



05

WEEK FIVE

MOSAIC: YAHWEH'S COVENANT THROUGH MOSES

Mosaic Covenant

YAHWEH'S COVENANT THROUGH MOSES

INTRODUCTION

Abraham's story continues on in his son Isaac, and Isaac's son Jacob. When we come to the end of Genesis we have learned how Jacob's twelve sons are living in Egypt. Then, in the book of Exodus we discover that after a number of years in Egypt, the Hebrews were oppressed and enslaved by Pharaoh, because they were **"...fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them"** (Exodus 1:7).

The enslaved Hebrews had been groaning out to **Yahweh** for a number of years, and at the right time Yahweh heard the groaning of the people and remembered the **covenant** that He made with them (Exodus 2:23–25). This is where we meet **Moses**, the man God called to serve as the mediator to deliver His people from Egyptian slavery (Exodus 3–12). After leading Israel out of bondage, Yahweh continued building His **kingdom** by establishing a covenant through Moses and Israel—His firstborn people (Exodus 19–24).

As we have learned through the study of covenants so far, since His interaction with the first people He created (**Adam** and Eve), Yahweh is building His kingdom through covenant and covenantal relationships.¹ This chapter will focus on Moses and the **Torah** (or **Law**), which is probably the most significant and central covenantal aspect of how Israel viewed their relationship with God.

Our goal for this week is to better understand what the Torah meant to Israel, how we will see the Torah connect to the rest of the biblical story, how we find Jesus in the Torah, and finally how we can apply the Torah to our lives today (as Christians).

Key Covenantal Verses

EXODUS 19:5-6

“Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; ⁶ and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.”

EXODUS 24:3-8

“Moses came and told the people all the words of Yahweh and all the rules. And all the people answered with one voice and said, “All the words that Yahweh has spoken we will do.” ⁴ And Moses wrote down all the words of Yahweh. He rose early in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. ⁵ And he sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to Yahweh. ⁶ And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar. ⁷ Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, “All that Yahweh has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.” ⁸ And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, “Behold the blood of the covenant that Yahweh has made with you in accordance with all these words.”

DEUTERONOMY 4:1-2; 13-14

“And now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the rules that I am teaching you, and do them, that you may live, and go in and take possession of the land that Yahweh, the God of your fathers, is giving you. ² You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of Yahweh your God that I command you...And he declared to you His covenant, which He commanded you to perform, that is, the Ten Commandments, and He wrote them on two tablets of stone. And Yahweh commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and rules, that you might do them in the land that you are going over to possess.”

Memory Verse

EXODUS 6:7

“I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am Yahweh your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.”

Define

THE COVENANT

DEFINING TERMS

The centerpiece of the **Mosaic Covenant** (also called the Torah or the Law) is recorded in two places: Exodus Chapters 19—24 (called the “Book of the Covenant”), along with the book of Deuteronomy.² This does not replace the covenant that was made with Abraham (Genesis 12, 15, 17) but shows how God continues to build His Kingdom through His people, as Abraham’s family has now become a nation.³

The word Torah can actually refer to multiple things:

- 1 **The “Books of Moses”** (Genesis—Deuteronomy).
- 2 **The entire Old Testament.**
- 3 **The Law itself** (the ethical, religious, and social commands given to Israel).

For this week’s study, we will use Torah in this third use. This means that the terms “Law” and “Torah” are synonymous, referring to the covenantal stipulations given through Moses to God’s people.

WHAT IS THE COVENANT (LAW/TORAH)?

As Christians who are not “under the Mosaic Law,” we sometimes have difficulty understanding what the Law is, because unlike Israel, it is not central to our identity with God. Was the Law some rigid set of external rules? Were there really 613 laws that all needed to be followed? One popular Protestant view divides the Law into three parts: civil, ceremonial, and moral (also known as the **tripartite view**). In this view, Christ’s coming abolished the civil (judicial laws for Israel) and ceremonial (**temple/priestly**) parts of the Law, leaving only the moral law to be continued in the life of Christians.


This perspective makes sense, is taught by many Protestant pastors and theologians, and is described in many of the historic church confessions;⁴ I personally held this view for a long time. However, over the past few years, I have become convinced that

this probably is not the way that Moses understood the Law.

The Bible generally describes the Law as a unity, and not in three parts. For instance, in Galatians 3:10, Paul says, **“for all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.’”** Also, the penalties for breaking the Law were not separated into categories: if a priest broke the **Sabbath**, he not only violated a civil law but also broke a ceremonial law (as the Sabbath was the day of sacrifices), which was a moral law itself, because he sinned against God. So while the tripartite distinction makes a lot of sense, it does not actually capture the fullness of the Law and what it meant to the Israelites.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS AND THE COVENANT

So what is the Law? It is the **Ten Commandments** itself. In Exodus 20:1–17 (also repeated in Deuteronomy 5), Yahweh presents to Moses what we know as the Ten Commandments (or, the Ten Words, as it reads in Hebrew). These form the basis of the covenant: four commands in relationship to Yahweh, and six for the **people of God** in relation to one another.⁵

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|---|-------------------------------------|----|--|
| 1 | No other gods/no images | 5 | Honor your parents |
| 2 | No graven images | 6 | Do not murder |
| 3 | No taking God's name in vain | 7 | Do not commit adultery |
| 4 | Remember the Sabbath | 8 | Do not steal |
| | | 9 | Do not bear false witness |
| | | 10 | Do not covet someone's household members or possessions |

In Exodus through Deuteronomy God often refers to this list of commands—specifically the words Moses wrote down on the tablets—as the covenant. For instance, in Exodus 34:27–28, God says to Moses: **“Write these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel...and he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.”**

And in Exodus 24:12: we read, **“Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Come up to me on the mountain and wait there, that I may give you the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction.’”** And in Deuteronomy 4:13 says, **“And He declared to you His covenant, which He commanded you to perform, that is, the Ten Commandments, and He wrote them on two tablets of stone.”**

So what is the relationship between the Ten Commandments, the Law, and the covenant? Simply put, the Ten Commandments are the covenant that Yahweh made with Israel.

God was building His kingdom through the covenant He made through Abraham; since this **“kingdom people”** were about to be given a land, they would need laws to govern them—which makes the Ten Commandments the constitution of Israel. But if the Ten Commandments are the covenant (the Law), then what about all the other “commands” we see in Exodus through Deuteronomy (the ones that add up to the 613 laws)?

In Exodus through Deuteronomy God often refers to this list of commands—specifically the words Moses wrote down on the tablets—as the covenant.

THE PROHIBITIONS AND THE CASE LAW

The Ten Commandments are the Law, and the Law is the Ten Commandments—the ten general commands that inform God’s people how they ought to serve God and neighbor in actions, behaviors, and thinking. However, they do not describe how to apply the Ten Commandments to everyday life, or the consequences of a broken commandment. This is where the rest of the “laws” come in. The additional laws (equaling up to 613) are what we might call the **judgments** or **case law**; they describe what the breaking of the Law looks like, and the penalty for those crimes—they are the application of the Law, not additional laws.

For instance, the First Commandment (the general command) is about not having any other gods before Yahweh. Deuteronomy 12:29—13:18 (the judgment/case law) then describes an example of serving another god and the consequence of death for those who do.

Or as another example, the Third Commandment (the general command) is to remember the Sabbath. Exodus 35 (the judgment/case law) then provides the rules for what it looks like to remember the Sabbath, with the penalty of death (the judgment/case law) as a consequence for those who break it.

For Moses and Israel, the Ten Commandments (the Law) were the covenant, and everything else was a way to apply the Law to their lives.⁶

"You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and Yahweh your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore Yahweh your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day."

—Deuteronomy 5:15

THE PHYSICAL SIGN OF THE MOSAIC COVENANT

The physical **sign** of Adam’s covenant was the **Tree of Life**, the sign of **Noah’s** covenant was the rainbow, and the sign of Abraham’s covenant was **circumcision**. While the people of Israel would continue to observe the physical sign of circumcision, the physical sign for the Mosaic covenant was to observe the Sabbath.⁷

This command, which is the longest of the commands,⁸ is repeated twice (Exodus 20:8–11 and 31:12–17), with the 31:12–17 passage calling the Sabbath a **“sign between Me and you.”** This is a practice that Israel was to remember to keep.

Remembering is a Hebrew concept that describes keeping something at the front of your mind.⁹ Israel was to remember a few things on the Sabbath. First, that God would provide for them, even when resting for a day. Second, that Israel was rescued from an unjust situation (being overworked slaves in Egypt), and so they must not only remember God’s mercy but must also treat foreigners with care and respect (Deuteronomy 5:15; Exodus 22:21).

CONCLUSION

Even though it seemed as though God's kingdom was lost at Eden, He continued to restore this earthly kingdom, as His sovereign hand never left His creation. He made a promise to bring this kingdom through Abraham, which we see blossoming in the people of Israel, as they received a Law to command their nation—a nation that will eventually inherit a **Promised Land**. And the purpose of this nation is to reflect the goodness of God to the world, as they serve as the vice-regents who rule and reign in a way that reflected God's glory—with the essence of this reflection found in the Law.



- 1 **What is the difference between the Ten Commandments and “all the other” laws (found in Exodus 21—Deuteronomy)?**
- 2 **Of the Ten Commandments, which commands are directed towards God, and which ones towards one another?**
- 3 **What was the sign of the Mosaic Covenant?**

Demonstrate

THE COVENANT

CONNECTING MOSES TO THE COVENANTAL PROMISES

If you remember (from the Introduction section), Pharaoh became antagonistic towards the people of Israel because they **“were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them”** (Exodus 1:7). God’s first command to Adam and Eve (Genesis 1:28) was to **“be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”** This is the same command given to Noah (Genesis 9:1,7), and is the climax of the promise given to Abraham: that he will **“be made a great nation”** (Genesis 12:2), and to **“Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them...so shall your offspring be”** (Genesis 15:5).¹⁰

The Exodus story begins by connecting God’s people in Egypt back to the **Garden of Eden**. And just as the Garden was a temple for God (as Adam served as a **priest** in the Garden-temple), God’s Kingdom, established through Moses, would also have priests who work and serve Him in a special way, as Israel represents Yahweh to the world.

A KINGDOM OF PRIESTS

A priest is someone who serves in the special presence of God. Adam, the first priest in the first temple, was put in the Garden of Eden to **work it and keep it** (Genesis 2:15).¹¹ These are the same Hebrew words used to describe what the priests did in the temple, as they served, protected, and oversaw the place where God dwelled (Numbers 3:7–8, 8:26, 18:5–6).¹²

In Exodus 19 (directly before the Ten Commandments are given), the guidelines are laid out for the people of Israel, as they enter into this special relationship with God. In verses 5–6, God says: **“if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation..”**

While there was a unique qualification for specific men to serve as priests,¹³ God called the entire nation (as His covenant people and **representatives**) to live their lives by serving in His presence before the world, just like a priest would.

PROPHETS FOR THE KINGDOM

God not only sent priests to serve Him and His people, but He also sent prophets, like Moses. A **prophet** is someone who speaks for God (Deuteronomy 18:18),¹⁴ and was ultimately a covenant enforcer—calling God’s people to repentance for breaking the covenant.¹⁵ So a prophet’s primary concern was not the pagan world, or even foretelling a distant future event, but to confront God’s people when they were breaking the covenant, and to call them to repent of their sin and to return to covenant faithfulness.

Not only were God’s people to serve as priests who ministered to God Himself, but God appointed certain people within the community to be covenant enforcers, to make sure that Israel truly represented God to the world.

Hesed, the faithful and covenantal love that God shows to those who belong to Him—it is the unrelenting love of God to His people.

YAHWEH’S HESED THROUGH THE MOSAIC COVENANT

The first four of the Ten Commandments focus on how God’s people should relate to Him. In Exodus 20:3, we read the First Commandment, which prohibits the worship of another god. Ultimately, Israel must not worship other gods because Yahweh, the true God, has shown His **“steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.”**

This passage uses the word love twice, but in Hebrew, these are actually two different words. The first use of love (the steadfast love that God shows to His people) is the Hebrew word **hesed**. **Hesed**, the “faithful and covenantal love that God shows to those who belong to Him—it is the unrelenting love of God to His people.”¹⁶ So why did God choose Israel to be His own? He tells us in Deuteronomy 7:7–9:

“...not because you were more in number than any other people that Yahweh set His love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples,⁸ but it is because Yahweh loves you and is keeping the oath that He swore to your fathers, that Yahweh has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.⁹ Know therefore that Yahweh your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love Him and keep His commandments, to a thousand generations...”

God chose Israel merely because He loved Israel, not because of Israel’s greatness—He loved them simply because He chose to love them, because as the sovereign Lord He does as He pleases (Psalm 115:3).

The second use of love is the response of Israel to Yahweh. This is the Hebrew word **ohav**, which indicates the common love that someone might have for something or someone. This certainly does not mean that Israel is off the hook for needing to also show **hesed**, as Hosea’s judgment over Israel clearly states that God desires **“steadfast love [hesed] and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings”** (Hosea 6:6). In response to the grace shown to them, Israel was to return Yahweh’s loving kindness that had been undeservingly shown them, Israel was to have complete devotion and allegiance to God alone, demonstrating their own **hesed**.

God is the faithful one who will always keep His promises. **Hesed** is the foundation of God’s Kingdom, is presented to His people in His Torah, and is demonstrated in His delivering them into the Promised Land.

MOSES AND THE PROMISED LAND

The books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers tell of the disobedient generation of Israelites who wandered in the wilderness for 40 years and were not allowed to enter the Promised Land (Numbers 20:10–13). This land promise was not merely about securing geography in the Mediterranean peninsula but was God’s way of connecting His covenantal faithfulness from Moses to Abraham, and Abraham to Adam, which ultimately expands into the whole world (in the **New Covenant**).

God promised Abraham land, and to become a great nation (Genesis 12:1–7), so that the entire world would be blessed (Genesis 12:3). But Abraham never entered that land. Yet through Yahweh’s covenant with Moses, the **offspring** of Abraham may finally experience this reality—Abraham is promised a land that his offspring now inherits! “The Mosaic covenant is given at this time to administer the fulfillment of the divine promises to Abraham and to the nation as a whole, and through them to the entire world.”¹⁷

The Promised Land inherited by Moses is not ultimately about Abraham or Moses, but is how God began restoring what was lost in the original land—the Garden of Eden. And this was done through the people adopted as God’s people, as they served as a kingdom of priests, for the purpose of blessing the world.

CONCLUSION

The blessings that God’s people received were not for their own glory. They were blessed **“so that (they) will be a blessing...and in (them) all the families of the earth shall be blessed”** (Genesis 12:2, 3). The goal for God’s people is to reside in the Promised Land as a kingdom of priests, and to be fruitful and multiply. And by multiplying, God’s Kingdom would continue to expand across the globe, where He could demonstrate His special covenantal love—His **hesed**.

God was calling the entire nation to live their lives by serving in His presence before the world, just like a priest would.



1 Israel is described as a “kingdom of priests.” What was the priestly role that the nation of Israel was to play to the world?

2 What special quality did Israel possess for God to choose them?

3 What is the primary job of a prophet?

Discover

THE COVENANT

JESUS FULFILLS THE LAW

Since Christians currently live in the New Covenant of grace, what do we do with Jesus and the “Law”? Does it matter any more? How do we understand Matthew 5:17–19, where Jesus says:

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”

Jesus is emphatic—He did not come to *abolish* (to end the effect or validity of something¹⁸) the Law. Rather, He came to *fulfill* the Law—to bring its full expression and completeness, so that God’s people can live the righteous life through Jesus, the one that the Law bears witness to (Romans 3:21). The job of the people of God today is to understand the Law, and everything in the Old Testament, through the lens of Jesus.

JESUS IS THE BETTER ETERNAL PRIEST

The entire book of Hebrews focuses on how Jesus is better. Jesus is the better priest because **“The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, but He holds His priesthood permanently, because He continues forever”** (Hebrews 7:23–24).

Jesus makes the better eternal sacrifice because **“He entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of His own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption”** (Hebrews 9:12).

Jesus is better than the old sacrificial system (Hebrews 9) and better than the priests who performed those sacrifices (Hebrews 4:14–5:10; 8:1–5). He is better than the prophets who came beforehand (Hebrews 1:1–3) and the angels (Hebrews 1:5). He is better than Abraham (Hebrews 7), better than the Law (Hebrews 8:13), and even better than Moses himself (Hebrews 3). The New Testament writers are emphatic that we do not go back to the Law, we do not establish any more temples, install new priests, or offer more sacrifices—not now or in the future! Instead, we look to Jesus as the fulfillment of all the things in the Law and the role that Israel played in God’s Covenantal Kingdom story.

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.” Matthew 5:17

JESUS IS THE BETTER ETERNAL PROPHET

A prophet is a covenant enforcer who speaks on behalf of God. The book of Hebrews begins by saying, **“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son”** (Hebrews 1:1-2). And in fact, Moses himself foretold that, **“Yahweh your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you...to him you shall listen”** (Deuteronomy 18:15). There can be no greater prophet than Jesus, the Son of God, because Jesus is the **“Word who became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth”** (John 1:14).

Jesus is not merely a spokesman for God. Jesus is the God of the universe who stepped into His own creation in order to speak to it.

JESUS IS THE BETTER COVENANT THAT MOSES ANTICIPATED

When Paul wrote to the Galatian churches, he explained that the Law was **“our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith”** (Galatians 3:24). The word *guardian* is the Greek word *paidagogos*. It is the idea of a tutor who is responsible for someone who needs guidance (a guardian or a leader).¹⁹ The Law is not bad, it is good—it just was not designed to be the end goal. In Colossians 2:17, Paul describes the Law as a **“shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.”** The Law is a tutor, something that foreshadows and gives us a glimpse of Jesus. The Law (and the entire Old Testament), finds its fulfillment in Jesus—when we read the Old Testament, we are reading the Jesus story!

JESUS FULFILLS THE MOSES STORY

We just looked at how the author of Hebrews presents “Jesus is better” than the Mosaic Covenant. In fact, the New Testament writers are *constantly* doing this, whether they explicitly state it (like in Hebrews) or presents more subtle parallels.

Matthew’s Gospel comes to a climax in Chapter 5 (the Sermon on the Mount), when Jesus goes up on the mountain to give the Law to God’s people (not receiving it like Moses did). Jesus intensified how God’s people are to truly live out the Law. He taught that you are guilty of murder when you hate someone in your heart, and not just when you physically kill them (Matthew 5:21-26), or that you are guilty of *adultery* when you inwardly lust for someone, not just when you physically touch them (Matthew 5:27-29).

Oftentimes, people believe that the Old Testament is disconnected from the New, but that could not be further from the truth. The New Testament writers were actually retelling the Old Testament story through the lens of Jesus and what He did—specifically in how He brought about God’s Kingdom.

Moses’ story ought to direct us to Jesus, who was the perfect Moses and fulfilled the Law in the perfect way that Israel could not. While Moses could not enter the Promised Land because he disobeyed God and struck the rock that provided water in the desert (instead of just speaking to it, Numbers 20:8), the New Testament shows that Israel **“drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them (in the desert), and the Rock was Christ”** (1 Corinthians 10:4).

The Gospel of Matthew shows that Jesus is the better Moses, who perfectly fulfills and brings to completion the things that Moses could not.

MOSES

Moses was born in distress, as the king of Egypt (Pharaoh) had the male children killed

Exodus 1:16

Moses/Israel came into Egypt through Jacob

Exodus 1:1

Moses and Israel passed through the water, the Red Sea

Exodus 14

Moses and Israel wandered for 40 years in the wilderness, and the people grumbled

Exodus 15:17

Moses went up onto the mountain (Sinai) to receive the Law

Exodus 19–20

Moses, at the end of his ministry, went up onto the mountain to watch the people of God go into the Promised Land

Deuteronomy 34

JESUS

Jesus was born in distress, as King Herod had the male children killed

Matthew 2:16

Jesus fled to Egypt (from Herod) for safety, and then was called “out of Egypt”

Hosea 11:1, Matthew 2:13–15

Jesus was baptized in the water, to fulfill all righteousness

Matthew 3:15

Jesus went into the wilderness for 40 days, but never grumbled against God or sinned

Matthew 4:1–11

Jesus went up onto the mountain to give the Law

Matthew 5–7

Jesus, at the end of His ministry, went up onto the mountain to commission the people of God to go into the entire world, to spread the Kingdom of God

Matthew 28:16–19

The Torah is a tutor, something that foreshadows and gives us a glimpse of Jesus. . . when we read the Old Testament, we are reading the Jesus story!

Israel entered the Promised Land, but they eventually were kicked out for breaking the covenant by worshipping other gods ([Deuteronomy 27–30](#); [Jeremiah 6:1; 25:1–14](#)). Jesus is the fulfillment of the Promise Land, as He is the true temple ([John 2:18–22](#)), and the true vine of God ([John 15:1–17](#)). The covenant Yahweh made through Moses was meant to point us to Jesus the Messiah, who is a better prophet than Moses, a better priest than the Levites, a better sacrifice and temple, and the true Promised Land. Jesus is the perfect Israel—who perfectly kept the Law.

The good news is that all who abide in Jesus (by faith) are now heirs to the promise that was made to Abraham ([Genesis 12](#); [Galatians 3:1–29](#)). God's people, whether Jew or Gentile, can now inherit the Promised Land when they put their trust in Jesus the Messiah.

CONCLUSION

Imagine a young man and woman who are dating. For years they lived apart, not sharing a bed or waking up to each other or sharing daily meals together. They finally get engaged and then celebrate their wedding. But after the wedding, they go back to living their separate lives: they do not sleep in the same house or share a bank account, and on holidays, they independently go to their family of origin's homes—they return to living a life of singleness, even though they have the blessing of marriage.

This would not make sense. While dating, independent living was good, but after experiencing marriage, it would be ridiculous to return to the incomplete and isolated ways from the past.

The same is true for the Mosaic Covenant. The Mosaic Covenant was a beautiful and good thing, but it was not meant to sustain the people of God—it was meant to point us to Jesus! We have now entered into a covenantal marriage with Jesus, and as His bride, we have the duty to faithfully live in this relationship, never to look back to the former. Because Jesus is the true Israel and has perfectly kept and fulfilled the Torah, His followers are empowered to keep the Law, because we have been given God's Spirit, and because God's Law is now written on our hearts (something that will be explored in Week 7).



1 What was Jesus' understanding/teaching on the "Law"? Did Jesus do away with it?

2 Using this section, and other knowledge you have of the Bible, what are some of the ways the New Testament writers present Jesus as "better than" what we see in the Old Testament?

3 How/why is Jesus considered the "perfect Israel"?

Digest

THE COVENANT

HOW DO THE PEOPLE OF GOD LIVE THE MOSAIC COVENANT IN LIGHT OF CHRIST?

I enjoy *The West Wing*, the early 2000s TV show about a fictitious White House staff. There was an episode where the deputy communications director (Sam Seaborn) had a conversation with the chief of staff (Leo McGarry) about an American town that wanted to apply the Ten Commandments:

Sam: Did you hear about the town in Alabama that wants to abolish all laws except the Ten Commandments?

Leo: Coveting thy neighbor's wife is going to cause some problems.

Sam: That's what I said! Plus, if I were arrested for coveting my neighbor's wife, when asked about it, I'd probably bear false witness.²⁰

While meaning to be humorous, this actually does raise the very real question: how are Christians supposed to apply the Law to their lives today? The answer: we apply the Torah by loving God and loving our neighbor ([Matthew 22:34-40](#)), and when we do this, we live as a kingdom of priests who bless the world.

THE LAW: LOVING GOD & NEIGHBOR

In His public ministry, Jesus taught that the Law was something to be taken seriously:

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets." ([Matthew 22:34-40](#))

Here Jesus summarizes the Ten Commandments: the first four commands are the relationship with God's people to Yahweh, and the final six are the relationship of God's people to one another. We see this throughout the books of Moses with the summary commands to **"love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might"** ([Deuteronomy 6:5](#)), and to **"love your neighbor as yourself"** ([Leviticus 19:18](#)).

It is true that we are not under the authority of the Mosaic Covenant today, as we do not keep the Torah in order to stay in right relationship with Yahweh. But because Jesus fulfilled the Mosaic Covenant, and because God sent His Spirit to dwell within the church ([Acts 2:1-47](#); [1 Corinthians 6:19-20](#)), and because God writes His law on His people's hearts ([Jeremiah 31:31-34](#)), the people of God are now empowered to actually keep the Law.²¹

God has shown His *hesed* towards His people, empowering us to love God and neighbor—we can now live the Law!

WE LOVE GOD & NEIGHBORS

So we ask: **“who is my neighbor?”** That is what a religious person asked when he was testing Jesus (to know how far he had to go in showing love to others). Jesus’ response was a provocative one, as He told the famous “Good Samaritan” story (Luke 10:25–37). We do not have space to develop this story here, so let me summarize.

The Jews loathed Samaritans. Samaritans were crossbreeds (Jewish–Gentiles) who only accepted Genesis through Deuteronomy as Scripture. In this famous parable, Jesus explains how the Samaritan was the person who showed true compassion to an injured Jewish person, even though the Jew was someone who hated the Samaritan to the core. Jesus’ application (and command) was to go and do like the Samaritan, who perfectly demonstrated neighborly love.

This is what God’s people are able to do now. Since we have had the Law written on our hearts, and since we have received the Spirit of God, we are empowered to love God and love our neighbors—even neighbors who hate us. Therefore, we can fulfill the Law in the way that it was intended. And since we are empowered to love, we can now bless the world.

“For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

—Galatians 5:14

“By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

—John 13:35

WE ARE A KINGDOM OF PRIESTS AND ARE A BLESSING TO THE WORLD

“...you (Christians) are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” ¹⁰ *Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”* (1 Peter 2:9–10)

As we bear God’s image to the world and are conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29), we are chosen to serve a special role: to be a royal priesthood that lives as a holy nation. This is not a geopolitical nation where you step into a voting booth, as you cannot identify this nation on a map. In fact, we are made up of folks who live in exile among all the nations (1 Peter 1:1) and are from every kind of people, language, and tribe, including from the tribes of Israel (Revelation 7:9). The citizens of God’s holy nation do not conquer by strength or violence, but by being a light to the world and loving each other, as Jesus said, **“by this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another”** (John 13:35).

CONCLUSION

As a royal priesthood, we do not need to work tirelessly in the temple making sacrifices for sin—because Jesus took care of that once and for all (Hebrews 10:10). Instead, we mediate the blessings of God in a way that brings the rest of the world to know God. We go out into the world, making disciples of all nations (every type of people group, in every type of country), and we make these disciples by teaching what Jesus commanded the disciples to know and do (Matthew 28:19), as we bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2), thus fulfilling the Law of Christ (1 Corinthians 9:21). Through God's Law written on our hearts, and through the empowerment of the Spirit, we can be a blessing to the world!



- 1 **Jesus describes true neighborly-love as what the Samaritan did for the injured Jewish person. Do you struggle to show love towards those who hate you? Are there people that you need to have a change of heart towards? What's a real-world application for us to show a neighborly-Samaritan type of love?**
- 2 **Christians oftentimes have too low of a view of the Law (that since we are under grace, we do not have to do anything), or too high of a view of the Law (that while we are saved by grace, there is a rigid way of living that everyone *must* follow). Do you fall into this trap of thinking (one or the other)? How can you have a "right perspective" on grace and Law?**
- 3 **As a Christian, how do you see the Law (loving God and neighbor) playing out in everyday life? What are more radical (yet authentic) ways you could love God and neighbor?**

We apply the Law by loving God and neighbor, and when we do this we are living as a kingdom of priests who are blessing the world.



MOSAIC

Covenant Summary

As we have seen through this study, God is building *His Kingdom through Covenants*, for the purpose of taking what was lost in the Garden of Eden and restoring it to something far better than originally imagined. What was promised (and confirmed) to Abraham in Genesis 12, 15, 17, and 22, was demonstrated through Moses and Israel—specifically, that God’s people are being made a nation and were given a land.

Because Israel would be given a land, they would need a constitution to live by, and so Yahweh entered into a covenant with Israel (through Moses). This covenant was the Torah (or Law) that God’s people were to live by. While there are Ten Commandments in this Torah, the first four instruct in how the people are to love God, and the final six instruct how the people are to love one another.

While Israel failed to keep this covenant, Jesus—the true Israel—perfectly kept it! He also taught that He did not come to abolish it, and that the Law was very important for God’s people. In fact, Jesus intensified the Law: you actually commit murder when you hate someone, not when you kill them (Matthew 5–7)!

Because Jesus perfectly kept the Law, and because God sends His Spirit to dwell in believers, God’s people now have the ability to keep the Law—by loving God and loving our neighbors!

ENDNOTES

- 1 Gentry, Peter, J., and Wellum, Stephen J., *God's Kingdom through God's Covenants: A Concise Biblical Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015). p. 134
- 2 In Exodus 24:7 Moses describes the preceding section as the **"book of the Covenant."** Also, the word Deuteronomy is a hybrid of the two Greek words *deutero* (meaning second) and *nomos* (meaning law). The Law was "re-given" to the generation of Israelites (wandering in the wilderness) who were about to enter the Promised Land.
- 3 Hunter, Trent, W., and Wellem, Stephen J., *Christ from Beginning to End* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018). p. 129.
- 4 Both the Westminster Confession of Faith and the London Baptist Confession of 1689, discuss this in Chapter 19 (of each of those documents).
- 5 Some traditions list the commandments pertaining to God differently (sometimes the Sabbath is the 3rd, and sometimes the 4th Commandment). This is because of how the 1st and 2nd Commandments are divided up.
- 6 In the *God's Kingdom through God's Covenants* book (Wellum and Gentry), you will find a very helpful description of the Ten Words/Case Law on pages 136–139.
- 7 Sabbath comes from the Hebrew word **Shabbat**, which means to rest or cease. It is also the word used for "Saturday," which is the day of the week that Israel would remember the Sabbath (technically, from sundown Friday, through sundown Saturday). The early Christians continued to gather on the Sabbath (as most were Jewish), but would also gather on the "first day of the week" (Sunday), to remember the resurrection of Jesus.
- 8 Schreiner, Thomas, R., *Covenant and God's Purpose for the World* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2017). p. 66.
- 9 Gentry and Wellum, p. 161. Regarding "remembering": some of the many examples of remembering are: Genesis 8:1; 9:15–16; 30:22; Exodus 2:24; 3:15; Number 15:39–40; Deuteronomy.
- 10 Other passages that include Yahweh's mandate to **"be fruitful and multiply"** are: Genesis 1:22, 28; 8:17; 9:1, 7; 17:20; 28:3; 35:11; 48:4; Jeremiah 23:3; Ezekiel 36:11.
- 11 Schreiner, Thomas, R., *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic 2013). p.6.
- 12 Gentry and Wellum. p. 89.
- 13 The qualifications for priestly service require that a man is from the tribe of Levi and from the house of Aaron (cf. [Exodus 28:1–4](#); [Leviticus 21–22](#)).
- 14 In Exodus 7:1 it was Aaron who would be a prophet, as he spoke for Moses.
- 15 The formal office of prophet develops much later in Israel's history.
- 16 Bruckney, J. K., *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, USA, 2003). p.228.
- 17 Gentry and Wellum. p. 136.
- 18 Bauer, Walter, *A Greek – English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick William Danker, Third ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000).
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 *The West Wing* "Take out the Trash Day." S1 E13. Directed by Ken Olin. Written by Aaron Sorkin. NBC. January 26, 2000.
- 21 In Week 7 of this study (as we look at Jeremiah 31), we will learn that God's Torah is not written on stone tablets but on the hearts of His people ([2 Corinthians 3:1–18](#)).