

# The Law of Moses in the Old and New Testaments: Its Relationship to Believing Jews and Gentiles

by

**Kenneth J. Morgan**

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## INTRODUCTION

The relationship between law and grace, or law and gospel, is perhaps the most difficult issue in biblical theology. The problems are difficult regardless of theological position, whether it be covenant theology, dispensationalism, Messianic Judaism, or some other system. The goal of this paper is to discuss this issue from the standpoint of a theology of the centrality of Israel, as developed in my previous paper. The central question is this: if Christians are "not under the law," how can Jewish believers, either during the Apostolic period or now, continue to observe the law? Is it then, after all, wrong to circumcise, keep the Passover and other feasts of the law, and in general remain "Torah

observant"?

However, before these questions from the New Testament can be addressed, much groundwork must be laid.

## THE MOSAIC LAW IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

### The Purpose of the Law

In the Abrahamic covenant, God sovereignly elected Israel as his people<sup>1</sup> and promised them the land of Canaan as an everlasting possession.<sup>2</sup> This was an unconditional covenant that God will sovereignly fulfill "because God's gifts and his call are irrevocable."<sup>3</sup> It was based on this covenant that God redeemed his people from bondage in Egypt:

I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty . . . I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, where they lived as aliens. Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are enslaving, and I have remembered my covenant. Therefore, say to the Israelites: "I am Yahweh, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am Yahweh."<sup>4</sup>

Then when God brought Israel to Sinai, he made another covenant with his people,<sup>5</sup> and a major component of that covenant was what is called the Mosaic law. What was the purpose of the law given to Israel? The OT itself clearly provides the answer.

The law was given to a nation already redeemed, Israel whom God redeemed from slavery in Egypt.<sup>6</sup> Notice the sequence in the following passage:

- **Election:** based on God's sovereign choice in the Abrahamic covenant
- **Redemption:** from slavery in Egypt, a redemption based on promise not works
- **Keeping the law:** Israel's response to God's redemption

For you are a people holy to Yahweh your God. Yahweh your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. Yahweh did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because Yahweh loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that Yahweh your God is God; he

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1 Gen. 17:7; 22:17; 26:4; cf. Rom. 11:28

2 Gen. 13:15; 17:8.

3 Rom. 11:29.

4 Exod. 6:3-8; cf. 2:24.

5 Exod. 19:5-8; 24:3-8.

6 Exod. 6:6-8; 15:11-13; Deut. 9:26; et al.

is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands. But those who hate him he will repay to their face by destruction; he will not be slow to repay to their face those who hate him. Therefore, take care to follow the commands, decrees and laws I give you today.<sup>7</sup>

So what was the purpose of the law God gave Israel to obey? There is a twofold answer to this question.

First, the law, not only moral but also civil and ceremonial, was to show Israel the way for his redeemed people, separated unto God, to live. It was the righteous standard by which a redeemed people should live, what is often called the "obedience of faith." That this is what God was doing in giving the law to Israel is clear in the Decalogue itself, the moral heart of the law:

I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me . . .<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, the law is related to **sanctification**, how a redeemed people set apart for God should live. This point is made a number of times.

I am Yahweh your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy. Do not make yourselves unclean by any creature that moves about on the ground. I am Yahweh who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy.<sup>9</sup>

Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: "Be holy because I, Yahweh your God, am holy."<sup>10</sup>

Yahweh will establish you as his holy people, as he promised you on oath, if you keep the commands of Yahweh your God and walk in his ways.<sup>11</sup>

Second, the law preserves the relationship between Israel and God and the blessings provided by the Abrahamic covenant. Only as Israel remained holy by obeying the law would they continue to receive the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant. Moses made this quite clear:

See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love Yahweh your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and Yahweh your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess. But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love Yahweh your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For Yahweh is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham,

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7 Deut. 7:6-11. The same pattern is seen in Deut. 15:15; 24:18.

8 Exod. 20:2-3.

9 Lev. 11:44-45.

10 Lev. 19:2; see also 20:7-8.

11 Deut. 28:9.

Isaac and Jacob.<sup>12</sup>

The dependence of covenantal blessings on obedience is also seen in the famous "if" in Exod. 19:

" 'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant [the Sinaitic covenant containing the law], then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites." So Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people and set before them all the words Yahweh had commanded him to speak. The people all responded together, "We will do everything Yahweh has said." So Moses brought their answer back to Yahweh.<sup>13</sup>

There is nothing here that places into doubt the election of Israel as a nation and as the people of God or its possession of the land as an everlasting inheritance. The conditionality here deals only with a **given generation or sequence of generations**. One generation or a series of generations might through disobedience forfeit their blessings under the Abrahamic covenant and cease to be God's "treasured possession," "kingdom of priests," and "holy nation" dwelling in the promised land. However, the unconditional blessings of the covenant will surely be fulfilled for the nation of Israel.<sup>14</sup> This fact is clear in the prophets,<sup>15</sup> but it is also clear in the Torah itself where the consequences of disobedience are discussed.

## The Result of Disobedience to the Law

God, in the Sinaitic covenant, recognized that Israel would not keep the law perfectly. Within the covenant itself, the sacrificial system was established to restore fellowship with God when sin broke that fellowship.<sup>16</sup> At the national level, this was done primarily through Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, described in Lev. 16. At the individual level, the sacrifices of Lev. 1-7 were used.

It is important to note that the sacrificial system at both levels served only to restore fellowship that was broken by sins committed "through the weakness of the flesh."<sup>17</sup> By contrast, for sins committed "with a high hand," that is, defiant sins in rebellion against God, no sacrifice was provided.<sup>18</sup> At the

12 Deut. 30:15-20. See also the explicit lists of blessings promised to Israel in Lev. 26:1-13 and Deut. 28:1-14 if the nation keeps God's law.

13 Exod. 19:4-8. Alva J. McClain: "As to the conditionality of the kingdom-covenant at Sinai, it is important to remember that this had to do only with the regal and mediatorial activity of Israel in her own land in relation to Jehovah and the nations. . . . The conditional clause qualifies the continuance of the nation of Israel in her favored position in the mediatorial kingdom of Old Testament history, functioning as God's 'kingdom of priests' among the nations on earth" (*The Greatness of the Kingdom* [Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1959], p. 63).

14 "The 'if' [in Ex. 19:5] is admittedly conditional. But conditional to what? It was a condition, in this context, to Israel's distinctive position among all the peoples of the earth, to her mediatorial role and her status as a holy nation. In short, it could qualify, hamper, or negate Israel's experience of sanctification and ministry to others; but it hardly could effect her election, salvation, or present and future inheritance of the ancient promise" (Walter Kaiser, *Toward an Old Testament Theology* [Zondervan Publishing House, 1978], p. 111).

15 This point was argued extensively in my previous paper, "The Centrality of Israel in the Bible and in Theology."

16 The same principle, without sacrifices, is operative today, as described in 1 John 1:9. Confession was, in fact, a part of the sacrificial system at both the individual and national levels (Lev. 5:5; 16:21).

17 This is the meaning of Num. 15:22-29. See C. F. Keil, *The Pentateuch* [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975], II:303, III:103.

18 Num. 15:30-31.

individual level, such a sinner was to be cut off from the people of Israel. At the national level, such sinning would place Israel under the warnings of Lev. 26 and Deut. 28-30, where the lists of blessings for obedience to the law and curses for disobedience are given. In both passages, Moses listed a graded series of divine responses to disobedience. The final judgment was that Israel would "perish among the nations," be removed from the land, and carried off into captivity.

I will lay waste the land, so that your enemies who live there will be appalled. I will scatter you among the nations and will draw out my sword and pursue you. Your land will be laid waste, and your cities will lie in ruins. Then the land will enjoy its sabbath years all the time that it lies desolate and you are in the country of your enemies; then the land will rest and enjoy its sabbaths. All the time that it lies desolate, the land will have the rest it did not have during the sabbaths you lived in it. As for those of you who are left, I will make their hearts so fearful in the lands of their enemies that the sound of a windblown leaf will put them to flight. They will run as though fleeing from the sword, and they will fall, even though no one is pursuing them. They will stumble over one another as though fleeing from the sword, even though no one is pursuing them. So you will not be able to stand before your enemies. You will perish among the nations; the land of your enemies will devour you. Those of you who are left will waste away in the lands of their enemies because of their sins; also because of their fathers' sins they will waste away.<sup>19</sup>

This judgment would be a witness to the nations of what God did to his people when they broke the covenant he made with them at Mt. Sinai:

All the nations will ask: "Why has Yahweh done this to this land? Why this fierce, burning anger?" And the answer will be: "It is because this people abandoned the covenant of Yahweh, the God of their fathers, the covenant he made with them when he brought them out of Egypt. They went off and worshiped other gods and bowed down to them, gods they did not know, gods he had not given them. Therefore Yahweh's anger burned against this land, so that he brought on it all the curses written in this book. In furious anger and in great wrath Yahweh uprooted them from their land and thrust them into another land, as it is now."<sup>20</sup>

But Moses made clear that all this was applicable on a generational basis and in no way threatened Israel's status as God's elect nation or the land as their everlasting possession. Israel would be regathered and restored to their land. This was a major theme in the prophets.<sup>21</sup> However, it is also made quite clear in the Torah itself. Moreover, the restoration of Israel is the result of God's sovereign will to fulfill his covenant with Abraham. In these same sections, Lev. 26 and Deut. 28-30, God, on the basis of his covenant with Abraham, promises not to destroy Israel completely. At first, however, it might appear that the actual restoration was dependent solely on whether Israel would repent:

But if they will confess their sins and the sins of their fathers--their treachery against me and their hostility toward me, which made me hostile toward them so that I sent them into the land of their enemies--then when their uncircumcised hearts are humbled and they pay for their sin, I will remember my covenant with Jacob and my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land. For the land will be deserted by them and will enjoy its sabbaths while it lies desolate without them. They will pay for their sins because they rejected my laws and abhorred my decrees.

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19 Lev. 26:32-39; see also Deut. 28:63-68.

20 Deut. 29:24-28.

21 See Jer. 24:4-7; 30:1-3, 10; 31:38-40; 32:36-44; 33:1-8, 25-26; Ezek. 34:11-14, 25-31; 36:21-38; 37:20-28.

Yet in spite of this, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them or abhor them so as to destroy them completely, breaking my covenant with them. I am Yahweh their God. But for their sake I will remember the covenant with their ancestors whom I brought out of Egypt in the sight of the nations to be their God. I am Yahweh.<sup>22</sup>

When all these blessings and curses I have set before you come upon you and you take them to heart wherever Yahweh your God disperses you among the nations, and when you and your children return to Yahweh your God and obey him with all your heart and with all your soul according to everything I command you today, then Yahweh your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where he scattered you. Even if you have been banished to the most distant land under the heavens, from there Yahweh your God will gather you and bring you back. He will bring you to the land that belonged to your fathers, and you will take possession of it. He will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers.<sup>23</sup>

However, though repentance is the vehicle of restoration, it is God who will sovereignly create this repentance:

Yahweh your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live. Yahweh your God will put all these curses on your enemies who hate and persecute you. You will again obey Yahweh and follow all his commands I am giving you today.<sup>24</sup>

The prophets confirm God's sovereign role in this restoration. Under the new covenant, God declares,

I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.<sup>25</sup>

And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. You will live in the land I gave your forefathers; you will be my people, and I will be your God.<sup>26</sup>

Therefore, rank disobedience to the law at the national level, even rank idolatry, jeopardizes only the participation in the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant for a given generation of Israelites or series of generations. The ultimate fulfillment of the promises to Israel in that covenant are never at risk.

## **The Law is Not a Hypothetical Offer of Salvation**

I have argued that in the Sinaitic covenant, the law was given to a redeemed people to show them God's righteous standards by which they should now live. In no way was keeping the law the way to become a redeemed people. Ladd has an excellent summary of this point:

The heart of Old Testament religion cannot be characterized as legalism, nor was the Law given as a means of achieving a right relationship with God by obedience. On the

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22 Lev. 26:40-45.

23 Deut. 30:1-5.

24 Deut. 30:6-8.

25 Jer. 31:33.

26 Ezek. 36:27-28.

contrary, the context of the Law was the covenant that preceded and underlay the Law [the Abrahamic covenant]; and the covenant was initiated by the gracious act of God. Israel was constituted God's people not because of merit gained by obedience to the Law, but because of God's free election. Israel belongs to God because he has revealed himself by delivering his people out of Egypt. The Law was given as the means of binding Israel to her God. Obedience to the Law did not constitute Israel as God's people; rather, it provided Israel with a standard for obedience by which the covenant relationship must be preserved . . . The reward for obedience to the Law was preservation of the positive obedience to Yahweh.<sup>27</sup>

But now the question arises as to the relationship of the law to the individual. The answer seems straightforward: the manner in which God dealt with the nation of Israel forms the paradigm by which he also deals with individuals. Therefore, the law sets forth God's standards for a redeemed individual as well as for a redeemed nation. Individual salvation, as always, is obtained under the Sinaitic covenant by personal faith in the contents of God's revelation. The Old Testament teaches this universal truth explicitly in the case of Abraham: he believed God and God counted that belief or faith as righteousness.<sup>28</sup> The law, then, defines God's righteous standards by which one who is saved should live. Again, for the individual as for the nation, the law deals with **sanctification**, not **salvation**.

Neither covenant theology nor dispensationalism teaches, or has ever taught, that keeping the law was the method of salvation under the Sinaitic covenant.<sup>29</sup> However, a somewhat related question is more important for this paper: does the law define a hypothetical offer of salvation by obedience to it? Was such an offer at least one of the purposes for giving the law? Of course, all agree that it is impossible for anyone to keep the whole law perfectly. So why should such a purpose even be suggested? The answer is that the concept of a hypothetical offer of salvation in the law is used to interpret certain passages about the law both in the Old Testament and the New Testament. For example, in commenting on Lev. 18:5, Bonar writes,

But if, as most think, we are to take, in this place the words "live in them" as meaning "eternal life to be got by them," the scope of the passage is, that so excellent are God's laws, and every special, minute detail of these laws, *that if a man were to keep these always and perfectly*, this keeping would be eternal life to him. And the quotations [of Lev. 18:5] in Rom. x. 5, and Gal. iii. 12, would seem to determine this to be the true and only sense here [emphasis original].<sup>30</sup>

I disagree and argue that no Scripture, even "hypothetically," offers salvation or eternal life as a condition of obedience to the law. New Testament statements about the law are discussed later in this paper. However, it is necessary in this section to determine that no text in the Old Testament presents

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27 George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974], p. 496.

28 Gen. 15:6.

29 In the past, however, both sides have made poorly-worded statements. The literature is replete with accusations back-and-forth that the other position teaches two methods of salvation. When pressed for clarity, neither side believes this today, and probably never did.

30 Andrew A. Bonar, *A Commentary on the Book of Leviticus*, 5th ed. [London: James Nisbet & Co., 1875], pp. 329-30. Meyer, in commenting on Rom. 10:5, states that "Moses exhibits the *doing* as the condition of the attainment of ζωη (which is referred by Paul not to the happy and prosperous life in Palestine, but to its antitype, the ζωη αιωνιος [eternal life]" (Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Hand-Book to The Epistle to the Romans* [New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1884], p. 406).

such a concept. The two primary texts that come up for consideration are Exod. 19:5-8 and Lev. 18:5.<sup>31</sup>

Exod. 19:5-8 has been discussed at length earlier. The key text to consider at this point is Lev. 18:5:

Keep my decrees and laws, for the man who obeys them will live by them. I am Yahweh.

Clearly, obeying the law will cause a man to "live." The important question is the meaning of "live."<sup>32</sup> The following arguments can be made.

- The passage begins and ends with "I am Yahweh your God."<sup>33</sup> Therefore, it is difficult to escape the implication that those who are enjoined to obey the laws in this chapter are already reckoned by God as his people. In turn, the activities herein described by authorial intent fall into the category of **sanctification**.<sup>34</sup>
- It is difficult to see in Lev. 18:5 an offer of salvation through perfect law-keeping when the law itself provided the sacrificial system for law-breakers.<sup>35</sup>
- In verse 5, obedience to the law leads to "life," while according to verses 26-28, not keeping the law results in expulsion from the land.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, it seems clear that in the context, the "life" here refers to the blessings inherent in living in the land, that is, the enjoyment of the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant.
- This same contrast is also drawn by Moses in other texts. For example, in Deut. 4:11 obeying the law is equated with living in the land.

Hear now, O Israel, the decrees and laws I am about to teach you. Follow them so that you may live and may go in and take possession of the land that Yahweh, the God of your fathers, is giving you.

Deut. 30:15-20 is even more direct:

. . . For I command you today to love Yahweh your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and Yahweh your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess. But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land . . .

Moreover, in the conclusion to the passage, Deut. 30:19-20, "life" is specifically defined as living in the land with all of its blessings, and therefore must mean something like "national

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31 Lev. 18:5 is quoted in Ezek. 20:11, 13, 21. Its citations in the NT, Rom. 10:5 and Gal. 3:12, are discussed later in this paper.

32 The word "live" here is a 3ms Qal perfect of חיה with a *waw* consecutive. The verb חיה simply means *to live*. *BDB* lists its use in Lev. 18:5 as an example of *to live on* or *to live upon* (p. 311). Holloday suggests, *to live by (means of) something* (p. 102). Thus literally: ". . . which if a man does them, he will live in them."

33 Verses 1 and 30.

34 Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "Leviticus 18:5 and Paul: Do This and You Shall Live (Eternally?)," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 14(1971):24.

35 Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "Leviticus 18:5 and Paul: Do This and You Shall Live (Eternally?)," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 14(1971):25.

36 Thomas Edward McComiskey, *The Covenants of Promise: A Theology of the Old Testament Covenants* [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985], pp. 121-22.

welfare":

Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love Yahweh your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For Yahweh is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

McComiskey concludes:

In neither of these contexts [Leviticus 18 and Deuteronomy 30] can the word life be understood to connote the state of receiving the inheritance. It relates only to continued participation in the inheritance and thus is effected by obedience to the law. The inheritance is granted only by the Abrahamic covenant. The law covenant [the Sinaitic covenant] does not grant the inheritance but functions to govern the obedience necessary for the maintenance of one's participation in it.<sup>37</sup>

In conclusion, the statement in Lev. 18:5 has a very clear purpose in the context: it states that the result of keeping the law is living the abundant life of blessing in the land. Keeping the law was not related to justification but to sanctification. Thus, it was a requirement for God to continue to allow Israel to enjoy the blessings in the land of promise in the Abrahamic covenant. In no way does this statement in Lev. 18:5 suggest that keeping the law represents a hypothetical method of salvation. To quote Buswell:

In that context [of Lev. 18:5] Moses is obviously describing not the means of obtaining eternal life, but the horizon within which an earthly godly life ought to be lived.<sup>38</sup>

## **The Law Was Viewed in a Positive Light**

It is important to make the point, that in the Old Testament the Law was not viewed as some heavy burden that one must try to "grin and bear." Specifically in the Psalms we can see how the law was loved by those who were saved under the Old Covenant.

### ***Psalm 1***

Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of Yahweh, and on his law he meditates day and night.<sup>39</sup>

### ***Psalm 19***

The law of Yahweh is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of Yahweh are

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37 Thomas Edward McComiskey, *The Covenants of Promise: A Theology of the Old Testament Covenants* [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985], pp. 122.

38 James Oliver Buswell, Jr., *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1962], I:313. See also George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974], p. 496: "The reward for obedience to the Law was preservation of the positive relationship to Yahweh. This is the meaning of Leviticus 18:5."

39 Ps. 1:1-2.

trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of Yahweh are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of Yahweh are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of Yahweh is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of Yahweh are sure and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.<sup>40</sup>

### **Psalm 119**

Psalm 119 is the longest "chapter" in the Bible: 176 verses, almost all of them referring in some way to the law:<sup>41</sup>

Your statutes are my delight;  
they are my counselors.

Direct me in the path of your commands,  
for there I find delight.

How I long for your precepts!  
Preserve my life in your righteousness.

Your decrees are the theme of my song  
wherever I lodge.

At midnight I rise to give you thanks  
for your righteous laws.

The law from your mouth is more precious to me  
than thousands of pieces of silver and gold.

Oh, how I love your law!  
I meditate on it all day long.

Your statutes are my heritage forever;  
they are the joy of my heart.

I obey your statutes,  
for I love them greatly.

Such assessments as these by divinely inspired Old Testament saints will prove very important in the analysis of Paul's statements regarding the law.

### **The Mosaic Law in the Future as Seen by the Prophets**

The next point to establish is that the Old Testament prophets did not foresee a time in which the law would be abrogated. In fact, the prophets make it very clear that the law was a permanent part of God's redemptive plan. This fact is demonstrated in a number of ways.

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<sup>40</sup> Ps. 19:8-11.

<sup>41</sup> Verses 24, 35, 40, 54, 62, 72, 97, 111, 167.

- There are the general statements that the law is part of the new covenant.

I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.<sup>42</sup>

And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. You will live in the land I gave your forefathers; you will be my people, and I will be your God.<sup>43</sup>

- There are numerous statements that various aspects of the law are part of the age of the Messianic kingdom. The Passover will be observed.<sup>44</sup> The nations will go to Jerusalem year-to-year to worship Yahweh and keep the feast of tabernacles.<sup>45</sup> Even in the new heavens and the new earth, the sabbath will be kept.<sup>46</sup> Finally, the sacrifices themselves are offered.<sup>47</sup>

There is no hint in the Old Testament that the law was temporary or that it would pass away.

### **The Mosaic Law in the Intertestamental Period**

Certain important changes in the Jewish understanding of the law occurred in the intertestamental period. During this time a view of the law developed that was quite different from that presented in the Old Testament. These developments must be understood in order to interpret several statements of Paul regarding the law in the New Testament.

Ladd provides the following summary:

In the intertestamental period a fundamental change occurred in the role of the Law in the life of the people. The importance of the Law overshadows the concept of the covenant and becomes the condition of membership in God's people. Even more importantly, observance of the law becomes the basis of God's verdict upon the individual. Resurrection will be the reward of those who have been devoted to the Law (II Macc. 7:9). The Law is the basis of the hope of the faithful (Test. Jud. 26:1), of justification (Apoc. Bar. 51:3), of salvation (Apoc. Bar. 51:7), of righteousness (Apoc. Bar. 57:6), of life (IV Ez. 7:21; 9:31). Obedience to the Law will even bring God's Kingdom and transform the entire sin-cursed world (Jub. 23). Thus the Law attains the position of an intermediary between God and man.

This new role of the Law characterizes rabbinic Judaism; and for this reason, "the basic starting point of the Old Testament is characteristically and decisively altered and invalidated." The Torah becomes the one and only mediator between God and man; all other relationships between God and man, Israel, or the world are subordinated to the Torah. Both righteousness and life in the world to come are secured by obeying the

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42 Jer. 31:33.

43 Ezek. 36:27-28.

44 Ezek. 45:21-25.

45 Zech. 14:16.

46 Isa. 66:22-23.

47 Jer. 33:15-18; Ezek. 43:18-46:24.

Law.<sup>48</sup>

In this connection, it is also interesting to note that during the intertestamental period, "life" in Lev. 18:5 came to be regarded as "life eternal."<sup>49</sup>

Of course, the Judaism of the New Testament era recognized that it was impossible to keep the law perfectly. Nevertheless, full obedience was the goal.

All of the commandments, both written and oral, must be kept. "To violate one of them was equivalent to rejecting the whole law and refusing God's yoke (Sifre on Num. 15:22)." However, salvation did not depend upon faultless conformity to the Law. Man is indwelt by an evil impulse as well as a good impulse, and therefore no man can attain to sinless perfection.

Therefore the "righteous" man is not he who obeys the Law faultlessly, but he alone who *strives* to regulate his life by the Law. The sincerity and supremacy of this purpose and the strenuous endeavor to accomplish it are the marks of a righteous man . . . God provided repentance as the way by which his sins could be forgiven . . . The righteous man, therefore, is not the man who actually succeeds in keeping the Law, but the man who intends to, strives to do so, and is repentant when he fails.<sup>50</sup>

With this background on the view of the law both in the Old Testament and during the time of Christ, Paul's view of the law can now be examined.

## THE MOSAIC LAW IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

### Limitations and Strategy

The New Testament commentary on the Mosaic law is vast. A complete examination would include the view of Jesus, of Paul, of the writer of Hebrews, and of James, Peter, John, and Jude in the general epistles. Even a study of just Paul's statement is beyond the scope of this paper. The discussion here is limited to a few of the more important and more difficult passages in Paul with a few additional comments on James.

Before attempting to interpret these difficult Pauline passages, it is worthwhile to consider various statements by Paul that are clearly in full accord with the views expressed in the Old Testament, especially the Psalms.

You can easily verify that no more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship. My accusers did not find me arguing with anyone at the temple, or stirring up a crowd in the synagogues or anywhere else in the city. And they cannot prove to you the charges they are now making against me. However, I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that

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48 George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974], pp. 497-98. The quotation is from H. Kleinknecht, *Bible Key Words: Law*, p. 69.

49 Rabbi J. H. Hertz, *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs: Hebrew Text, English Translation, and Commentary* [London: Soncino Press, 1981, originally published 1937], p. 489, cites Onkelos, Targum Jonathan, and Rashi for this interpretation.

50 George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974], pp. 498-99. The quotation is from J. Bonsirven, *Palestinian Judaism in the Time of Jesus Christ*, p. 95.

agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets.<sup>51</sup>

Three days later he called together the leaders of the Jews. When they had assembled, Paul said to them: "My brothers, although I have done nothing against our people or against the customs of our ancestors, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans."<sup>52</sup>

Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.<sup>53</sup>

So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good.<sup>54</sup>

We know that the law is good if one uses it properly.<sup>55</sup>

Therefore, to properly interpret Paul's difficult statements about the law, the following background must be applied:

- The view of the law in the Old Testament
- The view of the law in Rabbinic Judaism during the Apostolic era
- Paul's own clear statements about *his* attitude toward the law

In connection with the first point, this paper assumes the following hermeneutical principle: any New Testament interpretation of the Old Testament in an apologetic argument must agree with the original intent of the Old Testament text. As Kaiser wrote,

If we limit our discussion to this one class of citations, it is our contention that the NT [writers] did not find, nor did they attach new or different meanings to the OT verses they used. On the contrary, we have argued . . . [that OT texts cited] yield the same basic meaning in both Testaments when patiently exegeted by the methods that assign a priority to the human author's own single truth-intention.<sup>56</sup>

We now analyze several Pauline texts that deal with the law.<sup>57</sup>

## "Christ is the End of the Law"

### Romans 9:30-10:13<sup>58</sup>

Paul has much to say about the law in this passage. However, the most controversial statement is in verse 4: "Christ is the end of the law."

What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have

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51 Acts 24:11-14.

52 Acts 28:17.

53 Rom. 3:31.

54 Rom. 7:12.

55 1 Tim. 1:8.

56 Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1985], p. 226.

57 The passages examined in this paper have been the subject of much debate throughout church history. Space does not allow a detailed critique of all the various explanations offered. In general, the argument here is limited to the view taken.

58 With a few minor departures, the analysis that I present of Rom. 9:30-10:13 follows the approach of Daniel P. Fuller, *Gospel & Law: Contrast or Continuum?* [Grand Rapids: William P. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980].

obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the "stumbling stone." As it is written:

"See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes men to stumble  
and a rock that makes them fall,  
and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame."

Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: "The man who does these things will live by them." But the righteousness that is by faith says: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with you mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame." For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile--the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

### **Section 9:30-32**

Verses 30-32a begin Paul's argument in this section:

What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works.

Verse 30 is clear enough: the Gentiles were not pursuing righteousness, but they obtained a righteousness that is "by faith" (*εκ πιστεως*). In Paul's contrasting statement about Israel in verse 31, he uses an unusual expression:

*Ισραηλ δε διωκων νομον δικαιοσυνης εις νομον ουκ εφθασεν*

Literally, "But Israel pursuing a/the law of righteousness at a/the law did not arrive."

Both nouns *νομον* (law) are anarthrous. However, Paul frequently uses *νομον* both with and without the article so that its presence or absence is not a clue to whether he is or is not speaking specifically of the Mosaic law.<sup>59</sup> However, once one decides contextually what "law" it is to which Paul is referring, that will

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<sup>59</sup> "Nevertheless, this [issue just discussed] must not be taken as an occasion to revive the issue whether there is a distinction between the use of *νομος* without the article and its use with the article. It is certainly not true

determine whether "a" or "the" should be used in the English translation.

The expression νομον δικαιοσυνης, "law of righteousness," is certainly unusual and has been variously explained by the commentators. However, the passage makes good sense if both uses of νομον have the same reference and both refer to the Mosaic law. Thus, νομον δικαιοσυνης, as a reference to the Mosaic law, is best translated as "the law of righteousness," meaning, **the Mosaic law characterized by righteousness.**

Verse 31 can therefore be interpreted as follows: "But Israel, [although] pursuing the [Mosaic] law of righteousness, did not arrive at [that] law."

To compound the difficulties in this passage, verse 32 contains a triple ellipsis. The interpreter must supply the subject, verb, and direct object. All interpreters agree that the subject must be "Israel" and that the verb should be "pursue" from verse 31: "Why? Because [Israel pursued <what?>] not by faith but, as it were, by works."

The most natural direct object to be supplied is that same "law of righteousness" that Israel pursued but did not attain in verse 31. Israel did not attain it because she pursued it amiss: she pursued the Mosaic law by works and not by faith.

Therefore, two different ways of pursuing the Mosaic law were open to Israel. What was the difference between them? The little word ως, "as" or "as it were," supplies a clue. The word can be used to introduce a characteristic quality of something, which quality can either be actual, be wrongly claimed, or exist only in someone's imagination. Here it is best taken as follows: "They pursued the law of righteousness not by faith but, as if it were possible, by works [which is impossible]."<sup>60</sup>

What then was the "by-works" method of pursuit and why was it impossible? Israel pursued the Mosaic law by works in the sense that she considered the works prescribed within the law to be inherently meritorious, works in which men could boast and whose performance would result in righteousness, that is, a right standing before God. However, as our review of the Mosaic law in the Old Testament demonstrated, the law was not given as a way to achieve a right standing before God. A right standing before God, namely justification, was by faith, and the works prescribed in the law represented the "obedience of faith," the obedience that flowed from the faith of an already-redeemed, righteous person. Therefore, the "by-faith" method by which Israel could have pursued and attained the Mosaic law would have been:

- First, to attain by faith the righteousness made known by that law
- Then to obey the law as the way for a redeemed person to live and enjoy the blessings of God

However, Israel pursued the Mosaic law incorrectly and did not attain it because she wanted to gain righteousness by the works of that law and not by faith. **That was an impossible pursuit because the goal of the law never was to grant righteousness by the works of the law.**

Therefore, the following interpretation of verses 30-32a is suggested:

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that νομος is 'a' law as distinct from ο νομος, 'the Law "' (W. Gutbrod, νομος, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965], IV:1070).

<sup>60</sup> William F. Arndt and Wilbur Gingrich take it in this way. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957], p. 906.

What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but Israel, [although] pursuing the [Mosaic] law of righteousness, did not arrive at [that] law. Why? Because [Israel pursued the law of righteousness] not by faith but, as if it were possible, by works [which was impossible, because the goal of the law never was to grant righteousness by the works of the law].

In verses 32b-33, Paul describes this wrong pursuit as stumbling over the stumbling stone, a reference to Jesus Christ.<sup>61</sup> So close was Christ related to the law that in rejecting the proper pursuit of the law by faith, Israel ipso facto also rejected Christ.

### **Section 10:1-9**

Three key issues are raised in this section:

- In what sense is Christ the "end" (τέλος) of the law in verse 4?
- What meaning does Paul attribute to Lev. 18:5 in verse 5?
- What meaning does Paul attribute to Deut. 30:11-14 in verses 6-8?

#### Verses 1-4

Verses 1-4 in the NIV read as follows:

Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. [For] Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

The word τέλος corresponds in a general way to the English word "end." However, it can mean "end" in the sense of "goal" or in the sense of "termination." The debate on its meaning in verse 4 rages between various theological camps. However, all must grant that the more common meaning of τέλος is "goal."<sup>62</sup> Therefore, apart from the context, one should be predisposed a priori to that meaning.

Verse 4 also contains the word γαρ, "for," its usual sense being that of giving the *cause* or *reason* for something. It is unfortunate that the NIV does not translate it, because it shows that verse 4 is offered as an argument for the point Paul just made in verse 3. Now consider the context of verses 1-3.

In verses 30-32a, Paul argued that Israel did not attain the Mosaic law because she pursued it by works rather than by faith. This was an impossible pursuit because ***the goal of the law never was to grant [justifying] righteousness by the works of the law.*** In this pursuit Israel stumbled over [or, rejected] Christ. Now in verses 1-3 Paul goes on to point out that although Israel had a zeal for God, it was not according to knowledge. Since she did not know "the [justifying] righteousness that comes

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61 On this most commentators agree; see Matt. 21:42; Mk. 12:10; Lk. 20:17; Acts 4:11; 1 Pet. 2:6-8.

62 This is the meaning of τέλος, for example, in 1 Tim. 1:5 ("The goal of this command is love") and 1 Pet. 1:9 ("For you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls").

from God" by faith, and rather sought to establish her own [justifying] righteousness by works, that is, by keeping the law, Israel did not submit to this [justifying] righteousness of God by faith. But the law could not make her righteous, **because** ["**FOR**"] Christ was the real goal of the law, not the making of people righteous before God. Christ was the goal of the law because he secured and would convey this [justifying] righteousness to everyone who responds in faith, thus confirming the works of the law to be the proper response of faith in righteous living. Possession of the righteousness of God was the prerequisite and basis for the proper use of the law. Therefore, Paul could argue that Christ was the "goal" of the law, "the object at which the law was aimed,"<sup>63</sup> because he obtained that righteousness for those who believe. The law looked forward to Christ because he provided the righteousness that the law could not provide; it simply structured one's response to gaining a right standing before God.

As Paul had already argued,

Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. But now a righteousness from God, apart from [observing the] law, has been made known, to which the law and the prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.<sup>64</sup>

This summary seems to best capture Paul's line of thought in verses 1-4. Therefore, nothing in verse 4 requires the conclusion that Christ terminated the law.

#### Verses 5-9

Verses 5-9 in the NIV read as follows:

[For] Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: "The man who does these things will live by them." But the righteousness that is by faith says: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) "or 'Who will descend into the deep?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

With regard to this passage, I start with two foundational assumptions, which space does not permit me to defend:

- There are no contradictions in the writings of Moses. Moses cannot make statements about righteousness or the law that are in conflict with each other.
- In his exegesis of Lev. 18:5 and Deut. 10:11-14, Paul does not ignore, evade, or twist the meaning intended by Moses in either passage. In making his argument, Paul uses the original intent of the Old Testament texts.

The first issue to determine is the meaning of the  $\gamma\alpha\rho\dots\delta\epsilon$  combination.  $\gamma\alpha\rho$  in verse 5 introduces the quotation of Lev. 18:5, and  $\delta\epsilon$  in verse 6 introduces the quotation of Deut. 30:11-14. The particle  $\delta\epsilon$  can indicate contrast similar to the unambiguous  $\alpha\lambda\lambda\alpha$  (strong "but"); however, it is also used "very

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63 Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1958], II:417.

64 Rom. 3:20-22.

frequently as a transitional particle pure and simple, without any contrast intended."<sup>65</sup> Of course, when used with *μεν*, the *μεν...δε* combination generally means "on the one hand . . . but on the other hand," implying a contrast. But in verses 5 and 6 we do not have that pair of particles. Does *γαρ...δε* mean "for...and" or "for...but"?

- If it means "for...and," then the two Old Testament texts, according to Paul, make essentially the same point.
- If it means "for...but," then the two Old Testament texts, according to Paul, make contrasting points.

If one chooses "for...but," it would be difficult to maintain the two foundational assumptions made above regarding this passage. However, there is indeed precedence in this very chapter for Paul's use of *γαρ...δε* in the sense of "for...and." In verse 10 he writes,

For [*γαρ*] it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and [*δε*] it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.<sup>66</sup>

Thus, in verses 5-6 Paul is citing two Old Testament texts that have essentially the same meaning in order to make a critical point in his argument. We now proceed to analyze the two quotations and the way they are used by Paul in his argument.

#### "The Righteousness of the Law": Leviticus 18:5

[For] Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: "The man who does these things will live by them."

Like it did in verse 4, the NIV leaves *γαρ* untranslated. Nevertheless, it is critical in determining Paul's line of thought. Verse 5, containing the quotation of Lev. 18:5, is offered as an argument for the point Paul just made in verse 4.

This paper has already argued that Lev. 18:5 teaches that keeping the law is the obedience of faith and results in living the abundant life of blessing. The law was not related to justification but to sanctification. How does that idea support Paul's statement about Christ in verse 4?

The goal of the law was not to grant righteousness by the works of the law. Verse 4 stated that instead Christ was the goal of the law in that he secured and would convey that righteousness to everyone who responds in faith, thus allowing the works of the law to be the proper response of faith. "We know this to be the case," Paul continues in verse 5, "**BECAUSE** [*γαρ*] Moses in Lev. 18:5 described the righteousness of which the law is speaking, namely, the obedience of faith, resulting in the abundant life of blessing."

However, Paul needed to add another component to his argument. Therefore he continues in verse 6,

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65 William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957], p. 170.

66 *γαρ...δε* is also used in the sense of "for...and" in Rom. 7:8-9 and 11:15-16, but in the sense of "for...but" in Rom. 6:23.

"And also . . ."

"The Righteousness of Faith": Deuteronomy 30:11-14

**AND** [similarly], the righteousness that is by faith says: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) "or 'Who will descend into the deep?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming.

Properly understood as intended by Moses, Lev. 18:5 did indeed speak of "the righteousness of the law," that is, righteous living as the obedience of faith. However, as argued above, contemporary Judaism had misinterpreted Lev. 18:5, claiming that eternal life could be gained by keeping the law. Therefore Paul adduces this second quotation to show that the true "righteousness of the law" described in Lev. 18:5 is equivalent to "the righteousness of faith" that both Moses and Paul preached. Properly understood, Deut. 30:11-14 depicts the law precisely the same way as Lev. 18:5. Both view keeping the law as the response of faith resulting in living the abundant life of blessing. Thus both citations support Paul's claim that Christ is the goal of the law: the law does not grant righteousness; Christ grants it to everyone by faith, while the law is the response of faith.

Consequently, . . . the righteousness of the law, set forth by the intended meaning of the law itself [in Leviticus 18:5], consists precisely in its being the righteousness of faith which Moses sets forth so clearly in Deuteronomy 30:11-14. So it is from the vantage point of the obedience of faith and not works in which men can boast that Leviticus 18:5 and the rest of the Mosaic law are to be understood.<sup>67</sup>

We move now to the details of Paul's second citation. Deut. 30:11-14 in the NIV reads as follows:

Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, "Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, "Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it.

Moses here is commanding Israel to obey the law but assures her that it is not difficult or beyond her ability. It is neither inaccessible in heaven nor beyond the sea. No, the law that Israel was to obey was very close: in their mouth and in their heart.<sup>68</sup> "With these words on the very essence or purpose of the law, Moses then concludes with a call for decision [in verses 15-20],"<sup>69</sup> a passage considered previously in this paper. Israel, God's chosen and redeemed people, were called upon to choose "life" by loving Yahweh their God and keeping his commandments; then she would "live and increase, and Yahweh your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess."<sup>70</sup> Therefore, the clear intent

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67 Daniel P. Fuller, *Gospel & Law: Contrast or Continuum?* [Grand Rapids: William P. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980], p. 81.

68 "This conjunction of mouth and heart calls to mind the injunction to Israel following the exposition of the Shema: 'These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them' (Deut. 6:6-7a)" (Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy, The New American Commentary* [Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994], p. 391).

69 Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976] , p. 365.

70 Deut. 30:16.

of Moses in Deut. 30:11-20 is to call redeemed Israel to the obedience of faith that would result in the abundant life of blessing.

In quoting this passage Paul modified the wording but preserved the original intent of Moses. First, he claims that what he is about to quote is what the righteousness of faith says, making Moses equivalent to the righteousness of faith. Second, Paul rewords the questions Moses anticipated from Israel into commands: do not ask who will ascend into heaven and who will descend into the deep! Moses was claiming the law was very close to Israel, neither in heaven nor in the deep. Third, by inserting Christ after each command, Paul implies two things: that (1) Christ and the law are essentially one, and that (2) Christ also is very near (he does not need to be brought back from heaven nor be raised from the dead a second time). Fourth, Paul concludes by asking what the righteousness of faith really does say. It says that the "word" is very near, even in your mouth and heart. This "word," Paul claims, is "the word of faith" that he is preaching! Paul is thus identifying the law with the word of faith that he preaches. The analogies Paul draws can be summarized as follows:

<b>Deut. 30:11-14</b>	<b>Rom. 10:6-8</b>
Moses	The righteousness of faith
The law	Christ
"The word" = The law	The "word" = "The word of faith" = The gospel of Christ that Paul preaches

By exegeting Deut. 30:11-14 in this manner, Paul asserts that the law and the gospel both proclaim the same message: "the word of faith," namely, that righteousness is obtained by faith and that the law represents the proper response of faith.

The Deuteronomy passage stated that the law was near, in their mouth and in their heart. In quoting that the word is near in verse 8, Paul picks up on "mouth" and "heart" in verse 9:

But what does it [the righteousness of faith] say? "The word is near you; it is in your **mouth** and in your **heart**," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your **mouth**, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your **heart** that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

### Summary

The entire argument can be summarized as follows:

- Israel did not pursue the law of righteousness, the Mosaic law, by faith but by works, using the law in the attempt to earn righteousness rather than as the response of faith (9:30-32a).
- Thus Israel also rejected Christ (9:32b-33).
- Israel did not submit to the righteousness of God that comes by faith but sought to establish her own righteousness by the works of the law (10:1-3).
- But Israel did not obtain righteousness because the goal of the law was not righteousness by works but Christ (10:4a).
- Christ was the goal of the law in that he secured righteousness for anyone who would receive

it by faith, confirming the works of the law to be the proper response of faith in righteous living (10:4b).

- We know this to be the case, first, because Moses described "the righteousness of the law" to be the holy and abundant life that resulted from obeying the law (Lev. 18:5 and 10:5).
- And, second, because "the righteousness of faith" said [by Moses] that the word of the law that you as a redeemed people are to obey is very near you: it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it; so the law is "the word of faith" that Paul proclaims--both the law and Paul's message say that true, justifying righteousness is obtained by faith and that the law represents the proper response of faith (Deut. 30:11-14 and 10:6-8).
- Specifically, Paul preaches that the mouth confesses Christ and the heart accepts him by faith (10:9).

The argument can be stated even more concisely:

- Christ is the goal toward which the law pointed because he secured the righteousness of God that was the basis for the righteous living described in the law.
- Both citations from Moses show that obeying the law is the response of faith.
- Both Moses and Paul were preaching the righteousness of faith, namely that righteousness is obtained by faith, not by the works of the law.

In view of this study, the NIV text can be amplified as follows:

What then shall we say? [Namely this:] That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but Israel, [although] pursuing the [Mosaic] law of righteousness, did not arrive at [that] law. Why? Because [Israel pursued the law of righteousness] not by faith but, as if it were possible, by works [which was impossible because the goal of the law never was to grant justifying righteousness by the works of the law].

They stumbled over [or, rejected] the "stumbling stone [Christ]." As it is written:

"See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes men to stumble  
and a rock that makes them fall,  
and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame."

Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the [justifying] righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own [justifying righteousness by keeping the law], they did not submit to God's [justifying] righteousness [by faith, even though the law itself could not make them righteous]. [For] Christ [and not the making of people righteous before God] is the goal of the law so that there may be righteousness [obtained by Christ] for everyone who believes [confirming the works of the law to be the proper response of faith in righteous living].

[For] Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: "The man who does these things [as the response of faith] will live [the abundant life of blessing] by them." And [similarly] the righteousness that is by faith says: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) "or 'Who will descend into the deep?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it [the righteousness of faith] say? "The word [of the law] is near you; it is in your mouth and

in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Rom. 9:30-10:9 is perhaps one of the most difficult passages about the law in the writings of the Apostle Paul. However, if the interpretation presented here is anywhere near correct, this passage teaches neither that the law was a hypothetical method of salvation nor that it was in any way abrogated in the new covenant inaugurated by Christ.

## **"You Are Not Under Law, but Under Grace" Romans 6:14**

In all, Paul uses the phrase *υπο νομον* (under law) ten times.<sup>71</sup> The specific question to be addressed here is how Paul's statement in Rom. 6:14--that "we are not under the law"--is to be reconciled with the notion that obeying the law is the proper response of faith in the life of a believer.

### ***Salvation in the Old Testament***

This paper has already argued that individual salvation, even under the Sinaitic covenant, has always been obtained by personal faith in the contents of God's revelation, as exemplified in Abraham.<sup>72</sup> The law of the Sinaitic covenant defines God's righteous standards by which one who is saved should live. Thus for the individual as for the nation, the law deals with **sanctification**, not **salvation**.

However, the nature of salvation in the Old Testament must be explored in more depth. For reasons of space, the case cannot be argued here, but I set forth the following proposition: in the Old Testament, salvation for individuals involved precisely those same works of the Holy Spirit that are explicitly attributed to him in the New Testament--regeneration, indwelling, sealing, and filling.<sup>73</sup> This proposition is important to the argument to follow.

### ***The Meaning of "Under Law" and "Under Grace"***

What does it mean to be "under the law" and "under grace"? First, I suggest that the shift from the one description to the other does not mean or imply **a change from one era or dispensation to another**. In particular, "under law" does not mean "under the Sinaitic covenant," and neither does "under grace" mean "under the new covenant." The following two arguments are advanced.

- Grace was clearly present under the Sinaitic covenant. The Abrahamic covenant, on which the Sinaitic covenant was based, was a covenant of grace, and Israel received grace in her election and redemption. Moreover, all those individuals who were saved prior to the new

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71 Rom. 6:14, 15; 1 Cor. 9:20 (three times); Gal. 3:23; 4:4, 5, 21; 5:18.

72 Gen. 15:6; cf. Rom. 4:1-12.

73 The case is thoroughly argued by Leon J. Wood, *The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976], pp. 64-89. See also briefer arguments by Benjamin B. Warfield, *Biblical and Theological Studies* [Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1968], pp. 127-56 (originally published as "The Spirit of God in the Old Testament," *The Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 1895, VI:665-687), and J. Barton Payne, *The Theology of the Older Testament* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1962], pp. 172-76.

covenant were also saved by grace through faith, as was Abraham. Finally, the gracious works of the Holy Spirit that brought about and accompanied salvation (regeneration, indwelling, sealing, and filling) were all of grace, as in the New Testament.

- The first part of Rom. 6:14 would be difficult to explain if "under law" and "under grace" referred to a change of era or dispensation: "For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace." Living in the New Testament instead of the Old Testament era is no guarantee that sin shall not be our master.<sup>74</sup> Similarly, living under the Old Testament is no guarantee that sin must be our master, or there would have been no salvation at all in the Old Testament.<sup>75</sup>

Therefore, instead of a change in era, to move from being "under law" to being "under grace" refers to **a change in an individual from unsaved to saved**, whatever the era in which he lived. The evidence consists of the following points.

First, in the context Paul has argued that those who have been "baptized into Christ" and united with him in his death and resurrection<sup>76</sup> are "no longer slaves to sin."<sup>77</sup> Those of us who are saved should "count ourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus" and not let sin reign in us.<sup>78</sup> Then in verse 14 Paul assures us that, indeed, sin shall not be our master, "because we are not under law, but under grace." It is the experience of salvation for each individual that breaks the dominion of sin over us. Therefore, it is salvation that effects the change from being under law to under grace. Commenting on Rom. 6:14, M'Caig observes that when one is saved, "his relationship to the Law has been altered through his union with Christ."<sup>79</sup> Being under grace means being in a state of favor, a state of reconciliation to God. Sin does not have dominion over anyone in such a state. Being under the law, therefore, is how Paul in this passage describes the state of being under the dominion of sin, being a slave to sin. This is the condition of everyone before salvation.<sup>80</sup> Note that this entire analysis applies equally to an individual whether living in the Old Testament era or the New. Thus it can be said of one saved in Old Testament times that he is "not under law, but under grace."

Second, Gal. 5:18 is a key verse in determining Paul's use of the phrase "under law": "If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law." Who is it that is "led by the Spirit"? One who is saved. Not being under the law, then, is to be saved.<sup>81</sup> Again, the condition of being under the law or not under the law is related to the individual, and in particular to the salvation status of that individual. Those who were

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74 Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* [Philadelphia: Alfred Martien, 1873], p. 149.

75 A logical analysis of the sentence is interesting. As written by Paul, "Sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace." Put in "if-then" form: "If you are not under law but under grace, then sin shall not be your master." The contrapositive, which is logically equivalent, would be: "If sin is your master, then you are under law and not grace." If "under law" and "under grace" signify the OT and NT eras, then this statement in Rom. 6:14 implies the curious conclusion that a man living in the New Testament era but under the dominion of sin is somehow really living in the Old Testament era!

76 Verses 1-5.

77 Verses 6-7.

78 Verses 11-12.

79 Archibald M'Caig, "Law in the New Testament," *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* [Chicago: The Howard-Severance Company, 1930], III:1849.

80 Note that this is not the same as saying that "under the law" means "under the penalty of the law," a common interpretation of the phrase. The context of Romans 6 deals with the problem of the **power** of sin, not the **penalty** of sin. "Hence to be 'under law' is to be the bondservant of sin" (John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Vol. I [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1959], p. 229).

81 Again it is interesting to form the contrapositive of this if-then statement by Paul. "If you are led by the Spirit, [then] you are not under law" is logically equivalent to "If you are under law, then you are not led by the Spirit." Therefore, "under law" cannot refer to the Old Testament era; if it did, there could have been no salvation.

saved in Old Testament times were also "led by the Spirit" and "not under law" just as those who are saved in New Testament times.<sup>82</sup>

However, two questions arise at this point. First, why does Paul describe the condition of being under the power of sin as being under the law? Second, if a believer, whether in the Old Testament or New Testament times, was not "under the law" in the sense used here by Paul, how can a believer use the law as the proper response of faith? We now address these questions in turn.

### **Why Does "Under the Law" = "Under the Power of Sin"?**

The answer to this first question lies in the curious effect that the law has on the unsaved man. The important passage in this regard is Romans 7.<sup>83</sup> Note verses 5-6:

For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death. But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.

An unregenerate man is "controlled" by the flesh or the "sinful nature." When under the control of the sinful nature, sinful passions are "aroused **by the law**" and bear fruit for death. Sin therefore results in condemnation and death.<sup>84</sup> However, the important point to notice is that the sinful passions described here are "aroused by the law." Paul has more to say about how the law does this in verses 7-13.<sup>85</sup> Before he presents that explanation, however, Paul in verse 6 gives a brief contrast between the unregenerate and regenerate states. In regeneration we die to what once enslaved us, the sinful

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82 The failure to recognize that the work of the Holy Spirit in the process of salvation is the same in the Old Testament as it is in the New Testament lies at the root of many incorrect interpretations of "under the law." For example: "Once more we see that 'under law' designates the status antithetical to the status of the believer. [So far, so good!] To be 'under grace,' free children of God, 'led by the Spirit' [Gal. 5:18] means to be living in the new age of redemption and no longer in the old age that was characterized by and dominated by the law" (Douglas J. Moo, "The Law of Moses or the Law of Christ" *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments* [Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1988], p. 215). So the "old age" had no "redemption"? Dr. Moo certainly does not believe this, but his statement, at best, is highly misleading. The fact is that those who were saved in Old Testament times were likewise transferred to the state of being "under grace" and were indeed "led by the Spirit."

83 Historically there is much disagreement among commentators in the interpretation of Romans 7. Is it autobiographical? Does it depict the regenerate or unregenerate man? Or is there a transition, with the first part of the chapter describing an unregenerate man while the second part a regenerate man? These are very detailed issues that would require much discussion to investigate. Ladd writes that Paul's concern in Romans 7 is the nature of the law (*A Theology of the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974], p. 508). That generalization is good enough for the issue here.

84 "Death" is used here in the same sense as it is in Rom. 6:23, namely, eternal death.

85 "What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, 'Do not covet.' But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire" (verses 7-8). "Paul views the law both as God's gift to his redeemed people for their direction and protection (Galatians 3) and as the instrument of sin. Sin is a *power* that enters the world through Adam's disobedience, bringing death in its wake (Rom. 5:12). Just as God's commandment becomes sin's instrument in the garden (Gen. 3:1-5; Rom. 5:14), so it is with the Mosaic Law. As soon as the law is given, sin commandeers it for its own evil purpose (Rom. 7:7-13). . . . Such is sin's influence that knowing the law encourages a person to break it rather than to keep it" (Knox Chamblin, "The Law of Moses and the Law of Christ," *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments* [Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1988], p. 193; emphasis original).

nature. In dying to the sinful nature that "once bound us," we are "released from the law" in the sense that the law no longer arouses a plethora of sinful passions. Now that we are saved we serve in a new way: we are slaves, not of our sinful nature and the passions aroused by the law ("the written code"), but of God through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Herein lies the basic answer to the question of why Paul describes being under the power of sin as being "under the law." (The bare phrase "under the law" implies under the power or dominion of the law.) First, Rom. 6:14 connected being under the law with being under the dominion of sin. Then, Rom. 7:5 explains this connection: while a man is unsaved and controlled by the sinful nature, sin uses the law to arouse all manner of sinful passions in him. Therefore, to be under the law is to be under the power of the law to incite these sinful passions. When the control of sin is broken with regeneration and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we are "released from the law," released from this effect that the law has on the unsaved man. To be "released from the law" is another way of saying that we are no longer under this power the law has as the agent of sin but under grace as the vehicle of salvation.

### **"Obedience of Faith" or "Not Under the Law"?**

If a believer is not under the law (Rom. 6:14), how can he use the law as the proper response of faith? The answer lies in verses 15-18:

What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey--whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

Paul had just stated in verse 14 that "sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law but under grace." In chapter 7 he explains that when sin is the master in the unsaved state, one is "under the law" as the agent of sin, in that the law arouses all manner of sinful passions. Once saved, he is "released from the law." He is not under the devastating effect that the law has when sin is his master by using the law to incite sinful passions. However, in verse 15 Paul makes it quite clear that being released from the law does not mean that we are now allowed to sin. "By no means!" Just the opposite is the case. We now are enabled **to obey the law** as the response of faith through the power of the Holy Spirit. That is the choice Paul describes in verses 15-18: a man is either under the dominion of sin or God. The exact import of some of the expressions in these verses is difficult to determine. However, since they follow Paul's statement in verse 15 that we are not free to sin, it seems likely that he is saying that as regenerate, indwelt believers we are now able to render obedience to the law, and that obedience leads to a righteous or holy manner of living.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> I disagree with Moo when he argues that "the very question about whether one could sin with impunity because one was no longer under the law strongly suggests that not being under the law involves for Paul not being under its precepts ("The Law of Moses or the Law of Christ" *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments* [Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1988], p. 211). Note that verse 14 itself directly connects the status of "under the law" with the dominion or power of sin, not with the law's precepts. Paul raises the question in verse 15 partly because the expression *υπο νομον* in the abstract might suggest it, but also, and more importantly, so that he can make the point that breaking the power of sin and thus the use sin makes of the law now enables the believer to respond to the law in faith as God's standard for righteous living.

Paul makes this point in chapter 8:

And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be met in us, who do not live according to our sinful nature but according to the Spirit.<sup>87</sup>

Regarding this statement, Hoekema makes the following comment:

Romans 8:4 teaches us that the reason why God sent His Son into the world is "that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." These words do not expound the fact that Christ has kept the law *for* us (for in that case the preposition before "us" would have to be something other than "in"), but they affirm that God sent His Son so that the requirement of the law might be fulfilled *in* us or *by* us . . . This being so, we must conclude that believers are not doomed to perpetual defeat in trying to keep the law--the kind of defeat pictured in Romans 7--but are now able to fulfill the law's just requirement, in principle though not in perfection, through the indwelling Spirit who enables and strengthens them.<sup>88</sup>

Therefore, "release from the law," or not being "under the law," in no way means that believers are not to follow the law as the obedience of faith.

## THE MOSAIC LAW, JEWS, AND GENTILES

Two passages in Romans have now been carefully analyzed. At first they might appear to teach that for the New Testament believer obedience to the law of God, the Mosaic law, is no longer the proper response of faith. The interpretation of these passages set forth in this paper indicates that this is not the conclusion to be drawn at all. As in the Old Testament, so in the New Testament: the law remains "the obedience of faith."

However, the question to be asked now is whether this statement applies equally to Jewish and Gentile believers in the New Testament era. My previous paper argued that although Jewish believers during the New Testament era rightfully remained "Torah observant," Gentiles were not required to keep the law of Moses. This was the decision of the Jerusalem council in Acts 15. In Galatians Paul argued that they definitely should not keep it.

### James' View of the Law

This distinction that Jewish believers were to remain "zealous for the law" while Gentile believers need not submit to it is made quite clear by James and the elders when Paul visits Jerusalem:

When they heard this, they praised God. Then they said to Paul: "You see, brother, ***how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law.*** They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles

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87 Verses 3-4.

88 Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Christian Looks at Himself* [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975], pp. 65-66.

to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs. What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come, so do what we tell you. There are four men with us who have made a vow. Take these men, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. **Then everybody will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law.** As for the Gentile believers, we have written to them our decision [in Acts 15] that they should abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality."

James' view of the law for Jews remains the same in his epistle, which he addressed "to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations":<sup>89</sup>

But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it--he will be blessed in what he does.<sup>90</sup>

If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.<sup>91</sup>

M'Caig offers the following comments on these verses:

James has nothing but good to say about the Law . . . James taught by Christ exalts the Law, glorifies it, in fact seems almost to identify it with the gospel, for in ch 1, when speaking of the Word and the importance of hearing and doing it, he in the same breath speaks of looking into "the perfect law, the law of liberty" (ver 25) . . . the guide of the Christian man who has entered into the spirit of it.

Even in the OT, as Pss. 19 and 119 specifically show, it is possible for spiritually minded men to see the beauty of the Law and find delight in its precepts. In 2:8 he speaks of the "royal law," and that here he does mean the Mosaic Law is beyond doubt, since he cites the particular requirement, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" . . . He then affirms the solidarity of the Law, so that a breach of it in one particular is a breach of the whole, and makes a man "guilty of all" (ver 10) . . . James . . . had a profound conviction of the perfection of the Law. And it is the perfection of the Law as a rule of life for spiritual men redeemed from its condemnation that James considers it, and so we can call it the perfect law, the law of liberty, the Royal Law.<sup>92</sup>

I conclude that the Mosaic law remained the proper response of faith for Jewish believers under the new covenant, just as for those under the Sinaitic covenant, a conclusion quite consistent with Jer. 31:31-34. Being "zealous for the law" does not mean being "under the law" in the sense of this phrase in Rom. 6:14.

However, notice that according to Acts 21:25 there was a definite contrast drawn when it came to

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89 Jas. 1:1.

90 Jas. 1:25.

91 Jas. 2:8-10; James quotes Lev. 19:18.

92 Archibald M'Caig, "Law in the New Testament," *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* [Chicago: The Howard-Severance Company, 1930], III:1851.

Gentile believers. Gentiles are not to keep the Mosaic law, except for a few common-sense requests by the Jerusalem council. How, then, is this exemption to be reconciled with the notion that obeying the law is the proper response of faith, apparently for everyone?

Two considerations give clues to how this question is to be resolved biblically. First, there is the concept of God's basic, righteous standards to which he holds everyone and all nations. These standards are reflected both in God's activities in the Old Testament and in a passage like Romans 2. Second, several passages in the New Testament indicate that there is a definite, definable sense in which Gentile believers do in fact "fulfill" the law, but in a sense that differs slightly from the concept of "keeping" or "doing" the law, which applied only to Jewish believers.

### **Clue 1: God's Basic Standards of Righteousness**

Both the Old and New Testaments make it clear that God requires all men and all nations to practice certain basic standards of conduct and morality. God often acts in judgment when these standards are not maintained.

- God destroyed Sodom, Gomorrah, and the other cities of the plain because "the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous."<sup>93</sup>
- The Amorites were a sinful people because their detestable practices violated God's basic standards of common righteousness. God told Abraham that his "seed" would remain in Egypt for 400 years "because the cup of the Amorites is not yet full."<sup>94</sup> When their sin reached a climactic level, God's judgment fell. The Amorites were conquered under Joshua as Israel took possession of the land of promise.<sup>95</sup> So vile was the sin of the Amorites and the other Canaanite nations in the sight of God, that Moses describes the coming conquest as the land "vomiting" them out.<sup>96</sup>
- Jonah was sent to Nineveh "because its wickedness has come up before me."<sup>97</sup>
- Assyria's repentance under the preaching of Jonah was short-lived. The judgment falls about 150 years later and is described in Nahum.
- The judgment of God on Babylon is described in Isaiah 13 and 21.
- Ezekiel 25-30 predicts judgment on Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyre, and Egypt.

The basis upon which all this judgment occurs is explained by Paul in Rom. 2:14-15:

Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.

Ladd offers the following comments:

God has implanted in all men a moral instinct that gives them a sense of right and wrong . . . [In Rom. 2:14-15] Paul does not mean to say that conscience is an infallible guide in all questions or that conscience is a guide equal to the Law. He only means to

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93 Gen. 18:20; 19:12-13.

94 Gen. 15:16.

95 See, e.g., Josh. 3:10; 24:8, 11.

96 Lev. 18:24-28.

97 Jon. 1:2.

say that all men have conscience, which gives them a sense of moral values, and that pagans will be held accountable by God for that knowledge.<sup>98</sup>

Yes, God holds all nations and individuals to certain basic standards. These standards deal with national and individual morality, integrity, the manner in which nations treat other nations, etc. History is replete with examples of judgment when these basic standards of righteousness are flagrantly violated.

Unbelieving Gentiles during any era can only imperfectly live up to these standards. Believing Gentiles under the new covenant, of course, have this same moral light of conscience and are under the same obligation to practice these basic standards of morality. However, they also have the indwelling Holy Spirit. This brings us to the second consideration.

## **Clue 2: Gentile Believers Fulfill the Law**

Several passages in the New Testament indicate that there is a real sense in which Gentile believers do in fact "fulfill" the law in a sense that differs slightly from the concept of "keeping" or "doing" the law, which applied only to Jewish believers, and also that differs from that of which unbelieving Gentiles are capable.

In writing to the Galatians, Paul establishes a general principle for Gentile believers under the new covenant:

Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law.<sup>99</sup>

Here Paul views the law as an indivisible body of code. Jewish believers rightfully continued to circumcise their children and obey the whole law. Gentile believers were exempted from this obligation per se. However, they were not exempted from living a righteous life as the response of faith. Moreover, this response of faith, this obedience of faith, does involve obedience to the law.

In Romans 13 Paul writes,

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

Therefore, though Gentile believers are not under obligation to obey the Mosaic legal code per se, they are expected to lead a righteous life that fulfills the moral center of the law.

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<sup>98</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974], p. 404. See also Douglas J. Moo, "The Law of Moses or the Law of Christ" *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments* [Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1988], p. 213: though Gentiles in the Old Testament did not have the Mosaic law, nevertheless "they would be responsible for those moral standards that God had laid upon them. The OT prophets can condemn the 'nations' because of this standard."

<sup>99</sup> Gal. 5:3.

More explanation is given in Galatians 5:13-18:

You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.

Gentile believers under the new covenant are "free" in the sense that they are not under obligation to obey the entire Mosaic legal code as a body of law. However, this freedom is not to be taken as a license to "indulge the sinful nature." Rather they are to "fulfill" the law by loving one another. The Holy Spirit is the key here. If we live by the Spirit, we "will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature." If we are led by the Spirit, that is, if we are saved, we are not under the law, which in the unsaved produces all manner of sinful passions.

Apart from the indwelling Holy Spirit, the law produces many sinful passions. Those who are led by the Spirit do not fall prey to this effect of the law. On the contrary, they are enabled to fulfill the law. This is true of both believing Jews and Gentiles.<sup>100</sup> In the case of the believing Jews, they fulfill the law by leading a righteous life as the obedience of faith, but their obedience is to the Mosaic legal code as a body of law. In the case of believing Gentiles, they also fulfill the law by leading a righteous life as the obedience of faith, but their obedience of faith is located in the moral core of the law and does not include the ceremonial aspects.

According to Paul, then, Gentile Christians, while not bound to the legal code known as the Mosaic law, nevertheless can and must live according to the divine standards of righteousness reflected in that law. Gentile Christians therefore "fulfill" the Mosaic law but are not obligated to "do" the Mosaic law in the sense that believing Jews are with whom the national Sinaitic covenant was made.<sup>101</sup>

## CONCLUSION

This paper set out to explore problems related to certain statements about the Mosaic law in the New Testament in view of the thesis developed in my previous paper, "The Centrality of Israel." The following conclusions have been reached:

- The Mosaic law, in both the Old and New Testaments, represents the obedience of faith for

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<sup>100</sup>"By such means [responding to the internal promptings of the enlightening Spirit], the heart of the Mosaic law comes to its deepest fulfillment. Responding to the promptings of the Spirit is not incompatible with external directives" (Knox Chamblin, "The Law of Moses and the Law of Christ," *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments* [Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1988], p. 193).

<sup>101</sup>This analysis is very similar to that given by Douglas J. Moo, "The Law of Moses . . ." pp. 209-10, except that Moo does not limit it to Gentile Christians. He applies the analysis to Christians in general: "Paul must show how Christians who are not bound to the law can and must nevertheless live according to the divine standard. . . . Paul in [Gal.] 5:14 highlights love as that activity which brings to its intended goal what the law aimed at. It remains necessary for Paul that Christians 'fulfill' the law (cf. especially Rom. 8:4), but nowhere does he require that Christians 'do' it."

both believing Jews and Gentiles.

- Both Jewish and Gentile believers, in both the Old and New Testament times, were enabled to have this response of faith through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit.
- Statements such as "Christ is the end of the law" and "you are not under law but under grace," are consistent with the previous point.
- The obedience of faith for Jewish believers under the new covenant continues to be the keeping of the entire Mosaic legal code as a body of law as they are led and empowered by the Spirit.
- The obedience of faith for Gentile believers under the new covenant consists of fulfilling the righteous standards of the Mosaic law for holy living as they are led and empowered by the Spirit.