under parts of the Law, or at least how we interpret the Law. We tend to pick and choose which commandments to obey (or sort of obey), such as the Ten Commandments, and which promises we want fulfilled (or sort of fulfilled) for us, such as healing our country. Like Israel, we have the innate desire to prove or perhaps even attain our righteousness through our works.

Why do we do this? In part it is because of our sin nature, which is always contrary to God. Also, it is because believers in general do not fully understand the difference between the Law of Moses and the grace of God. I believe that this is the case because most brethren do not understand the importance and distinctiveness of Paul's apostleship and message. Among many other new things, such as truths that apply to Jews and Gentiles without distinction, through Paul's letters we learn the intent of the Law.

Because it is righteous and perfect, no one is able to obey Law of Moses. It was intended to show the people of Israel that they could not obey it through their own efforts and that they needed to humble themselves before God and live by faith. Instead, they tried to prove their own righteousness. Consequently, the Law condemned them and us—all mankind—to death; it spiritually killed us. Thankfully, we also learn that it has been taken out of our way through the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

To summarize this study on the Law of Moses very briefly, the following history of the Law and the dispensation of grace is provided for review. These points have been addressed in some degree with supporting Bible references as well as references to other studies.

## **History of the Law and Grace**

### ***The Law of Moses***

- The people of Israel promised to obey the covenant that God was about to give to them through Moses and, after receiving it, reiterated their promise. This covenant was later referred to as the Law of Moses.
- Beginning with the Ten Commandments, God explicitly laid out His commandments, statutes, and ordinances for Israel to live by in its promised land.
- God promised to bless the nation, its people, and their land immensely if they obeyed the Law. He also warned them of the consequences if they disobeyed.
- Israel rarely even tried to obey the covenant of God; in truth, the nation and its people never fully obeyed it. Instead, the people worked for their own righteousness and worshiped idols, and they and their nation suffered the consequences as promised.
- Israel killed the prophets of God, the Son of God, and Stephen who was controlled by the Holy Spirit, thus rejecting God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
- Instead of judging Israel as prophesied, God blinded Israel and temporarily set the nation and His promises to it aside, which is a condition that remains to this day.

### ***The Dispensation of Grace***

- God ushered in His dispensation of grace through the Apostle Paul. It was part of the revelation of the mystery, a body of truth hidden in God (His secret plan) since before the world began, to Paul by our glorified Lord Jesus Christ.
- In part, the mystery included:
  - The gospel of the grace of God, which included justification and salvation apart from the works of the Law of Moses.
  - The gospel of our salvation, which is that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised up from the dead.
  - The revelation that God had planned, from before the world began, to set Israel aside due to their rebellion, interrupt His prophetic program for His nation, and establish His dispensation of grace.
- Because God is not working through Israel under the Law of Moses in this dispensation of grace, there is no longer a spiritual difference between Jews and Gentiles, males and females, or free and enslaved people. All people are equally guilty before God and can be saved from the consequences of their sins by believing the gospel of salvation, and all believers are members of the body of Christ.
- We are not justified by doing the works of the Law or any other works. Instead, we are justified solely by faith in the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ for our sins.

- God has blessed us immensely through the work of Christ at the cross.<sup>55</sup>
- We have proven that we do not really accept the grace of God because we are working for our own righteousness just as Israel did. Instead of truly believing that the Law has been set aside by God and that we are no longer required to obey it, we have incorporated certain commandments and promises of the Law into our faith and worship.
- When God is done working through us, He will call us up to Himself in Christ in an event we have called the rapture.

### ***Resumption and Fulfillment of Prophecy***

- After the rapture, God will resume His work for and through Israel. He will restore, judge, and redeem Israel and resume fulfilling all of His promises described in the Law and the Prophets to His chosen nation.
- God will remove the sin nature from His redeemed people and write the Law on their hearts and they will completely obey Him. This will be the fulfillment of the prophesied new covenant.
- After His initial judgments of the nations culminating in the battle of Armageddon, God will establish His promised kingdom on earth—New Jerusalem—with Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords.
- The lost souls (nonbelievers) of all time will be judged according to the Law of Moses. This judgment, at the great white throne following our Lord's 1,000-year reign and the final battle of the nations (led by Satan) against Christ and His kingdom, is the last event of the prophetic last days described in the Old and New Testament prophecies.
- All of the promises contained in the Law and the Prophets will thus be fulfilled.

### ***The Fulness of Times***

- After the final judgment, all things will be subject to Christ and He will turn His kingdom over to God the Father.
- God will then bring all things together in Christ—things in heaven and on earth—for eternity. Everyone will be righteous with a righteousness that could not be attained under the Law of Moses.
- Neither of these events was prophesied—they are part of the mystery revealed through Paul.

### **Another Thought**

We have seen that the people of Israel did not obey the Law of Moses and that they could not obey it because it is righteous and people are not righteous by nature. Did God, therefore, set up Israel for failure by giving the people something that they could not keep? I do not believe that God sets anyone up for failure—He does not tempt or cause us to sin (James 1:13-18; Romans 6:1-23). Brethren, God sent His own Son to die for our sins. Instead, the failure always lies with us.

In the Bible we see the long-term plan of God beginning with His creation through the dispensation of the fullness of times. In every way that God has presented Himself to mankind over the ages, we have

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<sup>55</sup> See my studies **Salvation and Its Blessings** and **Our Lord Jesus Christ** that address many of the blessings we receive at the moment of our salvation.

always proven to be self-righteous. That is, we have always demonstrated that we can somehow attain our own righteousness and do not need God, thereby rejecting Him.

Although not covering everything in Scripture, please consider how mankind continually rejects God. Even children of God disobey and rebel against Him.

- God revealed Himself through the works of His creation (without communicating with anyone), and yet all of mankind chose to worship the creation rather than the Creator. Consequently, He gave mankind over to their sin, which became our nature (Romans 1:18-32; 3:9-18, 23; I Corinthians 2:14).<sup>56</sup>
- God made Adam without sin and communicated directly with him, and yet he disobeyed God's first command to him by eating of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:15-17; 3:6, 17-19). Adam's disobedience of God's direct command condemned us to spiritual death (Romans 5:12-14, 18; I Corinthians 15:20-22).
- God demonstrated His miraculous power by delivering Israel from bondage in Egypt, and yet the people immediately complained and later made and worshiped an idol as their deliverer (Exodus 16:1-3; 32:1-10).
- God gave His righteous covenant—the Law of Moses—to His chosen nation, and yet the people of Israel tried to attain their own righteousness through works apart from faith and continually rebelled against God (Romans 9:30-33; Ezekiel 2:1-5).
- God sent His prophets to Israel, and yet the nation persecuted and killed them (Jeremiah 7:21-26; Acts 7:51-53).
- God sent His Son to Israel, and yet the nation rejected Him and demanded His crucifixion (Acts 2:22-23; 3:11-15).
- God gave the miraculous gift of the Holy Spirit to His disciples beginning at Pentecost, and yet the people of Israel continued to reject God and killed Stephen who spoke under the control of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4; 6:8-15; 7:54-60).
- God initiated His dispensation of grace by the revelation of Jesus Christ to His Apostle Paul, and yet the dispersed Jews and the Gentile authorities rejected his message (Acts 13:44-47; 24:1-27; Philippians 1:12-14; II Timothy 4:6) and God's children (believers) continue to try to attain righteousness through works (Galatians 3:1-3). Sadly, very few churches today teach the distinctiveness and importance of Paul's apostleship and his ministry about the mystery and the gospel of the grace of God.
- God will restore the twelve tribes of Israel to their promised land after the rapture, and yet much of the nation will still reject God and the Messiah and be judged by God (Zechariah 13:8-9).
- God will judge the Gentile nations in the time of great tribulation through miraculous events, and yet they will still reject Him (Revelation 6:12-17; 16:8-11).
- God will establish His kingdom on earth (New Jerusalem) with Christ as King of kings, through whom the Gentile nations will be blessed as promised to Abraham, and yet the nations will still reject God and Christ and will rise up against New Jerusalem after 1,000 years of Christ's reign of peace (Revelation 20:7-10; see also Ezekiel 37:24-28).

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<sup>56</sup> There is a reason I list this before the point about Adam. I encourage you to read my studies **Creation—What Does Scripture Say?** and **Adam** that explain why I did this.

Through all of these things and more it has been, and will be, mankind who fails. Despite what God did and will do, it is mankind who rejects God. God did not set us up to fail—we failed because of our own sin. We are the ones who reject God and His word. From the beginning, God has demonstrated that we can meet Him on His terms only by faith (Psalm 40:6-8; 51:14-17; Jeremiah 7:21-24; Hebrews 10:1-10; 11:1-40; Ephesians 2:8-9). And yet, mankind continues to try to find their own way to their own righteousness.

We have seen that Israel will be redeemed and will fully obey God in all things only when He forgives them and writes His Law on their hearts in fulfillment of the new covenant, which is based on the shed blood of Christ. God considers His children in this dispensation of grace, whom He has saved by His grace, as righteous even though we still sin (Romans 4:4-5). Why? Because He sees us in Christ who is righteous (Ephesians 2:4-7; II Corinthians 5:21). We will fully attain and experience this righteousness when we are with our Lord in the heavens (Philippians 1:6; 3:20-21; I Corinthians 15:42-53; I Thessalonians 4:13-17).

Everything depends on the righteousness of Christ through His work at the cross for us. May we always remember and be thankful for God's love that He demonstrated through our Lord Jesus Christ, and endeavor to yield ourselves to Him as instruments of righteousness instead of unrighteousness (Romans 6:12-14).

### **Our Lesson and Goal**

Brethren, we are no longer under the Law of Moses but under grace. The Law no longer has jurisdiction over us because of what Christ accomplished for us at the cross. Instead of trying to be justified by works of the Law we are justified apart from the works of the Law.

We need to realize a truth not often taught in our churches: God has blinded and set Israel aside in this dispensation of grace. Neither the church (the body of Christ) nor America is the Israel of today. We cannot claim God's promises to Israel as our own.

We also need to remember why God set Israel, His chosen nation, aside during this time. He did so because of their continued rebellion against Him so that He could implement His eternal plan regarding His grace. We, therefore, are the beneficiaries of Israel's rebellion and temporary judgment (Romans 11:17-32).

By incorporating parts of the Law of Moses into our worship we are demonstrating our arrogance and, yes, an inadvertent form of rebellion against God and His word to us as members of the body of Christ. Because of the arrogance of the Roman brethren (believers like us), Paul warned that God could blind us (cut us off) just as He did with Israel (Romans 11:11-24). Among other things, we demonstrate our arrogance by judging Israel for failing to obey God and thinking we can do what that nation could not do. We need to be careful, brethren, and use and live by the word of God accurately, understanding the difference between the Law and grace (II Timothy 2:15).

God will never leave a promise unfulfilled. In the future He will restore and redeem Israel and fulfill all of His promises to them. In the meantime, He is working through us—His children and ambassadors for Christ—in this time of His grace. We, too, have many promises that I have not discussed, but none of

them involve a promised land or future kingdom. Our certain hope is a heavenly hope.<sup>57</sup> As members of the body of Christ we are spiritually and positionally in Him at the right hand of God in the heavens right now, a promised position we will fully attain through physical death or the rapture (Ephesians 2:4-7; Philippians 3:20-21; II Corinthians 5:6-9; I Thessalonians 4:13-18).

We should be very thankful, brethren. To express our thankfulness to God for what He has done for us, we ought to earnestly desire and try to walk worthy of (as becoming) our salvation in Christ in which we have been blessed by God and to join Paul in desiring to be found in Christ, having a righteousness that comes through Him apart from the Law of Moses.

**Therefore I [Paul], the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling [salvation] with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:1-3)**

**More than that, I [Paul] count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in [the faith of] Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. (Philippians 3:8-11)**

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<sup>57</sup> See my studies **The Mystery (God's Secret Plan), The Two Messages of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Walk Worthy**, and others that explain the differences between the gospel of the kingdom and the gospel of the grace of God and how He wants us to live today.