

AND LAWLESSNESS



WILL ABOUND..

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Almost two thousand years ago, Jesus Christ, under the inspiration of God the Father, prophesied that the very last generation of mankind would be so evil and wicked that it would be willing to even destroy “all flesh” in a worldwide war (Matthew 24:22). At that time of impending cosmocide “the love of many”—even in God’s Church—“will grow cold” (Matthew 24:12). There is a reason for such indifference and God tells us in the same verse what the reason is, “...because *lawlessness will abound.*”

At that very time it will be as if people were to say, “**The law is no more!**” (Lamentations 2:9). Instead, they will have been misled by the “mystery of **lawlessness**” (2 Thessalonians 2:7). This mysterious concept was already at work in the days of the apostle Paul but it grew worse and worse over the centuries. Just prior to the return of Jesus Christ, a religious personality, referred to as the “**lawless one,**” will appear (2 Thessalonians 2:8). The overwhelming majority, not having

“received the love of the truth,” will accept, support and even worship that man, thinking that he is God (2 Thessalonians 2:10).

How could this be, given the fact that most people, especially in the Western World, are professing Christians, and as such, supposedly embrace the teachings of the Bible? Don’t they agree with, and keep, the fundamental and, we might say, constitutional law of the Bible, the Ten Commandments, as well as God’s statutes and judgments that further define and explain the Ten Commandments? How could professing Christians be referred to in the Bible as people who follow “lawlessness”?

Most professing Christians do not *believe* that the Ten Commandments are still in force and effect, so they don’t see a need to keep them—neither in the letter, nor in “spirit and in truth” (John 4:24).

Before you disagree with this statement, consider the fact that the Bible nowhere authorizes replacement of the weekly Sabbath with Sunday worship. The fourth com-

mandment says, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Exodus 20:8). The Sabbath (the time from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset) is the *last* or seventh day of the week. God Himself set aside the Sabbath at the creation of man, thereby making it holy. He subsequently required that man keep it holy as He made it. It is still in force and effect today. Sunday is *not* the Sabbath. Sunday is the *first* day of the week, not the last day. But how many professing Christians keep the Sabbath holy? Only very few. It was the Catholic Church that “changed” the Sabbath law, fulfilling a prophecy in Daniel 7:25 that describes a church that would, in fact, “intend to change times and law”—that is, the “law” regulating holy “times.” But God did not approve of this man-made change. And by following the lead of the Catholic Church, many were made to “*stumble at the law*” (Malachi 2:8).

Apart from the rather obvious discrepancy between biblically-commanded Sabbath observance and humanly-invented Sunday worship, how many Christians do you know who really believe and keep even the other *nine* of the Ten Commandments?

How many do you know who are determined, for example, *never* to lie, *never* to kill, *never* to take God’s

name in vain, *never* to worship idols, *never* to steal, and *never* to *desire* his or her neighbor’s wife or husband, or something that belongs to a neighbor?

It is obvious that not many have this determination *not* to violate God’s law. This is why our carnal minds that are incapable of being subject to the law (Romans 8:7), have invented seemingly convincing “logical arguments” that “prove” from the Bible that God’s law is indeed “no more.”

WHAT SIN IS!

The Bible teaches us from beginning to end that sin, unrepented of, will prevent us from entering the Kingdom of God. God expects and requires of us to overcome sin. And if God’s Holy Spirit dwells in us, we *can* become victorious over sin—that is, we *can* stop breaking God’s law. We read in Romans 8:4, in the *Living Bible*, “So now we *can* obey God’s law, if we follow after the Holy Spirit and no longer obey the old evil nature within us.”

When we obey God’s law, we don’t sin. Sin is defined as “**the transgression of the law**” (1 John 3:4, *Authorized Version*). We could also say, sin is lawlessness. Those who live in and follow after lawlessness, live in and follow after sin. We are also told that all unrighteousness is sin (1 John 5:17). Conversely, *if* we

keep God's commandments, we live in righteousness, as God defines *all* of His commandments as "righteousness" (Psalm 119:172, *Authorized Version*).

But what exactly is the "law" that we break when we sin? Is it some "New Law" that Christ brought, while doing away with His Father's commandments? Or is it the very same law that defined sin from the outset—the Ten Commandments?

We read in Matthew 19:16–19 about a young man who once came to Christ with an interesting question. He asked Him what "good thing" he had to do in order to "have eternal life." Christ responded by saying, "...if you want to enter into [eternal] life, *keep the commandments*." The young man asked what many professing Christians might want to ask today, "Which ones?"

Notice, carefully, Christ's answer. Did He say, "Why, of course, *not* the old ancient ones that Israel received at Mount Sinai! Not those Ten Commandments from the relic past. Rather, you need to keep the New Law that I am bringing to REPLACE those burdensome Ten Commandments!"?

Not at all! His response is recorded in verses 18 and 19: "...You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness,

Honor your father and your mother, and You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Christ quoted from the last six of the Ten Commandments, which define our love toward neighbor. He did not quote from any of the first four of the Ten Commandments, which define our love toward God. Did He tell the young man that he did not have to love God anymore? Of course not! It is obvious that, although Christ quoted just some of the **Ten Commandments**, He wanted it to be understood that we can *only* obtain eternal life if we keep them **all**. As the same section goes on to show, Christ was addressing this individual in direct response to what his underlying lack involved. As a Jewish citizen of that day, he knew the command to keep ALL of God's commandments—and he claimed that he had done so from his youth (Matthew 19:20). However, Christ showed him that he really lacked the love toward neighbor and toward God, as he placed his riches before God and neighbor (Matthew 19:21). He stumbled at Christ's challenge to rid himself of his great wealth and give it to the poor, and to follow Christ. His riches had become the most important aspect of his life, and he was not able to put service and surrender to God and neighbor **FIRST** in his life (Matthew 19:22).

THE LAW OF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

Some, though, would want to disagree and argue with these clear words of Christ. They allege that, since Christ only quoted *some* of the Ten Commandments, only those need to be kept, and since He did not specifically refer to the Sabbath commandment, that law no longer needs to be kept either. (Remember, though, that Christ quoted *none* of the first four commandments!).

Those who reason this way overlook a very important biblical principle. The apostle James, who is the half-brother of Jesus, explains this principle and, at the same time, silences those who claim that we today do not have to keep all of God's Ten Commandments. Let's read his decisive answer in James 2:8–12: "If you really **fulfill** [that is, **keep**] the royal law according to the Scripture, You shall love your neighbor as yourself, you do well; but if you show partiality, you commit sin, **and are convicted by the law as transgressors**. For whoever shall **keep** [or, **fulfill**] *the whole law*, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of *all*. For He who said, Do not commit adultery, also said, Do not murder. Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, **you have become a transgressor of the law**. So speak

and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty."

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS AS A PACKAGE!

James tells us that we sin if we break just one provision of the "*whole*" law. He makes it clear that the "law" he is talking about is, in fact, the Ten Commandments. He illustrates this point by selecting *two* of the Ten Commandments—the law against murder and the law against adultery. He explains to us that, if we violate even *one* of the Ten Commandments, we are still a "transgressor of the [entire] **LAW**." **Note that James uses the word "law" as a summary term to include all of God's Ten Commandments.**

We do the same today in human affairs. A person might have violated a specific traffic regulation and the police officer might tell him, "You have violated the law." The officer would be right, as that particular traffic rule is indeed part of the entirety of man's law. When Christ told the young man that he had to keep the commandments, and then cited some of the Ten Commandments, especially focusing on the last six, He made it very clear that He was referring to *all* of the Ten Commandments, treating them as a "total package," as did the apostle James.

DID CHRIST ABOLISH GOD'S LAW?

Some, having given themselves over to the arguments of the carnal mind—which is hostile toward the law of God—have used this “package” concept, to “prove” that the *entire* law of God was abolished. Their absurd “argument” goes something like this: Since certain scriptures show that a “law” is no longer in effect, *all* of God’s Ten Commandments (it is alleged) have been done away with, and Jesus Christ brought a “New Law,” which happens to include *nine* of the Ten Commandments, while omitting the Sabbath commandment.

This seemingly “clever” argument to get away from God’s specific commandment to *remember* the Sabbath day and to *keep it holy* is “supported” by the misuse of the following scriptures: Galatians 3, Romans 5, and Hebrews 10. Correctly understood, however, these three passages do not at all support abolishment of the Ten Commandments—rather, they *prove* the opposite—that the Ten Commandments are still in force and effect for us today! Let’s analyze these aforementioned scriptures.

Does Galatians 3 Abolish the Ten Commandments?

Reading from Galatians 3:17–19,

22, 24–25: “And this I say, that the *law*, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect. For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise. What purpose then does *the law* serve? **It was added because of transgressions**, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator... (verse 22) But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in [of] Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe... (verse 24) Therefore *the law was our tutor* to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.”

Does this passage teach us that the Ten Commandments have been abolished, as some claim? Does Paul even have the Ten Commandments in mind when he talks about the “law” that “was added because of transgressions”?

In order to understand this passage properly, we must recognize that the Bible sometimes uses the word “law” for just **a portion** of the entire law system. We must consider the *context* of the particular passage in order to ascertain whether the

word “law” refers to the entirety of God’s law system, or just a portion, and if just a portion, *which* portion.

We do the same today in human affairs. We might say, “the law requires you to do this or that,” and we may be speaking about a particular provision in the Civil Code, or the Criminal Code, or some administrative law.

We learned from Galatians 3:17 and 19 that “the law” was “added” “four hundred and thirty years” after God’s covenant with Abraham. This “law” was added “**because of transgressions.**” We also learned in verse 22 that the Scripture confined everybody “**under sin.**” We know already that **sin is the transgression of the law.** The law referred to in Galatians 3 was **added** because people had **sinned**—because they had transgressed God’s law.

Paul’s use of the word “law” in the third chapter of the book of Galatians then does not relate to the Ten Commandments at all, but to an altogether *different* set of rules.

The Bible does not contradict itself. One Scripture does not “break” or “make of no effect” another Scripture (John 10:35). A law was *added* because of transgressions. This law cannot be the Ten Commandments. Rather, because people had transgressed the law of the Ten Commandments, an

additional law was given to the people. What this additional law was will become clear very soon.

TEN COMMANDMENTS IN FORCE AND EFFECT SINCE CREATION OF MAN

The Bible consistently teaches that people transgressed the Ten Commandments *long before* the added “law” mentioned in Galatians 3 came into existence.

We read in 1 Timothy 2:14 that “Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, **fell into transgression.**” Eve sinned when she violated God’s law. This means that God’s law of the Ten Commandments was already in effect long before Abraham or Moses, because Paul tells us in Romans 4:15, “**...where there is no law there is no transgression.**” And remember, if we sin, we are “convicted *by the law* as transgressors” (James 2:9).

Adam and Eve transgressed the law of the *Ten Commandments* when they took of the forbidden fruit. They sinned by *disobeying God*, by *stealing* from Him and by *lying* to Him about it. They also committed *idolatry* by following Satan, *desiring* to have something that was not theirs. Later, Cain sinned by *murdering* his brother Abel (Genesis 4:7–8). The men of Sodom were “sinful” against God (Genesis 13:13) in violating His

commandments and principles pertaining to *marriage* (Genesis 18:20).

God prevented two pagan rulers, both referred to as Abimelech, from sinning against Him by having an *adulterous relationship* with Abraham's and Isaac's wives (Genesis 20:6; Genesis 26:10). Later, Joseph refused to *commit adultery* with Potiphar's wife, knowing that this would be a sin (Genesis 39:7–9). Jacob sinned by *deceiving, or lying to*, his father Isaac (Genesis 27:35). Jacob knew that *stealing* was sinful (Genesis 30:33; 31:39). Joseph later explained that kidnapping a person was *stealing* and therefore sinful (Genesis 40:15). His brothers understood, too, that *stealing* was sinful (Genesis 50:17; Genesis 44:8).

Fornication was understood to be a sinful act long before God spoke the Ten Commandments to Israel (Genesis 34:7, 31; 38:24). *Murder* also was declared to be sinful (compare also Genesis 49:6–7), and the midwives refused to kill the Israelite baby boys because they feared God (Exodus 1:16–17).

Prior to arriving at Mount Sinai, God clearly identified the observance of the seventh-day *Sabbath* as a law that had to be obeyed (Exodus 16:4–5, 22–30). After all, it had been in effect since Adam and Eve were created (Genesis 2:2–3).

We see, then, that the Ten

Commandments were in force and effect since the creation of man. In breaking them, man sinned and fell into transgression. And because of such transgression, another law was later added.

Does Romans 5 Abolish the Ten Commandments?

In Romans 5, as in Galatians 3, people misinterpret Paul's statements about the law, not realizing what "law" he is referring to. We will see here that Paul again writes about a "law" that was "added"—he is *not at all talking* about the Ten Commandments.

Romans 5:13–14 reads, "**For until the law sin was in the world**, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless **death reigned** from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the *transgression of Adam*, who is a type of Him who was to come."

Paul tells us clearly that there was already sin in the world before "the law" came. Sin, we know, is the transgression of the LAW. Therefore, there was a law in effect that was broken *before* this additional "law" came. **So, the law that came or was added must have been different from the law that was already broken; in fact, this particular law was added because another law had been transgressed.**

We also read about the *transgression of Adam*. Adam sinned—sin being the transgression of the law. Others sinned too—although perhaps not to the same degree that Adam sinned—because we read that death reigned from Adam to Moses. Romans 6:23 tells us *why* death reigned: “**For the wages of sin is death.**” When we sin or transgress God’s law, we have to pay a penalty—death. This is confirmed by the apostle James in James 1:15: “...sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.”

We understand, then, that a law was added “because of transgression”—because God’s Ten Commandments had been transgressed. What “law” is it, then, that Paul talks about in Galatians 3 and Romans 5 that was *added* because of transgression or sin?

Does Hebrews 10 Abolish the Ten Commandments?

The answer can be found, paradoxically, in Hebrews 10—the very scripture that some would use to “prove” that the Ten Commandments are no longer in effect. But, the tenth chapter of the book of Hebrews does *not* refer to the Ten Commandments—rather, it *identifies* the *law that was added* because of transgression.

In discussing the “earthly sanctuary” that Moses built according to

God’s instructions, Paul explains in Hebrews 9:9–10, “It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices were offered which cannot make him who performed the sacrifice perfect in regard to the conscience—*concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation.*”

Here we find described the “law that was added.” It was only a temporary law—it was only imposed until the time of reformation, that is, until the time of Jesus Christ’s perfect life without sin (Hebrews 4:15), His sacrificial death and His resurrection to eternal life. Since Christ paid the penalty for our sins through His death, we are no longer under the tutor referred to in Galatians 3. We are no longer under the law that was added that dealt with fleshly ordinances and rituals. This temporary law can be summarized as the sacrificial law—it regulated sacrifices, food and drink offerings, certain washings, and other rituals dealing with the flesh. This was the law that was added after Israel made a golden calf—after Israel had *sinned* against God’s Ten Commandments and fallen into transgression.

This sacrificial system is clearly referred to as “the law” in the Bible. Let’s note this in Hebrews 10:1, 8–9,

and let's also note that it is *that* law that was abolished when Christ died for us: “(verse 1) For **the law**, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never **with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year**, make those who approach perfect... (verse 8)

Previously saying, ‘Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure in them’ (which are offered according **to the law**), (verse 9) then He said, ‘Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God.’ **He takes away the first** that He may establish the second.”

Acts 13:38–39 explains that those who now believe in Christ are the ones who receive the forgiveness of sins and are justified (made perfect through living as Christ lived). Verse 39 also shows, by contrast, that no one “... could be justified by the law of Moses.” We will explain later that the “law of Moses” *included* the sacrificial system. Contrast this with the response by Jesus when the young man asked what he must do to gain eternal life—“keep the commandments” (Matthew 19:17).

Christ took away the LAW of sacrifices, washings, and rituals—He abolished the entire sacrificial system. This was the law that had been **added—not the Ten Com-**

mandments. The physical sacrificial system had been given to the people because they had sinned against God’s spiritual law—the Ten Commandments. The ritual law was a “tutor” to bring us to Christ. It was laborious work and the people were motivated through this kind of work to avoid sinning, at least to an extent.

But the sacrificial law could not *forgive* sin, as Paul stresses in Hebrews 10:4: “For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.” Paul adds in verse 11: “And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.”

This sacrificial law is not binding for Christians today. It was a law that was added because of sin, until Christ came to forgive sin, upon repentance of sin and belief in His sacrifice. That’s why we read in Hebrews 10:18, “Now where there is remission [forgiveness] of these, there is no longer an offering for sin.”

This sacrificial law that was added and then later taken away did not affect the Ten Commandments. This means, for example, that the fourth commandment, regarding the keeping of the Sabbath, is still valid and in force today. Note that the Sabbath was made for *man* (Mark 2:27) at the time of the creation of *man* (Genesis 2:2–3). It is referred to

as a *law* to be kept prior to Mount Sinai (Exodus 16:25–30). It is still a binding commandment for all of mankind today, as are the other nine of the Ten Commandments. The sacrificial system, which was added one year after God spoke the Ten Commandments to the people, did not enact or bring into existence the Ten Commandments, including the Sabbath commandment. And since it did not enact the Ten Commandments, it could not void them when the sacrificial system itself became obsolete.

We have seen, then, that the word “law” used in the Bible *can* refer to *all* of God’s laws, or it *can* refer to just a *portion* of God’s laws. We always need to study the context to see how the word “law” is to be understood in any given situation.

THE WORD “LAW” IN BIBLICAL CONTEXT

As this is such an important issue, we will take some time now and analyze several passages from both the Old and the New Testaments to show that the word “law” does not always refer to the entirety of God’s laws. In fact, many of the passages that we will look at apply the word “law” exclusively to the *sacrificial system* or *provisions within the sacrificial system*. Once we have this truth firmly in mind, it will not be possible

to fall for, or be fooled by, “clever” arguments that try to convince us that Christ did away with *all* of the laws of the Old Testament and replaced them with an entire set of *new* laws.

THE WORD “LAW” APPLIES TO SACRIFICIAL SYSTEM

Notice the following examples from the Old Testament, applying the words “the law” strictly to a *portion* of the sacrificial system that pertains to different kinds of offerings:

“Command Aaron and his sons, saying, ‘This is *the law* of the burnt offering... This is *the law* of the grain offering... This is *the law* of the sin offering’” (Leviticus 6:9, 14, 25).

“Likewise this is *the law* of the trespass offering (it is most holy)... This is *the law* of the sacrifice of peace offerings, which he shall offer to the LORD... This is *the law* of the burnt offering, the grain offering, the sin offering, the trespass offering, the consecrations, and the sacrifice of the peace offering, which the LORD commanded Moses on Mount Sinai, on the day when He commanded the children of Israel to offer their offerings to the LORD in the wilderness of Sinai” (Leviticus 7:1, 11, 37–38).

In addition, let’s notice the following examples from the Old Testament that apply the words “the law” strictly to certain ritualistic washings and purification. For

instance, there were in existence specific rituals that had to be fulfilled when a child was born:

“When the days of her purification are fulfilled, whether for a son or a daughter, she shall bring to the priest a lamb of the first year as a burnt offering, and a young pigeon or a turtle dove as a sin offering, to the door of the tabernacle of meeting. Then he shall offer it before the LORD, and make atonement for her. And she shall be clean from the flow of her blood. This is *the law* for her who has borne a male or a female” (Leviticus 12:6–7).

There was also a *statute* that had to be obeyed regarding the purification of a leper or infected garments and buildings. This statute is clearly referred to as “the law of leprosy”: “This shall be the *law of the leper* for the day of his cleansing... This is *the law for one* who had a leprous sore, who cannot afford the usual cleansing... This is *the law* for any leprous sore and scale, for the leprosy of a garment and of a house, for a swelling and a scab and bright spot, to teach when it is unclean and when it is clean. This is *the law of leprosy*” (Leviticus 14: 2, 32, 54–57).

We are also introduced to another *ritualistic procedure*, referred to as the “law of jealousy,” to determine whether a wife had committed adultery or not:

“This is *the law* of jealousy, when a wife, while under her husband’s authority, goes astray and defiles herself, or when the spirit of jealousy comes upon a man, and he becomes jealous of his wife; then he shall stand the woman before the LORD, and the priest shall execute *all this law* upon her” (Numbers 5:29–30).

Another example from the Old Testament notes a ritualistic law of purification regarding a person who was in or entered a tent in which a man had died:

“This is *the law* when a man dies in a tent: All who come into the tent and all who are in the tent shall be unclean seven days... on the seventh day he shall purify himself, wash his clothes, and bathe in water; and at evening he shall be clean” (Numbers 19:14, 19).

All of these examples serve to illustrate the point that the words “*the law*”—based on the context in which they are used—can apply to just a portion of the entire law of God, and when those particular laws are abolished, they do not nullify the rest of God’s laws.

The word “law” must always be viewed in context. This is true for both the Old and the New Testaments. We already saw that the word “law” in Galatians 3, Romans 5, and Hebrews 10 does not refer to the entirety of God’s laws, nor to the Ten

Commandments at all. Rather, they refer to the laws or the legal system pertaining to washings, rituals and sacrifices. This became evident as we viewed those passages in context with the rest of the Scriptures.

This biblical principle must be applied throughout. For instance, some have carelessly assumed, when reading the 21st chapter of the book of Acts, that Paul was accused of not living by the Ten Commandments. A *careful* review of this passage will show, however, that it does not deal with the Ten Commandments at all.

PAUL WAS NOT ACCUSED OF DOING AWAY WITH THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

We read in Acts 21:18–24, “On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. When he had greeted them, he told in detail those things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord. And they said to him, ‘You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous *for the law*; but they have been informed about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles *to forsake Moses*, saying that they *ought not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs*. What then?

The assembly must certainly meet, for they will hear that you have come. Therefore do what we tell you: We have four men who have **taken a vow**. Take them and be **purified** with them, pay their expenses so that they may **shave their heads**, and that all may know that those things of which they were informed concerning you are nothing, but that you yourself also **walk orderly and keep the law.**”

What “law” is this passage talking about? The law of the Ten Commandments? Note that the specific context is circumcision, purification, and other rituals in connection with the making of a vow. Consider also what Paul actually did do when following the “customs” of the Jews: “Then Paul took the men, and the next day, having been *purified with them*, *entered the temple* to announce the *expiration of the days of purification, at which time an offering should be made for each one of them*” (verse 26).

The reference to the “law” or the “customs” is solely in regard to that portion in the writings of Moses that dealt with sacrifices, washings and rituals—in other words, the “*law that was added*,” and not the Ten Commandments at all.

We might add here that it was of course not *sinful* for Paul to participate in these customs, although they were no longer required. Paul said

that he became a Jew to the Jews in order to win some (1 Corinthians 9:20). And, although he had made it clear that circumcision was no longer *required* [see the detailed discussion later in this booklet], he still circumcised Timothy, for the Jews' sake, in order not to place a stumbling block before them (Acts 16:1–3).

BIBLICAL DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE LAW OF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS AND THE LAW OF SACRIFICES

We have seen, from the previous examples that the word “law” must always be examined in context. It *can* refer to the entirety of God’s laws or it can refer just to a portion of God’s laws. We learned that the word “law” sometimes refers to the **sacrificial system** that was established or “**added**” one year after God spoke the Ten Commandments to ancient Israel.

If one does not differentiate between God’s spiritual laws (including the law of the Ten Commandments) and the laws of sacrifices and rituals, one is bound to make devastating mistakes in understanding the Bible. Let us therefore note a few more examples that clearly distinguish between God’s spiritual law that existed since the creation of man, and the ritual and sacrificial law system “that was added” at the time of Moses.

God makes this distinction very clear in Jeremiah 7:22–23: “For I did not speak to your fathers, or command them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices [In fact, those commands God gave **one year later**]. But this is what I *commanded* them, saying, ‘Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be My people. And walk in *all the ways* that **I have commanded** you, that it may be well with you.’”

God Himself is teaching us an important concept here. He commanded the Israelites to walk in all His ways—and this did *not* include the bringing of sacrifices! God’s spiritual law—the Ten Commandments—and the statutes and judgments that further define God’s spiritual law, knew nothing about sacrifices. The sacrificial system was **added because** the Israelites did not obey God’s spiritual law.

In Jeremiah 6:19–20, God emphasizes this same truth: “Hear, O earth! Behold, I will certainly bring calamity on this people—The fruit of their thoughts, Because they have not heeded My words **Nor My law, but rejected it**. For what purpose to Me Comes frankincense from Sheba, And sweet cane from a far country? Your burnt offerings are not acceptable, Nor your sacrifices sweet to Me.”

The people brought sacrifices, yet rejected God's law. Obviously, God is speaking here about two different sets of "laws." The Israelites kept the sacrificial law, but they did not keep God's spiritual law of the Ten Commandments. Nowhere in all of God's word is He ever displeased with those who do keep His great spiritual laws, including the Ten Commandments.

Another clear distinction between the system of sacrifices (that was added to bring people to Christ) and God's spiritual law is made in Psalm 40:6–8: "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire; My ears You have opened. Burnt offering and sin offering You did not require. Then I said, Behold, I come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me. I delight to do Your will, O my God, And **Your law** is within my heart."

Originally, it was *not* God's will, nor was it part of God's spiritual law, to bring sacrifices. Rather, the requirement of sacrifices was added after Israel had broken God's spiritual law. Again, we see that the word "law" must be carefully examined, in context, in order to come to a correct understanding.

THE BOOK OF THE COVENANT

As we will discuss later in this booklet in much more detail, God made a covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai. We read in Exodus 24

that the covenant was sealed with blood. When that happened, the covenant was final and could not be altered. The law of the covenant was written in a book, the "Book of the Covenant" (verse 7; compare Hebrews 9:19–20). At that time, the sacrificial system was not a part of the law—those ritual provisions had not been given yet—and they were not written in the Book of the Covenant. The *only* sacrifice that is mentioned as a required sacrifice is the Passover (Exodus 23:18; Exodus 12). Yet, even this Passover sacrifice found its fulfillment in the death of Jesus Christ. Christians do not now offer lambs in sacrifice for Passover—rather, Paul shows: "For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us" (1 Corinthians 5:7).

There is also a reference to an altar on which offerings could be made (Exodus 20:22–26), but these offerings were not part of a mandatory sacrificial system. Even before Sinai, people gave voluntary offerings (Cain and Abel, Genesis 4:3–5; Noah, Genesis 8:20–21; Abram, Genesis 15:9–11; Abraham, Genesis 22:13; Jacob, Genesis 31:54; 35:14; Israel, Genesis 46:1). The offerings mentioned in Exodus 20 were voluntary—they are identified as burnt and peace offerings (verse 24). Interestingly, sin and trespass offerings are not mentioned. They

are only described as a part of the sacrificial system—to remind the people of their sins and trespasses—for the first time in Leviticus 4 and 5.

The covenant at Horeb originally did not include the sacrificial system. Neither did the Book of the Covenant contain such ritual regulations. But as time went on, ritual laws were added, including the laws regarding the Levitical priesthood and penalties or curses for violations of God’s spiritual law, and those did find their way into the Book of the Covenant, which is also called the Book of the Law of Moses (Deuteronomy 28:58, 61; 29:20–21, 27, 29; 31:9).

This Book of the Law was placed *outside* or *beside* the ark of the covenant (Deuteronomy 31:24–26). The tablets with the Ten Commandments, however, were placed *inside* the ark (Deuteronomy 10:4–5; Hebrews 9:4).

Later, all the laws that had been written by Moses into the Book of the Law were engraved on massive stones (Deuteronomy 27:2–3, 8; Joshua 8:30–32, 34). The laws that were written on the stones included the Ten Commandments, along with the statutes and judgments, and also the rules and regulations regarding sacrifices and other rituals. We find a reference to those stones and the laws that had been engraved on them in 2 Corinthians 3:7–8, “But if

the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious... how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious?”

The reference to the ministry of *death* includes the *death penalty* for violating God’s spiritual law. The penalties were first written in the Book of the Law of Moses and then engraved on massive stones. Since Christ died for us, we don’t have to pay the death penalty, if we repent of our sins and obtain forgiveness. In addition, the ritual sacrificial laws, which were among the laws written on stones, could not *forgive* sins—they only *reminded* the sinners of their sins. The Levitical priesthood was, in that sense, a ministry of death, as people would still not be able to obtain *eternal* life, even though they brought sacrifices.

THE WORKS OF THE LAW

With that background, we should be able to better understand what Paul is telling us in Galatians 3:10–13, where he speaks about the “works of the law.” In reading this passage, remember to consider the context to see what specific law this passage has reference to. Beginning in verse 10, “For as many as are of the *works of the law* [including the sacrificial and ritual works that had to be performed] are under the curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed is

everyone who does not continue in **all things** which are written in the **book of the law**, to do them.’ But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for ‘the just shall live by faith.’ Yet the law is not of faith, but ‘the man who *does them* [i.e., the rituals and sacrifices] shall live by them [that is, God did not kill them as long as they lived within the *sacrificial system*.]’ Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’).”

Anyone who did not continue in *everything*, which was written in the Book of the Law, *including* the regulations pertaining to washings, rituals and sacrifices, was cursed. Although the Book of the Law included, of course, the Ten Commandments and its spiritual statutes and judgments, it also included the physical works of the law, that is, the sacrificial system, as well as the death penalties for the violations of God’s law.

Paul’s statement, then, that the *law was added* because of transgression (Galatians 3:19), refers to that part of the law or laws in the Book of the Law which have to do with sacrifices and other rituals, as well as the curses or penalties for violating God’s spiritual law.

We need to keep firmly in mind that “the Book of the Law of Moses,”

sometimes referred to as “the law of Moses,” included *all kinds of laws*. We must therefore be careful not to draw hasty conclusions when we read about the Book of the Law in the New Testament. Again, we always need to analyze in context, *which* particular and specific laws *the author is talking about*.

For instance, we read in Acts 15:5, “But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, ‘It is necessary to circumcise them [Gentiles who became Christians], and to command them to keep the law of Moses.’”

The context of the discussion shows us that they were not arguing about the Ten Commandments—including the Sabbath—but whether circumcision and other rituals contained in the Law of Moses were mandatory for Gentile Christians. Now, notice, how this question was decided in the first ministerial conference in Jerusalem. Notice that it is James who is saying these words—the same apostle who later talked about the Ten Commandments as a package, saying that we are guilty of violating them all if we break even one of the Ten: “Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual

immorality, from things strangled, and from blood” (Acts 15:19–20; compare also Acts 15: 28–29).

James was not talking about the Ten Commandments. But, why does James specifically mention that the Gentiles must abstain from idols, sexual immorality, strangled meat and blood? These four aspects in the Law of Moses were mentioned here in connection with rituals and sacrifices (Leviticus 17:7, 10). Gentiles would often times drink blood with their sacrifices, or they would eat their sacrifices with the blood still in the meat (as happens when animals are strangled), or they would commit fornication with temple prostitutes. So that there would be no misunderstanding, the apostles and elders clarified to the Gentiles that those laws, although mentioned in the context of the sacrificial system, were still valid and binding on them.

CHRIST DID NOT COME TO DESTROY THE LAW!

Christ did not come to do away with God’s spiritual law of the Ten Commandments. He stated in Matthew 5:17 that He had **not** come to destroy the law, but to fulfill it—to magnify it, to exalt it and to make it more honorable (Isaiah 42:21), to fill it up with its intended meaning, to show how to keep it perfectly in the

flesh. The Greek word for “fulfill” is “*pleroo*.” It literally means “to fill” or “to make full” (*Young’s Analytical Concordance to the Bible*). In Matthew 3:15 it is used in this context: “. . .it is fitting for us to *fulfill* all righteousness.”

In Philippians 2:2, Paul states, “. . .*fulfill* my joy by being like-minded, having the same love.” Further, Paul reminds the saints in Colosse that he became a minister to “*fulfill* the word of God” (Colossians 1:25), and he admonishes Archippus to “take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may *fulfill* it” (Colossians 4:17). None of these passages convey the thought that something has *ended*—rather, the obvious understanding is that something should be *continued to be filled with meaning, or to be brought to perfection*.

Since Christ *did* abolish the sacrificial system, He did not talk about *that* law in Matthew 5:17. Rather, He stated in that passage that He had not come to do away with God’s *spiritual law*—the Ten Commandments and all the Old and New Testament statutes and judgments that define and magnify the Ten Commandments even more.

After all, we read that God’s spiritual law, as defined in the Ten Commandments, the statutes and the judgments, “stand[s] fast forever

and ever” (Psalm 111:7–8), and that it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away “than for one tittle of the law to fail” (Luke 16:17). A tittle is the smallest stroke in a Hebrew letter.

Some quote a statement in Romans 10:4 to support the idea that Christ did away with God’s spiritual law. We read there, “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.” Here the word for “end” in the Greek is “*teleos*” and means, “goal, aim, result.” James 5:11 states that we saw the “*end [teleos in Greek]* intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.” In 1 Peter 1:9, we are told to “receiv[e] the *end [teleos in Greek]* of your faith—the salvation of your souls.”

Therefore, the law did not end with Christ, but rather it was the end result of the law to lead us to Christ. The law then helps us to become *like Christ*. *And the living Christ in us helps us to become righteous and live in righteousness* (Romans 8:3–4).

Others quote Romans 6:14, stating that we are no longer “under law but under grace,” saying this means we don’t have to obey the law anymore. However, the correct meaning of this passage is that when we violate the law, we are no longer under the curse of the law—the *death penalty*—as the blood of Christ,

given to us by grace, has covered and forgiven our sins—has paid the death penalty that we earned. Paul explains in the very next verse (verse 15), that this does not mean that we can now *continue to sin*—that is, to break God’s law. Rather, we are now to be “slaves of righteousness” (verse 18), in keeping God’s law.

THE TITHING LAW—STILL IN EFFECT TODAY!

We find another interesting reference to a “law” in the seventh chapter of the book of Hebrews. As we will analyze this passage, we will clearly see that it does not address the Ten Commandments at all. Rather, it discusses tithing. Many who read this passage become confused, believing that God did away with His command to tithe, that is, to give to God ten percent of our income. But God had told His people in Malachi 3:8–10, “Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, ‘In what way have we robbed You?’ In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, For you have robbed Me, even this whole nation. Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, That there may be food in My house, And try Me now in this, Says the LORD of hosts, If I will not open for you the windows of heaven And pour out for you such blessing That there will not

be room enough to receive it.”

Jesus Christ confirmed that the tithing law was still in effect at the time of His first coming. While emphasizing that tithing is not an end in itself, He nevertheless endorsed its validity: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. **These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone**” (Matthew 23:23).

Some say that Christ did away with the law of tithing when He died. They support their claim by referring to the seventh chapter of the book of Hebrews. They misunderstand, however, what this passage tells us. Let’s read Hebrews 7:5 and understand what it says: “And indeed those who are of the sons of Levi, who receive the priesthood, have a commandment to receive tithes from the people **according to the law.**”

The law referred to here is the law of the Levites—that portion of the laws of God that regulates the collection of tithes through the Levites. Note how *that* portion of God’s laws is referred to in Nehemiah 12:44: “And at the same time some were appointed over the rooms of the storehouse for the

offerings, the firstfruits, and the tithes, to gather into them from the fields of the cities the portions specified by the **Law for the priests and Levites.**” The Levites had been given the right, from God, to collect tithes. God had issued a specific law to grant them such responsibility.

Back in Hebrews 7, let’s continue in verses 11–12: “Therefore, if perfection were through the **Levitical priesthood** (for under it the people received the law), what further need was there that another priest should rise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be called according to the order of Aaron? **For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change in the law.**”

The law that was changed had to do with the **Levitical priesthood**. It is referred to as “the law of a fleshly commandment” (Hebrews 7:16), as the Levites were human beings—flesh and blood. That portion of the entirety of God’s laws giving authority to the Levites to collect tithes was “annulled,” as we read in verse 18, “because of its weakness and unprofitableness.” The Levites were weak by reason of human nature. The law that gave them the right to collect tithes “made nothing perfect” (verse 19). But the “change of that law for the Levites” did not do away with the

commandment to give tithes—it had only to do with *who* has the right today to collect tithes from God’s people.

In fact, the tithing law was in existence long before the law was given to the Levites to collect those tithes. Notice Hebrews 7:9: “Even Levi, who receives tithes, *paid tithes* through Abraham, so to speak, for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him.” We read about this incident in Genesis 14:20, where Abraham gave Melchizedek “a tithe of all.” Later, Jacob told God that he would accept God as His God and give Him a tithe if He were to bless him (Genesis 28:20–22).

God’s people, we see, paid a tithe of their income long before there were Levites to collect tithes. And today, it’s no longer the Levites who have the responsibility to collect God’s tithes. This right has now been given to “another priest” who arose “according to the order of Melchizedek”—Jesus Christ. He is the everlasting High Priest who collects the tithes today—and He does it through His spiritual body, the Church.

Notice Hebrews 7:28: “**For the law** [regulating the collection of tithes through the Levites] appoints as high priests men who have weaknesses, but the word of the oath, which came **after the law** [pertaining

to the Levites], appoints the Son who has been perfected forever.”

Christ, who is a priest forever according to *the order of Melchizedek*” (verse 17), was none other than Melchizedek himself. Melchizedek is described as the “king of peace, without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, remain[ing] a priest continually” (verses 2–3). It is said about Melchizedek that he “receives them [tithes], of whom it is witnessed that he lives” (verse 8).

We are still duty-bound to pay tithes; otherwise, we rob God and are under a curse. But it is no longer the Levites who are to collect the tithes. *That part* of the law was changed. It is now Christ—through His Church—who has the responsibility of *collecting* God’s tithes. The word “law” in Hebrews 7 does not talk about the abolishment of collecting the tithes—it only refers to the identity of the one who is charged today with collecting them.

We have seen so far that the key scriptures that have been quoted to support the idea that the Ten Commandments, as well as the statutes and judgments, are no longer in effect today, do not at all prove such a concept—in fact, they prove the opposite.

DID THE TEN COMMANDMENTS DISAPPEAR WITH THE OLD COVENANT?

Still, the carnal mind—which is hostile toward the law of God—does not give up easily. Inspired by Satan who hates God and His law, humans have come up with another idea as to why they think that they don't have to obey God. And this is essentially how *that* argument goes:

God's Ten Commandments are no longer in force today, as they, as well as all the other Old Testament laws, are allegedly identical with the Old Covenant, and since God abolished the Old Covenant, He also abolished the Ten Commandments and all the other Old Testament laws. Christ, so the argument goes, replaced the Old Covenant (allegedly identical with all of the Old Testament laws) with a New Covenant, and this New Covenant is allegedly identical with a New Law. This "New Law" allegedly includes, for instance, nine of the original Ten Commandments, but it leaves out the fourth commandment (to keep the Sabbath holy), as well as the statutes regarding the annual Holy Days, tithing, or clean and unclean meat, just to name a few.

Surprisingly, many have fallen for this argument and have concluded that they do not have to keep the

Sabbath or the annual Holy Days anymore, and that they don't have to tithe nor refrain from unclean meats.

What about this argument? Is it valid? Or can it be proven to be wrong from the Bible? *Is*—as the advocates of this argument claim—the Old Covenant *identical* with the Ten Commandments? As we will see in the remainder of this booklet, the answer to this question is a resounding, NO!

WHAT IS A COVENANT?

Quite frankly, the idea that the Old Covenant is identical with the Ten Commandments is rather silly and only shows an absolute ignorance of what a covenant is. The word "covenant," as used in the Old Testament, is a translation from the Hebrew word "*berith*." The meaning of this term is "covenant, agreement or contract."

The Bible mentions numerous covenants or contracts. Technically, it is incorrect to say that the Bible only speaks about the "Old" and the "New" Covenants.

Webster defines a "covenant" as a "usually formal, binding agreement between two or more persons, to do or not to do something; a document containing the terms of the agreement."

Today, we still use this kind of language in legal matters to show what a covenant is. It is very com-

mon to begin a written lease agreement as follows, “We hereby *covenant* and agree...”

Rienecker, in *Lexikon zur Bibel*, writes, “The Bible knows quite a few Godly covenants...”

Once we understand that a covenant is merely a contract or an agreement, the fact that the Bible speaks about more than just one or two covenants should not surprise us. Neither should we be surprised by the fact that a covenant is not identical with the law—rather, a covenant or contract is based on law.

Let’s take an example. You might want to buy a car from me, and we might reduce our oral agreement to writing. The document might say, that you buy a used car from me for the amount of \$3,000.00. The document might also say that California law applies to this transaction. Assume that you don’t have the money to pay for the car. Under those changed circumstances, we might declare the contract to be null and void. In other words, I don’t have to deliver the car to you and you don’t have to pay me money (that you don’t have, anyway). But, when we annul the contract and tear apart the written document, have we thereby invalidated the California law on which the contract was based? Of course not.

We can learn from this example a

very important lesson: **When a contract or a covenant, which is based on law becomes invalid, it does not automatically invalidate the law on which the contract is based. The abolishment of a covenant does not affect the validity of the law on which the covenant is based.**

As we will see, the Bible confirms the basic truth that a covenant is not identical with the law. In fact, God entered into covenants with people *because they had kept the law!*

GOD’S COVENANTS WITH MAN

Let us take a closer look at the many covenants, which God has made with man over the centuries. We will see that there were numerous covenants in effect before God ever made a covenant with the nation of Israel at the time of Moses.

God’s Covenant With Noah

One of the most famous covenants that God made with man is the covenant with Noah. While God destroyed the entire earth through a flood because of the wickedness of all flesh, He spared Noah, his wife, and his three sons and daughters-in-law, as well as certain land animals, by protecting them in an ark.

Notice how the covenant is described in Genesis 9:9–17: “And as for Me, behold, I establish My

covenant with you and with your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you... Thus I establish My covenant with you: Never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood; never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.' And God said: 'This is the sign of the covenant which I make between Me and you, and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth... (verse 15) and I will remember My covenant which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. The rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.' And God said to Noah, 'This is the sign of the covenant which I have established between Me and all flesh that is on the earth.'"

God explained very clearly in the preceding verses what a covenant is. It is a contract or an agreement between two or more parties. In today's language, we would say, God made a contract between Himself and Noah, which included benefits for third parties (i.e., Noah's descendants and all the animals). The subject matter of this contract was

the fact that all flesh would never again be destroyed through a worldwide flood. The length of time or duration of this contract was forever—never again would God bring a flood over this earth to destroy all flesh. To put it differently, as long as there would be flesh on this earth, God would not destroy it through a worldwide flood. In addition, there was also a sign of the covenant—the rainbow. Every time God would see a rainbow in the sky, it would remind Him that He promised to Noah—by and through a covenant with him—that He would never again destroy the earth with a flood.

Why was it that God even made a covenant with Noah? Did Noah's lifestyle have any influence on God's decision to make a covenant with him? Was it immaterial to God how Noah lived—what kind of a person he was?

Genesis 6:8–9 and 7:1 reveal: "...Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD. This is the genealogy of Noah. Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God... Then the LORD said to Noah, 'Come into the ark, you and all your household, *because* I have seen that you are righteous before Me in this generation.'"

While the "wickedness of man was great in the earth, and... every

intent of the thought of his heart was only evil continually,” (Genesis 6:5) Noah was “righteous.” We already know that righteousness is defined as the observance of all of God’s commandments (Psalm 119:172). God saved Noah and made a covenant with him *because* Noah was righteous—because he kept God’s law. And Noah *stayed* righteous, or obedient, even *after* God announced to him that He would make a covenant with him (Genesis 6:18, 22; 7:5, 16).

Recall that a covenant is not identical with the law, but that it is based on law. God made a covenant with Noah because he kept God’s laws. However, the covenant itself that God made with Noah does not mention any laws. This fact alone proves that God’s covenant with Noah was not identical with God’s laws.

Notice an interesting passage in Isaiah 24:5–6: “The earth is also defiled under its inhabitants, Because they have transgressed the laws, Changed the ordinance, Broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore the curse has devoured the earth, And those who dwell in it are desolate. Therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, And few men are left.”

The prophet Isaiah tells us that the inhabitants of the earth have transgressed the laws—that is, they

have sinned—and that they have broken the everlasting covenant. Isaiah is not stuttering here or repeating himself. To break the laws and to break the everlasting covenant are two different things. But what everlasting covenant did Isaiah have in mind? The only covenant mentioned in Scripture that is between God and all the inhabitants of the earth is God’s covenant with Noah. God made this covenant with man after He had brought on the flood as punishment for man’s sins.

Since man would continue sinning, God announces in Isaiah 24 that He would bring a curse of FIRE over the earth. We see, then, that God keeps His covenant with Noah—He will not destroy all flesh again through a worldwide flood. But sin has its price, and God will bring FIRE over this earth, at the time of Christ’s return, to devour those who do not live as Noah had lived (2 Thessalonians 1:6–8).

God made a covenant with Noah because Noah had obeyed God. God’s covenant with Noah did not establish or bring into existence any laws, but it was made, of course, on the basis of existing law.

Clean and Unclean Animals

Let’s also note, in passing, that the laws of clean and unclean meat

were already in existence at the time of Noah—they did not come into existence at the time of Moses. Noah was specifically told by God to take with him into the ark “seven each of every clean animal, a male and a female; two each of animals that are unclean, a male and a female” (Genesis 7:2. Compare also verse 8). Noah offered a burnt offering to God “of every clean animal and of every clean bird” (Genesis 8:20).

The covenant that God made later with Israel had no effect on the laws of clean and unclean animals—they were already in force long before that covenant was made. And nowhere does God teach us that we are now permitted to eat unclean animals. Notice the curse that God pronounces over those who, at the time of Christ’s return, eat swine’s flesh (Isaiah 66:17; 65:3–4).

God’s Covenants With Abraham, Isaac and Jacob

In due course, God chose to make another covenant with man—this time with Abram.

God’s First Covenant With Abram

We are introduced to that covenant in Genesis 15:18, where we read, “On the same day the LORD MADE a covenant with Abram, saying: ‘To your descendants I have given this land, from the river

of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates.’”

Notice that God actually MADE that covenant—or contract—with Abram on that very same day when He said those words. The subject matter of that covenant was the conveyance of land to Abram’s descendants.

God’s Second Covenant With Abram

As time went on, God would make an ADDITIONAL covenant with Abram. We read about this next contract in the 17th chapter of the book of Genesis: “(verse 1) When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, ‘I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless. And I WILL MAKE My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly... (verse 4) As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. (verse 5) No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. (verse 6) I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. (verse 7) And I WILL ESTABLISH My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting

covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you.”

This is a **new** covenant with Abram. It is **not the same covenant** that God had made with Abram earlier. Though the subject matter of this new covenant includes the conveyance of the land of Canaan to Abram’s descendants (verse 8), it goes beyond that—it involves the promise that many nations and kings would descend from Abraham, and it includes the promise that the Eternal would be God for Abraham and his descendants.

We are also told in Romans 4:13 that God’s covenant was not limited to the land of Canaan; rather, God’s promise to Abraham and his descendants would ultimately include the whole earth.

God’s Third Covenant With Abram, Now Called Abraham

Returning to Genesis 17, we find that God made with Abraham a *third* covenant—the covenant of circumcision. Beginning in verse 10, “This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised.” We see here that circumcision was a separate covenant. The deacon, Stephen, would later explain to the Jewish council that God gave Abraham “the covenant of circumci-

sion” (Acts 7:8). It is true that circumcision is also referred to as a *sign of the covenant* (Genesis 17:11) that God was about to make with Abraham (as described in Genesis 17:1–7). This reminds us of the rainbow, which was a sign of the covenant between God and Noah. Nevertheless, circumcision was also *a separate covenant* between God and Abraham.

God’s Fourth Covenant With Abraham

Realize that, in addition to *physical* promises of national greatness and kingship, God’s covenant relationship with Abraham also included *spiritual* promises. Notice Acts 3:25–26, “You are sons of the prophets, and **of the covenant** which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’ To you first, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquity” (Luke 1:72–75).

It is noteworthy that these spiritual promises that God gave to Abraham in a covenant are not mentioned in the 17th chapter of Genesis. They *are* mentioned, however, in Genesis 22:16–18 and in Genesis 26:4. From this, it is apparent that God made even an *addi-*

tional covenant with Abraham, pertaining to spiritual matters, subsequent to His earlier covenants that dealt with physical matters.

It was promised to Abraham that his Seed—Jesus Christ—would give Abraham and his descendants spiritual blessings. In the book of Galatians, Paul made it clear that all the promises to Abraham—physical and spiritual—were also made to Jesus Christ, as the Seed or Descendant of Abraham, *and to us*, if we are Christ's and therefore "Abraham's seed":

"Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, 'And to seeds,' as of many, but as of one, 'and to your Seed,' who is Christ... And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:16, 29).

God's Covenants With Isaac and Jacob

In Genesis 17:21 God promised Abraham that He would make a covenant with Abraham's son, Isaac: "But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this set time next year." And so He did, and subsequently, God made another covenant with Jacob whose name was later changed to Israel.

It is important to recognize that God made these covenants with Isaac and with Israel on an indi-

vidual basis, just as He had entered into different covenants or agreements with Abraham. This again shows what a covenant is—simply a contract or an agreement, based on law, but not identical with the law.

Notice the following scripture that tells us about the covenants that God made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob: "I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and My covenant with Isaac and My covenant with Abraham I will remember; I will remember the land" (Leviticus 26:42).

Although the subject matter of these three covenants was identical, God still made individual covenants with Abraham, his son, and his grandson, as the parties were different.

Why God Made Covenants With Abraham

Why was it that God made a covenant with Abram or Abraham in the first place? We saw that God made a covenant with Noah because Noah was righteous. Can the same be said about Abram?

We read the following testimony about Abram, *before* God made a covenant with him: "And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness" (Genesis 15:6). Afterwards, God made a covenant with him (Genesis 15:18).

Abram's faith was one of obedi-

ence (Romans 1:5; 16:26). We read that “by faith Abraham obeyed” (Hebrews 11:8). Abraham’s righteousness was by faith, which motivated him to keep God’s commandments and not to sin. We are told in Nehemiah 9:7–8: “You are the LORD God, Who chose Abram, And brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans, And gave him the name Abraham; You found his heart faithful before You, And made a covenant with him to Give the land of the Canaanites... to his descendants. You have performed Your words, For You are righteous.”

We see that God *first* found Abraham’s heart faithful, *then*, He made a covenant with him. After God *had already* made His covenants with him, Abraham stayed loyal and faithful, as Noah had done. Abraham did not refuse to obey God in the most difficult of circumstances, and because of his ongoing obedience, God told him, in Genesis 22:18: “In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, *because you have obeyed My voice.*” We also read in Genesis 26:3–5, that God made His promises, by covenants, to Abraham, “*because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws*” (verse 5).

We see, then, that God made covenants with Abraham because he

had lived an obedient life. God knew that Abraham would teach his descendants God’s law and that, as a consequence, Isaac and—to an extent, Jacob—would also live righteously. He said in Genesis 18:19: “For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice, that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him.” But it was because of *Abraham’s* faith and righteousness that God entered into a covenant relationship with Abraham and his descendants. God gave Abraham an unconditional promise that He would make covenants with Isaac and Jacob, and later with the entire nation of Israel, to give that nation the Promised Land. The nation of Israel was not to inherit any spiritual blessings, but they were to possess the physical land of Canaan, and they would be allowed to dwell there—but only as long as they stayed obedient.

Abraham is actually called the friend of God in numerous places (James 2:23; 2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8). This means that Abraham agreed with God as to how to live, because two cannot walk together unless they are agreed (Amos 3:3). Abraham lived in obedience to God’s laws, and that is

why God called him His friend and entered into agreements with him.

We understand, then, that the covenants God made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were not identical with God's laws, but they were made because Abraham had kept God's laws.

God's Covenants With the Nation of Israel, Under Moses

As time went on, the nation of Israel found itself enslaved by the Egyptians. God sent a deliverer, Moses, who was used to bring Israel out of slavery and to lead them to Mount Zion. At that time, God began to enter into a covenant relationship with the people. As we will see, God made several covenants or agreements with the nation of Israel—not just one. And there was a particular reason *why* God made such covenants with the people—covenants that included God's promise to bring the nation into the Promised Land.

Moses tells the people the reason in Deuteronomy 9:5: "It is not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart that you go in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD your God drives them out from before you, *and that He may fulfill the word which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.*"

Later, God had Jeremiah explain this same reason to the nation of Judah. We read in Jeremiah 11:3–5, "Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'Cursed is the man who does not obey the words of this covenant which I commanded your fathers in the day I brought them out of the land of Egypt, from the iron furnace, saying, Obey My voice, and do according to all that I command you; so shall you be My people, and I will be your God, that I may establish the oath which I have sworn to your fathers, to give them a land flowing with milk and honey, as it is this day.'"

God made a covenant with the nation of Israel at the time when He brought them out of slavery to fulfill His unconditional promise that He had made, through a covenant or agreement, to Abraham, later to Isaac, and then to Jacob. But, as we will see, God expected of the nation to obey Him—at least in a general way. Since God never offered them the gift of the Holy Spirit, He knew that they could not obey Him in the same way we can today. Still, God expected obedience to an extent. In fact, when they refused to do so, He expelled them from the land. Let's note the specific circumstances and conditions under which this agreement between God and the nation of Israel was entered.

God's First Covenant With the Nation of Israel

We read in Exodus 19 that God instructed Moses to make the people an offer of a covenant or an agreement. We also read that the people accepted the offer; thus an agreement was reached. Exodus 19:5–6 says, “Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.”

Note the people's response to God's offer in Exodus 19:8: “Then all the people answered together and said, All that the LORD has spoken we will do. So Moses brought back the words of the people to the LORD.”

God and the people had agreed, in principle, on the terms of the covenant. God then explained the foundation of this covenant—what the covenant would be based on—by speaking the Ten Commandments directly to the people and by giving Moses additional statutes and judgments to be communicated to the people (Exodus 20:1–Exodus 23:33). These were the “words of the LORD” that Moses wrote down in the Book of the Covenant.

And, as is the case with many contracts today, something else was

necessary to make the covenant binding and “enforceable.” Today, we may need notarization of a written agreement. At the time of Moses, the covenant had to be sealed with blood of animals, as noted in Exodus 24:3–8: “So Moses came and told the people *all the words of the LORD and all the judgments*. And all the people answered [again, a second time] with one voice and said, All the words which the LORD has said we will do. *And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD...* Then he sent young men of the children of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of the oxen to the LORD... ***Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people.*** And they said [for the third time], All that the LORD has said we will do, and be obedient. And Moses took the blood, sprinkled it on the people, and said, This is the **blood of the covenant** which the LORD has made with you **according to all these words.**”

So we see that the blood of the covenant “sealed” the contract—now it was confirmed or legally binding. Galatians 3:15 explains that no subsequent unilateral changes can be made, even to a contract between humans, once it is sealed and delivered: “Though it is only a man's covenant, yet if it is confirmed, no one annuls or adds to it.”

The subject matter of God's covenant with the nation of Israel at that time was simply this: If Israel were obedient to the words of God, which formed the basis of the covenant, then they would become a kingdom of priests. Note in verse 8 that God made the covenant with the nation **"according to all these words."** The *New International Version* and the *Revised Standard Version* translate, "...the covenant that [or, which] the LORD has made with you **in accordance with all these words.**"

Lamsa and the *Authorized Version* say, "...the covenant which the LORD has [or, hath] made with you **concerning all these words.**" *Moffat* reads, "This is the blood of the compact which the Eternal has made with you, **on all these terms.**" The *Revised English Bible* states, "This is the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you **on the terms of this book.**"

A Covenant Is Based On Law

All of these translations show clearly that the covenant, a contract or agreement, was made based on God's words. God's law was the basis of, or foundation for the covenant. The covenant did not bring God's law into existence, nor was it identical with God's law—rather, the contract or covenant was made on the basis of certain terms, in accor-

dance with God's law. The phrases "according to" or "in accordance with" can also be translated as **"based on"** or **"based upon"** or **"pursuant to"** or **"founded upon"** or even, **"because of."** The German *Luther Bible* translates Exodus 24:8, "This is the blood of the covenant that God made with you **because of** all of these words." The German *Menge Bible* translates it in a similar fashion: "This is the blood of the covenant which the LORD made with you **because of** all of these commandments." The German *Elberfelder Bibel* translates it this way: "This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD made with you **on all of these words.**"

So, we understand that God made the covenant with the nation of Israel **BASED ON** God's law, including the Ten Commandments. This covenant did not bring the Ten Commandments into existence. This covenant was not identical with the Ten Commandments, nor were the Ten Commandments the *only* law on which the covenant was based. It was also founded on additional *judgments* that had been announced to the people.

God's Second Covenant With the Nation of Israel

Shortly after they had made this agreement with God, the people

sinned. When Moses delayed his return from the mountain, they decided that they needed another visible “leader”—and so they built a golden calf to lead them back to Egypt (Exodus 32:1–6). Moses, upon his return, in anger, broke the two tablets of stone on which were written the Ten Commandments (Exodus 32:19). God had Moses cut out two new tablets of stone on which God would again write the Ten Commandments (Exodus 34:1).

Notice what else God said He would do. “Then the LORD said: ‘I AM MAKING a covenant with you’” (Exodus 34:10, NIV). This is indeed the proper translation of the tense—God is referring to a *new* contract that He was about to enter into with the people. The *Living Bible* says it in a similar fashion: “This is the **contract** that I AM GOING TO MAKE with you.” The *New American Bible* states, “‘Here then,’ said the LORD, ‘is the covenant I WILL MAKE.’”

After Israel sinned against God and broke the first agreement, God was now entering into a second contract with them. There is something else we can learn about this *second* contract that God was about to make with the people. We read God’s words in Exodus 34:27–28: “Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Write these words, *for according to the tenor of these words* I have

made a covenant with you and with Israel.’ So He was there with the LORD [another] forty days and forty nights [that is, a second time, after he had broken the tablets]; he neither ate bread nor drank water. **And He [that is, God] wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.’**”

Covenant Not Identical With The Ten Commandments

Some say that this last passage proves that the Ten Commandments and the covenant were identical, as it says that the Ten Commandments were the words of the covenant. But we just read in the previous verse that God’s covenant was made “*according to the tenor*” of those words—that is, it was BASED on these words. **The Ten Commandments existed already before this covenant was made—so they cannot be identical with the covenant.** They are called here the “words of the covenant,” because they were the heart and core—the basis—of the covenant.

Some say that Deuteronomy 4:13 proves that the Ten Commandments and God’s covenant with Israel were identical. But does it? Let’s read it: “So He declared to you His covenant which He commanded you to perform, the Ten Commandments; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone.”

But as is the case with the scripture in Exodus 34:28, this passage in Deuteronomy 4:13 only shows that the Ten Commandments were the heart and core, or the basis, of God's covenant with Israel. Note how the *Revised English Bible* translates this verse: "He announced to you the *terms of his covenant*, bidding you observe the Ten Commandments, which he wrote on two stone tablets."

In addition, note the very next verse, "And the LORD commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and judgments, that you might observe them in the land which you cross over to possess" (Deuteronomy 4:14). These additional statutes and judgments were not written on the tablets of stone, but they *were* written by Moses, in a book, and they, too, were part of the terms of the covenant and had to be obeyed.

Covenants and Laws Are Not Identical!

We read earlier in Isaiah 24:5–6 that God made a distinction between His Law and His covenant with Noah. Through His prophet, He pointed out that the inhabitants of the earth were violating His laws *and* that they were breaking His covenant. The following additional Scriptures will prove beyond any doubt that the Bible teaches that a **covenant**

and the **law** on which the covenant is based are ***different and distinct***.

For instance, we are told in Joshua 7:11, "Israel **has sinned** [remember that sin is the transgression of the LAW], and **they have also transgressed My covenant** which I commanded them."

Also in 2 Kings 18:11–12, in the *Revised English Bible*, "The king of Assyria deported the Israelites to Assyria and settled them... in the cities of Media, because they did not obey the LORD their God but **violated His covenant and every commandment** that Moses the servant of the LORD had given them; they would not listen and they would not obey."

We are also informed in Hosea 8:1, in the *New American Bible*, "... they have **violated my covenant, and sinned against my law.**"

Further confirmation of the truth that the law and the covenants are distinct from each other can be found in Romans 9:4: "...who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, **the covenants, the giving of the law**, the service of God, and the promises."

So we can see that God's law and God's covenants are separate and distinct. If God does away with a covenant, that does not mean that He thereby does away with the law on which the covenant was based.

Consequences for Breach of a Covenant

In any given contract, there is a penalty for breach of contract. This is just as true today, as it was at the time of ancient Israel. The legal penalty might be monetary compensatory damages, it might be specific performance of the commitment that had been agreed to, and it might be punitive damages. The contract might even agree in advance to specific damages in case of a breach. We read that God held the nation of Israel accountable for breach of their covenant with Him. Moses prophesied in Leviticus 26:25 that this would happen: “And I will bring a sword against you that will execute the **vengeance of the covenant.**” Or, as the *Moffat Bible* reads, “I will let loose the sword of war on you, in punishment for your breach of compact.”

And so we see that God made two covenants with the nation of Israel, under Moses. He made a second one, after they had breached the first one. But, it may come as another surprise that God subsequently made additional covenants with the people of Israel, under Moses.

God’s Third Covenant With the Nation of Israel

Just prior to crossing over the River Jordan to enter the Promised

Land, Moses addressed the younger generation. He said in Deuteronomy 29:1, “These are the words of the covenant which the LORD commanded Moses to make with the children of Israel in the land of Moab, **besides** the covenant which He made with them in Horeb.”

This is an additional covenant or contract. Notice with whom it is being made, verses 14–15: “I make this covenant and this oath, not with you alone, but with him who stands here with us today before the LORD our God, as well as with him who is not here with us today.” This covenant, then, included future generations as well.

As was the case with the previous covenants that God made with the nation of Israel, this third covenant was also made because of the unconditional promises that God had given to Abraham. We read in verse 13 of Deuteronomy 29 that God is making this covenant with the new generation, so “that He may establish you today as a people for Himself, and that He may be God to you, just as He has spoken to you, and just as He has sworn to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.”

If one wants to argue that the Old Covenant is identical with the Ten Commandments, and that the Ten Commandments vanished when the Old Covenant was abolished, which

specific covenant is one talking about? Is it the covenant that God made with Israel at Sinai before Israel sinned or after Israel sinned? Or is it the covenant that God made with the nation in Moab? Further, this third covenant was made on the basis of *additional* laws that had been written in the Book of the Law as time had gone on—laws that had **not** been the basis for the covenant(s) that God made with Israel at Mount Sinai a generation earlier. As we mentioned before, these additional laws had been *added* because of sin, and included sacrificial rules, rituals, and other ceremonial washings, as well as curses and penalties.

God's Fourth Covenant With the Nation of Israel—The Sabbaths Covenant

But perhaps even more surprising, God made yet *another* covenant with the entire nation of Israel at Sinai, in addition to the covenants that He had made earlier. We are introduced to that separate covenant or agreement in the 31st chapter of the book of Exodus. The subject matter of this covenant was the Sabbath, but this covenant did not bring the Sabbath into existence. This covenant was made long after the Ten Commandments had been announced, and, as we saw earlier, the Sabbath commandment was already in existence

since the time of the creation of man. So, we see again that a covenant is not identical with the law, although it is based on law.

We read in Exodus 31:16, “Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations **as a perpetual covenant.**”

In addition, the Sabbath law was now designated as a sign between God and Israel. Verses 13 and 17 tell us, “Surely My Sabbaths (this word is in the plural and refers to both weekly and annual Sabbaths or Holy Days) you shall keep, for it is a **sign** between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you... It is a **sign** between Me and the children of Israel forever...”

By observing and being mindful of this sign, Israel would understand that it is God who sanctifies them, and Israel as a nation would become a sign to the other nations of this world, as the keeping of God's Sabbaths does single one out.

This separate Sabbath covenant between God and His people was never abolished—neither were the laws of God commanding us to keep His weekly and annual Sabbaths holy. And, since Christians are to be spiritual Jews (Romans 2:28–29; Galatians 6:16; Revelation 2:9; 3:9), they have a *two-fold* obligation to keep God's Sab-

baths—first, because God commands us to do so; and second, because they are under a specific covenant or agreement that God made with both physical and spiritual Israel, for all generations.

God's Covenant With Aaron And His Descendants

At the time of Moses, God chose to make still another covenant with a part of the nation of Israel—Aaron, of the house of Levi, and his descendants. This additional covenant needs to be examined very closely, as its importance and significance has confused a lot of people.

Numbers 18:19 calls this covenant between God and Aaron and his descendants “a *covenant of salt*.” The subject matter of this covenant was the Levitical priesthood and the sacrificial system, and especially the right of Aaron and his descendants to eat of the sacrifices. God says, “All the heave offerings of the holy things, which the children of Israel offer to the LORD, I have given to you and your sons and daughters with you as an ordinance forever.”

Compare also Leviticus 24:5, 8–9: “And you shall take fine flour and bake twelve cakes with it...Every Sabbath he shall set it in order before the LORD continually, being taken from the children of Israel by an *everlasting covenant*. And it shall be for Aaron and his sons, and they

shall eat it in a holy place; for it is most holy to him from the offerings of the LORD made by fire, by a perpetual statute.”

These offerings had to be made with salt to signify, among other things, the permanent validity or lasting effect of God's covenant with the priesthood. Leviticus 2:13 tells us that “...every offering of your grain offering you shall season with salt; you shall not allow the *salt of the covenant* of your God to be lacking from your grain offering. With all your offerings you shall offer salt.”

In time, the covenant with Aaron was transferred to, or made with, Aaron's grandson Phinehas and his descendants. When God's laws were flagrantly violated before all Israel, with at least the tacit approval of the people, Phinehas arose and turned away the wrath of God who was ready to consume the nation.

We are told in Numbers 25:11–13, “Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned back My wrath from the children of Israel, because he was zealous with My zeal among them, so that I did not consume the children of Israel in My zeal. Therefore say, Behold I give to him My *covenant of peace*; and it shall be to him and his descendants after him a *covenant of an everlasting priesthood*, because he was zealous for his God, and made atonement for

the children of Israel.”

God later elaborated by saying that Phinehas’ conduct “was accounted to him for righteousness to all generations forever” (Psalm 106:31). We read earlier that Abraham’s faith was counted to him as righteousness. Abraham DID something. He proved his living faith by his obedience. The same is true for Phinehas—he DID something that was righteous in the eyes of God—and as a consequence, Phinehas became the recipient of the blessings of the Levitical priesthood that had been bestowed on Aaron and his descendants through a covenant with God.

We find another reference to this covenant in Nehemiah 13:29–30 where Nehemiah was forced to reform the priesthood and cleanse it from pagan influences. We read, “Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood and the *covenant of the priesthood and the Levites*. Thus I cleansed them of everything pagan. I also assigned duties to the priests and the Levites, each to his service.”

God utters a very strict and stern warning in the prophetic book of Malachi, addressing specifically the failure of the Levites—both the physical descendants and the spiritual ministers of God—to stand strong for God’s law in the sight of

adversity and compromise (Malachi 2:4–9). Beginning in verse 4, “Then you shall know that I have sent this commandment to you, That My *covenant with Levi* may continue, Says the LORD of hosts. My *covenant was with him, one of life and peace*, And I gave them to him that he might fear Me; so he feared Me And was reverent before My name. The law of truth was in his mouth, And injustice was not found on his lips. He walked with Me in peace and equity, And turned many away from iniquity. For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, And people should seek the law from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts. But you have departed from the way; You have caused many to stumble at the law. You have corrupted the *covenant of Levi*, Says the LORD of hosts. Therefore I also have made you contemptible and base Before all the people, Because you have not kept My ways But have shown partiality in the law.”

This prophecy for our day tells us, in verse 4, that God’s covenant with Levi will continue. This means that it is still in force and in effect today. We find this confirmed in the 33rd chapter of the book of Jeremiah where there is an unconditional promise for the perpetual validity of God’s covenant with Levi (Jeremiah 33:18–22): “...nor shall the priests,

the Levites, lack a man to offer burnt offerings before Me, to kindle grain offerings, and to sacrifice continually... Thus says the LORD: If you can break My covenant with the day and My covenant with the night, so that there will not be day and night in their season, then *My covenant may also be broken ... with the Levites, the priests, My ministers*. As the host of heaven cannot be numbered, nor the sand of the sea measured, so will I multiply... the Levites who minister to Me.”

These passages clearly tell us that God’s covenant with Levi was to continue—that it is therefore still in force and effect today—and that it will remain so in the future. But how can this be, given the fact that sacrifices are no longer required since the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and that the Jews have ceased bringing sacrifices since the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D.?

These passages in Malachi, and especially in Jeremiah, teach us that as long as and whenever biblical sacrifices are being brought to God in Jerusalem, they will be brought through the descendants of Aaron and Phinehas. And God gave those descendants the right to eat from those sacrifices. We also know that shortly before the return of Jesus Christ, the Jews will again start to bring sacrifices in Jerusalem, appar-

ently in a newly-rebuilt temple. Daniel 12:11 refers to a future time when sacrifices that had commenced will be taken away again and the abomination of desolation will be set up at the holy place (Matthew 24:15). The Jews have recorded the genealogies of the Levites, so they know exactly who the priests are who will bring sacrifices shortly before the coming of the Messiah. We also know that at the beginning of the Millennium sacrifices will be brought again in Jerusalem. The 44th chapter of the prophetic book of Ezekiel explains this in great detail. Verses 15 and 29–30 tell us that “the priests, the Levites, the sons of Zadok,” will bring and eat from the sacrifices.

We must note that those Millennial sacrifices will not be brought for the purpose of forgiveness of sin. Christ’s blood did this once and for all. But God introduced the sacrificial system to ancient Israel because Israel had sinned. The sacrifices served as a reminder of their sins. Apparently, for the same reason, there will be sacrifices brought in the Millennium so that carnal, unconverted people can begin to appreciate the awesome purpose and meaning of Christ’s sacrifice and how God looks at sin. But, as we already saw, the necessity of bringing these sacrifices ceased for

Christians with the death and resurrection of Christ. The millennial rule of Jesus Christ will be administered by spirit beings—those who are part of the first resurrection. Satan and his demonic followers will no longer be able to influence mankind. World government will emanate from Jerusalem. In addition, there will be an ongoing physical priesthood serving at that time. The physical sacrifices extant at that future time, which will be brought in Jerusalem at the temple, will be part of the new administration that God's Kingdom will usher in.

The covenant between God and Levi, then, does continue to exist, that is, the Levitical priests *will continue* to offer sacrifices in Jerusalem for carnal, unconverted people, both prior to and subsequent to the return of Christ. But as we read, Jesus Christ became the High Priest for converted people. Unless one accepts the sacrifice of Christ, one has no part of that priesthood. However, once we do accept Christ's sacrifice, our High Priest will then live in us, intervene for us, and lead us to perfection. The Levitical priesthood was not given the function or responsibility to lead carnal people to spiritual perfection. Rather, they presided over the administration of the sacrificial system as a reminder of sin—not for

the purpose of forgiving sin.

The sacrificial *system* and the rules regarding the Levitical priesthood were added after God had made His covenant with the nation of Israel at Mount Sinai or Horeb, because of Israel's sin. When these regulations were added, they became part of an additional covenant that God made *with the nation*. The sacrificial system is, of course, not identical with the covenant, as laws—*any* laws—are different and distinct from covenants. But God made a covenant that now incorporated, or was based on, the additional sacrificial system administered by the Levitical priesthood.

God's Covenant With David

There is another covenant that God made in Old Testament times, that has tremendous importance for us today and all mankind. That is the covenant that God made with king David of Israel. We read David's last words as recorded in 2 Samuel 23:3–5: "The God of Israel said, The Rock of Israel spoke to me: 'He who rules over men must be just, Ruling in the fear of God. And he shall be like the light of the morning when the sun rises, A morning without clouds, Like the tender grass springing out of the earth, By clear shining after rain.' Although my house is not so with God, Yet He has made with

me an *everlasting covenant*, Ordered in all things and secure.”

Psalms 89:3–4 and 34–37 summarizes for us the *subject matter* of that covenant between God and David. We read that God says, “I have made *a covenant* with My chosen, I have sworn to My servant David: Your seed I will establish forever, And build up your throne to all generations... My *covenant* I will not break, Nor alter the word that has gone out of My lips. Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David: His seed shall endure forever, And his throne as the sun before Me; It shall be established forever like the moon, even like the faithful witness in the sky.”

It might have appeared to the Israelites at times that God *had* broken His covenant with David when He punished them for their transgressions. The truth is that God never abolished His contract with David. He promised David, in a covenant with him, that there would always be a descendant of his sitting on the throne of David, until the very time of Christ’s return, and beyond. We read in 1 Kings 11:11–13 how God remembered His covenant with David, even though David’s son, Solomon, had terribly sinned against God: “Therefore the LORD said to Solomon, ‘Because you have done this, and have *not kept My covenant* and My statutes,

which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom away from you and give it to your servant... However I will not tear away the whole kingdom; I will give one tribe to your son *for the sake of My servant David*, and for the sake of Jerusalem which I have chosen.”

God saw to it that one of David’s descendants would always sit on the throne of David. King Abijah of Judah reminded Jeroboam, the servant of Solomon, of this very fact, when he said “Should you not know that the LORD God of Israel gave the dominion over Israel to David forever, to him and his sons, *by a covenant of salt?*” (2 Chronicles 13:5).

Later, we are told that God did not wipe out the house of David, even though they had begun to rebel against Him. 2 Chronicles 21:7 reads, “Yet the LORD would not destroy the house of David, *because of the covenant* that He had made with David, and since He had promised to give a lamp to him and to his sons forever.”

Earlier we discussed the 33rd chapter of the book of Jeremiah where God had made a covenant with the house of Levi, guaranteeing that offerings to the LORD would always be brought by the Levitical priesthood. This chapter also makes reference to God’s covenant with the house of David. Jeremiah 33:17 says,

“For thus says the LORD: ‘David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel...’” Jeremiah continues in verses 20 and 21, “Thus says the LORD: ‘If you can break My covenant with the day and My covenant with the night, so that there will not be day and night in their season, then My *covenant may also be broken with David My servant*, so that he shall not have a son to reign on his throne...’” Then in verses 25 and 26, “Thus says the LORD: ‘If My covenant is not with day and night, and if I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth, then I will cast away the descendants of Jacob and David My servant, so that I will not take any of his descendants to be rulers over the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.’”

What God is telling us here is simply this: As long as the throne of David exists on earth, one of David’s descendants would sit on that throne. David’s throne is in fact on this earth today. Christ will return to an *existing* throne, and He, as a descendant of David, will then sit on it and rule from it. The angel Gabriel told Mary, the mother of Jesus, as recorded in Luke 1:31–33, “And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus... and the Lord God will give Him the throne

of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever.”

Christ will rule from Jerusalem, sitting on the throne of David. When He returns, He will be given that very throne. In the meantime, according to God’s promise, the physical line of David would continue sitting on it, until Christ’s return. Even before Christ’s first coming, as long as the kingdom of Judah existed, a descendant of the house of David sat on the throne of David, ruling over the house of Judah. When king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon destroyed the kingdom of Judah (the house of Israel had been destroyed before by the Assyrians), the prophet Jeremiah transferred the throne of David from Jerusalem to Ireland, in that he accompanied one of the daughters of king Zedekia of Judah to Ireland, where she married a descendant of David who lived there. The couple then ruled from the throne of David over Ireland. Later, the throne was transferred to Scotland, and in the process of time, it was again transferred to England where it still is today. Christ *will* be returning to an *existing* throne, just as God prophesied that He would. This throne will then be transferred to Jerusalem and Christ will rule from there.

Why did God decide to make a covenant with David? God explains in 1 Kings 11:34, “However I will

not take the whole kingdom out of his [Solomon's] hand, because I have made him ruler all the days of his life for the sake of My servant David, **whom I chose because he kept My commandments and My statutes.**”

God chose David because David was a righteous man who obeyed God to the best of his ability. God referred to David as “a man after My own heart, who will do all My will” (Acts 13:22). And although David was not sinless—since there is *no* human being who does not sin (1 Kings 8:46; Ecclesiastes 7:20; Romans 3:23; 1 John 1:8, 10)—yet, overall he did please and obey God. Notice God's additional testimony about His servant David, in 1 Kings 15:4–5, “Nevertheless for David's sake the LORD his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem, by setting up his son after him and by establishing Jerusalem; **because** David did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, and had not turned aside from anything that He commanded him all the days of his life, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite.” Psalm 51 shows that David deeply repented of this terrible sin, and he turned back to obedience to God.

So, we see again in regard to the covenant that God made with David, what we have seen over and over again—that a covenant is not

identical with the law, but it is based on law. This law which was already in existence, David kept. **It is because David kept God's law that God made a covenant with him.**

Additional Old Testament Covenants

The Bible, in fact, mentions **many additional covenants** that were made in Old Testament times. They were all based on God's law—none of the covenants established laws, nor were they identical with God's law. *In many cases, these covenants were made because the people had transgressed God's laws.* They came to repentance and promised God that from then on they would be loyal to Him and keep His commandments. They promised God *through a covenant with Him* that they would from now on keep His laws. We read, for instance, about **covenants made with God under Joshua** (Joshua 24:19–25); **under king Asa of Judah** (2 Chronicles 15:8–15); **under the priest Jehoiada** (2 Chronicles 23:16; 2 Kings 11:17); **under king Hezekiah of Judah** (2 Chronicles 29:6–10); **under king Josiah of Judah** (2 Chronicles 34:29–32); and **under Ezra the priest** (Ezra 10:3). All of these covenants were contractual promises by the people to keep God's laws that had been broken by them.

How clear it is, then, that a covenant is not identical with the law, but that it is based on law. Therefore, the abolishment of a covenant has absolutely no influence or effect on the law on which the covenant was based.

THE NEW COVENANT

Does all of this understanding change when we begin to analyze the New Covenant? Is it no longer true that the New Covenant is an agreement or a contract made between two or more parties, that is based on law?

Christ—The New Covenant?

Is it correct to say that Jesus Christ is the New Covenant, and that as long as Jesus lives in our hearts, we will automatically do what is right, so that we don't even need any written laws or rules whatsoever? Some who support this last claim turn to Old Testament scriptures in the book of Isaiah that prophesy the coming of Jesus Christ. Isaiah 42:6 reads, "I, the LORD [God the Father], have called You [Jesus Christ] in righteousness, And will hold Your hand; I will keep You and give *You as a covenant to the people.*" They also refer to Isaiah 49:8, which says, "Thus says the LORD: 'In an acceptable time I have heard You, And in the day of salvation I have helped You; I will preserve You and

give You As a covenant to the people, To restore the earth, To cause them to inherit the desolate heritages...'"

But, since a covenant is a contract or an agreement between two or more parties, how can Christ, a being, be identical with a covenant? The obvious answer is, *of course, He is not!* Let's understand, then, the meaning of what we just read in the book of Isaiah.

To help clarify this, let's read about the coming of Jesus Christ in Malachi 3:1, "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, *even the messenger of the covenant*, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts" (*Authorized Version*).

In this passage, Jesus Christ is referred to as "*the messenger of the covenant*," not as the covenant itself. He is the one who brings the New Covenant. How, then, do we understand Isaiah 42:6, and Isaiah 49:8?

Let's take a look at how some other translations render this passage. The *Zürcher Bibel* translates both scriptures this way, "**I have given You as the messenger of the covenant for the people.**" The *Living Bible* interprets the passages, "**I have given you to my people as the personal confirmation of my covenant with them.**"

The real meaning is that God gave Christ, His only-begotten Son, to establish a New Covenant with the people. The Father gave His Son “FOR a covenant,” as the *Lamsa* translations brings it—in other words, to establish a New Covenant with man. Notice, too, that Paul identifies Christ in Hebrews 12:24 as “the *Mediator* of the new covenant.”

Christ, then, is not identical with the New Covenant, nor is the law—any law—identical with the New Covenant. But as we will see, both Jesus Christ and God’s law have a major role in relationship with the New Covenant between God and man.

The New Covenant In “Old Testament” Scriptures

The New Covenant is not an isolated contract between God and man—without any connection with previous contracts that God had made. Rather, the Bible makes it very clear that God made or offered a New Covenant, which ties in specifically and directly with “Old Testament” covenants that He had previously made.

The New Covenant and Noah

In Isaiah 54:9–10, God compares the New Covenant with the covenant He made with Noah. We read, “For this is like the waters of Noah

to Me; For as I have sworn That the waters of Noah would no longer cover the earth, So have I sworn That I would not be angry with you, nor rebuke you. For the mountains shall depart And the hills be removed, But My kindness shall not depart from you, Nor shall **My covenant of peace** be removed,’ Says the LORD, who has mercy on you.”

As we will see much more clearly in a short while, God is speaking here about the *New Covenant*, calling it *His covenant of peace*, but comparing it at the same time with the covenant that He had made with Noah.

The New Covenant and David

Let’s notice God’s prophetic words in Isaiah 55:3, “Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live; And I will make an **everlasting covenant** with you—The sure mercies of David.”

Here, God refers to the New Covenant as an *everlasting* covenant. He places this covenant in relationship with His covenant that He had made with David. We will see in a moment *why* there is such a relationship, involving and including *rulership* over Israel.

More Old Testament Scriptures About the “New Covenant”

Isaiah 59:21 gives us further

understanding regarding the New Covenant: “As for Me,’ says the LORD, ‘**this is My covenant with them:** My Spirit who is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your descendants, nor from the mouth of your descendants’ descendants,’ says the LORD, ‘from this time and forevermore.’”

New Covenant Includes Spiritual Blessings

The New Covenant includes the fact that God’s Holy Spirit and God’s Holy Word will not depart anymore from the people with whom the New Covenant will be made, and this will even include the descendants of those people.

Now notice something remarkable and shocking in the book of Jeremiah. Many teach today that while the “Old Covenant“ was made with ancient Israel, the “New Covenant” will be made, or has been made, with the Gentiles. Nothing could be further from the truth. Let’s read Jeremiah 31:31–34, and note with whom the New Covenant is to be made:

“Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when **I will make a new covenant** *with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah*—not according to the covenant that I

made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, **My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them,** says the LORD. **But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days,** says the LORD: **I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts;** and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will *forgive* their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

This is a critical passage that explains to us the nature of the New Covenant, and *why* there even had to be such a New Covenant. First, we read that the New Covenant is to be made with the houses of Israel and Judah—it does not say that it is to be made with Gentiles! Gentiles *can* become parties to this New Covenant, but only if they become spiritual Israelites or Jews, as we saw earlier when we discussed God’s Sabbaths covenant with the nation of Israel. Secondly, we read that ancient Israel and Judah broke God’s covenant, but that they will keep the New Covenant, **because God’s Law will be in their hearts and minds.**

Rather than having God's Law on tablets of stone, it will be within them—it will have become a part of them. But notice—**it is the same law**, not different sets of rules.

The problem with the covenants that God had made with ancient Israel at Mount Sinai or in Moab was not the law—rather, the problem was that God's law was not in the hearts and minds of the people, so they broke the covenants by breaking God's law on which the covenants were based.

Further, Jeremiah tells us that people who are parties to the New Covenant have obtained, and can obtain, *forgiveness of sin*—something the previous covenants did not offer—and they can have spiritual understanding of God through the Holy Spirit given to them—again, something that was not offered to such an extent in previous covenants.

Notice this additional prophecy regarding the New Covenant in Jeremiah 32:38–40: “They shall be My people, and I will be their God; then I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me forever, for the good of them and their children after them. And I will make **an everlasting covenant** with them, that I will not turn away from doing them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts **so that** they will not depart from Me.”

By the fear of God, one departs

from evil (Proverbs 16:6). God's Spirit will be living in those people, *so that* they will not practice the way of disobedience any longer.

New Covenant Includes Physical Blessings

Although the New Covenant is mostly concerned with *spiritual* blessings, it would be false to assume that it does not include physical blessings as well. Notice Ezekiel 34:25–28, 30: “**I will make a covenant of peace with them**, and cause wild beasts to cease from the land; and they will dwell safely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods. I will make them and the places all around My hill a blessing; and I will cause showers to come down in their season; there shall be showers of blessing. Then the trees of the field shall yield their fruit, and the earth shall yield their increase. They shall be safe in their land; and they shall know that I am the LORD, *when I have broken the bands of their yoke and delivered them from the hand of those who enslaved them*. And they shall no longer be a prey of the nations, nor shall beasts of the land devour them; but they shall dwell safely, and no one shall make them afraid... Thus they shall know that I, the LORD their God, am with them, and they, *the house of Israel*, are My people, says the LORD GOD.”

The New Covenant Is a Marriage Agreement

Let's read the parallel passage in Hosea 2:16, 18–20, and notice some interesting additional information. Notice, too, in Hosea 1:10 that God speaks to the children of Israel. “And it shall be, in that day, Says the LORD, That you will call Me **My Husband**... In that day **I will make a covenant for them** With the beasts of the field, With the birds of the air, And with the creeping things of the ground. Bow and sword of battle I will shatter from the earth, To make them lie down safely. I will **betroth** you to Me forever; Yes, I will **betroth** you to Me in righteousness and justice, In lovingkindness and mercy; I will **betroth** you to Me in faithfulness, And you shall know the LORD.”

We are introduced here to the concept that this New Covenant, which includes physical blessings of peace and prosperity, is compared with betrothal and marriage. We will discuss the concept of betrothal more fully a little bit later—it can roughly be compared with a *binding* agreement of engagement that can only be annulled through a divorce. God compared His covenant with ancient Israel at Mount Sinai with a marriage agreement (compare Ezekiel 16:8; Isaiah 54:5; Jeremiah 31:32)—but this marriage ended in

divorce, as Israel broke the agreement and sinned against God (Isaiah 50:1; Jeremiah 3:8). Now, we are told that God, when making a New Covenant, will enter again into a marriage agreement with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. First, it will start with a *betrothal*. This is *very significant*, as we will see in a moment.

The New Covenant in the “New Testament” Scriptures

On the very night when He would be betrayed, Jesus Christ introduced the New Covenant to His disciples. We read in Matthew 26:27–28, “Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. For this is **My blood of the new covenant**, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.’”

The New Covenant makes it possible, then, to have sins forgiven—something, as we will recall, that was not possible under the previous covenants that God had made with ancient Israel. Notice, too, in Hebrews 13:20, “Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through **the blood of the everlasting covenant**, make you complete...”

Through Christ's shed blood of the New Covenant, the resurrection

from the dead to eternal life has become possible. We are being sanctified or set aside for a holy purpose through the blood of Christ, which grants us forgiveness of our sins. Hebrews 10:29 explains, “Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted *the blood of the covenant* by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?”

We obtain forgiveness through Christ’s sacrifice. This makes it possible to receive God’s Holy Spirit—God’s power enabling us to overcome sin and to keep God’s law which has been written in our hearts (Hebrews 10:16–17, quoting Jeremiah 31:33–34). And since Christ’s sacrifice is sufficient for the forgiveness of our sins, animal sacrifices are no longer necessary (Hebrews 10:18).

Christ came to enter into a new covenant relationship with those who are called by God, by forgiving their sins that had been previously committed. Hebrews 9:15 explains, “And for this reason He is the *Mediator* of the **new covenant**, by means of death, for the redemption of the *transgressions under the first covenant*, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.”

As we read earlier, it was the people who **broke** the first covenants—the fault was with the people—not with the Old Testament covenants. Paul says so, explicitly, in Hebrews 8:7–8, “For if that first *covenant* had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a *second*. Because **finding fault with them**, He says, ‘Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.’”

The people broke the covenants—the fault was with them. And why did they break the covenants? Because God’s law was not in their hearts (Hebrews 8:10). But, God promises that it will be different in regard to the New Covenant. That is why Hebrews 8:6 says that Christ is “the Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises” (compare also Hebrews 7:22).

What Are Those Better Promises?

First of all, before the New Covenant came, there was no forgiveness of sins—animal sacrifices do not forgive sins (Hebrews 10:4, 11). Also, there was no promise for receiving the Holy Spirit, which alone gives us the strength and power to overcome and conquer sin,

and to obey and keep God's law. The Israelites had the law written on *tablets of stone* (2 Corinthians 3:2–3). These tablets of stone never became part of their being—they never entered their hearts. As the tablets were of stone, so were their hearts. That is the reason why God, in a New Covenant, *replaces our stony hearts with hearts of flesh* (Ezekiel 11:19).

The ministry under the previous covenants led to condemnation, since people sinned and could not obtain forgiveness (2 Corinthians 3:9). On the other hand, the ministry under the New Covenant leads to righteousness, since the promises of the New Covenant include forgiveness of sins and the gift of the power of the Holy Spirit to live righteously.

But the promises of the New Covenant include more than that. Notice 2 Corinthians 3:18, “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being **transformed into the same image** from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.” Through the Spirit of God, we are to be born into the Family of God. We are to become a glorified God being. THAT was never a promise given to ancient Israel at the time of Mount Sinai. In addition, we will enter into the covenant relationship between God and David, by ruling with

Christ for one thousand years here on earth (as was promised to Abraham and his descendants) (Revelation 20:4; 5:10), and after that, for all eternity (Revelation 22:5).

Since the time that God made a New Covenant with Israel, the first covenants that He made with them are becoming obsolete and are growing old, ready to vanish away (Hebrews 8:13). But notice—it does not say that *the law of God* was growing old, ready to vanish away—in fact, God had just explained in Hebrews 8:12 that He will remember their **LAWLESS** deeds no more. God forgives the transgressions and sins previously committed, and He puts His laws in the minds and hearts of the people so that they do not continue with their practice of transgressing God's laws and committing lawless deeds. **The laws of God are still in effect—they have not become obsolete.**

In What Way Is the New Covenant Established on Better Promises?

Returning to Hebrews 8:6, recall that the New Covenant is “established” on better promises. The *New Revised Standard Version* says here, “**enacted** through better promises.” The *New Jerusalem Bible* states, “**founded** on better promises.” The Greek word, translated as “estab-

lished” or “enacted” or “founded,” is “*nomotheteo*.” The word “*nomos*” means, “**law**.”

In Hebrews 7:11, the same word “*nomotheteo*” is translated as “**received the law**.” In James 4:12, the noun “*nomothetes*” is used in the Greek and rendered there as “**Law-giver**.” In Romans 9:4, the related Greek word “*nomothesia*” is translated as “**giving of the law**.”

When we take another look at Hebrews 8:6, we can now see what the obvious meaning of that passage is: **Jesus Christ is Mediator of a better covenant, which, having better promises, is BASED or ENACTED or FOUNDED on God’s given law.**

The New Covenant is based on God’s law, just as all the other covenants were based on God’s law, and the New Covenant is *not identical* with God’s law, just as none of the other covenants were identical with God’s law.

However, the New Covenant is not based on laws that God has decreed are no longer valid. The New Covenant is not based, for example, on the sacrificial system, the Levitical priesthood, and other rituals and washings. But it is important that we understand why those particular laws are no longer valid. *Not*, because the “Old Covenant” was abolished, and with it all

Old Testament laws. The concept that the “Old Covenant” ended, and with it all the laws of the Old Testament, is **WRONG**, as a covenant is not identical with the law, but it is **BASED** on the law.

What To Do When Laws Change

We saw that certain Old Testament laws are no longer binding because *God tells us in the New Testament that they are no longer binding*. Therefore, the covenants which God made with ancient Israel at Mount Sinai and in Moab are vanishing, because they were based, along with other laws, on ritual statutes and sacrificial regulations which are no longer valid today—and, of course, because Israel kept breaking the covenants.

We can relate to this, when we look at a modern day example. Assume that you enter into a contract and base it on certain laws, and that those laws, or at least some of them, later become obsolete. What happens to your contract? The parties might have several options at their disposal. They could agree to do away with the contract in its entirety, and make a new contract based on the laws, which are still in effect. Or, they could try to change or modify the contract, by considering the new circumstances and by

determining what they would have done, if they had known that some of the laws on which the contract was based, would be changed.

How did God do it? Actually, He used both methods.

When analyzing **His covenant with the Levitical priesthood**, we find that He kept that contract alive, but He modified it, as the provisions or laws regarding the collection of tithes were changed. That right was transferred from the Levites to Christ. The remainder of the contract between God and the Levites, including the Levitical right to bring, and to eat from, the sacrifices, stayed in effect. As you will recall, it will be the Levites who will administer the sacrifices, which will be reestablished in Jerusalem for the Jews prior to Christ's return (Daniel 12:44), and at the beginning of the Millennium for unconverted people (Ezekiel 44:15, 29–30).

When analyzing **the covenants that God made with the ancient nation of Israel at Mount Sinai and in Moab**, God did away with those covenants [except for the Sabbaths covenant with Israel, which remains in force and effect], as too many laws on which those covenants had been based, had become obsolete. Also, God wanted to make a new covenant that would include additional promises that were never a part of

the previous covenants with the nation of Israel. So, God abolished the previous covenants with the nation of Israel because certain laws on which the covenants were based were changed or abolished.

We understand, then, that changes in the law can lead to the abolishment of a covenant or contract, which is based on such law, but, that the abolishment of a contract never leads to the abolishment of the law on which the contract is based.

As this is so, we need to consider *the following, extremely critical point*: **In order to determine which Old Testament laws are no longer valid today, God must identify those to us in the New Testament. It is false to say, Old Testament laws are no longer valid, unless they are specifically mentioned in the New Testament. Rather, one must say that Old Testament laws remain in effect, unless the New Testament specifically states, through the letter or through the Spirit, that they are no longer valid today.**

Which Laws Were Abolished?

And what are those laws that have been abolished? We have already touched upon them—the laws dealing with animal sacrifices, ritual washings, and the right of the Levitical priesthood to collect God's tithes.

Some have asked for a specific list of the individual sacrificial or ritual laws mentioned in the Old Testament, which are no longer valid today. To discuss all of those laws here would go beyond the scope of this booklet. Future writings will go into these questions in more detail. In the meantime, any questions regarding the validity of particular laws could be directed to the ministry responsible for the publication of this booklet.

At this point, it may be sufficient to set forth important principles which need to be applied to determine whether a specific law is still valid, or whether it has been abrogated in the New Testament through the Spirit—at least insofar as its practical application for the Church and its members are concerned. We will also give a few examples to show how to apply these principles.

From a general standpoint, the laws in the Old Testament are divided into several categories. They may deal with temporary national or ritual circumstances, or they may address lasting principles to be incorporated in our personal lives.

For instance, Deuteronomy 20 contains laws and regulations about national warfare. These laws are clearly not binding for Christians today, as a Christian is not to participate in war (Matthew 5:44;

26:52; Romans 12:20; 2 Corinthians 10:3–4; James 4:1–2; 1 John 3:15).

In addition, God gave Israel certain national laws, for instance in Deuteronomy 16 and 17, dealing with the punishment and, in certain cases, the execution of criminals. Converted Christians are servants of the New Covenant, which gives life (2 Corinthians 3:6). They are not to judge or condemn another person. Christ said that he who is without sin may cast the first stone (John 8:7). At the same time, we are told that nobody can claim to be without sin (1 John 1:8). Therefore, Christians are not to participate, for instance as jurors, in the judicial systems of this world. In addition, the Church today is not to carry out the death penalty, either. Rather, the ministry is to preach today reconciliation and eternal life (2 Corinthians 5:18–21).

Another “national” law, which is no longer in effect today, is listed in Deuteronomy 25:5–10. It is commonly referred to as the law of the “levirate marriage.” It stated that if a married man died without children, his widow was to be married to his brother, so that the name of the dead brother “may not be blotted out of Israel” (verse 6). One reason why this law is not in force for the Church today is that it may require a converted brother-in-law to marry an unconverted sister-in-law, or *vice*

versa. This would be contrary to specific New Testament instructions in 1 Corinthians 7:39 and 2 Corinthians 6:14. Also, if the brother-in-law were already married, the application of the law would violate the New Testament teaching that a man is to be the husband of only *one* wife (compare 1 Timothy 3:2, 12).

To just give one more example of an obsolete “national” statute, turn to Deuteronomy 23: 1–8. This law excludes certain people with particular racial or national backgrounds, such as Ammonites or Moabites, or eunuchs, from access to the congregation. This distinction does not apply to the New Testament Church. True Christians may be from any nation and suffer any physical disability (Ephesians 2:19). This will be discussed more fully below.

Another category of laws, which are no longer binding for Christians today are the ritual laws of sacrifices and washings. Again, certain principles apply, showing us when a law is of a temporary ritual nature, or when it is still binding for us. For instance, the violation of a statute or a particular circumstance could make a person “unclean” for a certain period of time. Following ritual washings, that person could become clean again. Clearly, these kinds of laws are strictly ritualistic in nature, as no violation of a binding

law was automatically cured simply by lapse of time and ritual washings.

For instance, while the laws prohibiting the consumption of unclean food are still valid (see discussion earlier in this booklet), the laws declaring someone unclean who *touch*ed the body of an unclean animal are not. This can be seen, as such a person was only unclean “until evening,” and he became clean again after washing himself, showing the ritualistic character of these laws (Leviticus 11:24, 27, 31). On the other hand, the eating of an unclean animal did not bring about only ritual uncleanness that ended in the evening after washing. There is no scripture, which tells us that a person who **ate an unclean animal** became clean again in the evening, after ritual washings. Many scriptures, however, tell us that a person who **touch**ed the **carcass** of an unclean or even a clean animal (Leviticus 11:39) became ritually clean again in the evening, after washings. This shows, then, the different nature of these two sets of laws.

Another temporary ritual law of a similar nature can be found in Deuteronomy 23:9–11, stating that an individual who contracts some ceremonial defilement during the night becomes ritually clean again by the next sunset. [This is not to say, however, that there were no physical

health benefits attached to such laws, such as the prevention of possible transmission of diseases—the underlying principle of physical cleanliness is still very much applicable today.]

Many of these examples, which we have discussed so far, have shown us how we must view an Old Testament law with the eyes of New Testament spiritual principles. We must always look at the purpose and intent of a given statute—lest we become like the Pharisees who tried to uphold the “letter” of the law, while neglecting the “spirit.” For instance, Jesus said that David was guiltless when he was hungry and ate from the showbread, although the law said that only a priest could eat from it (Matthew 12:3–4). Christ was pointing at the spiritual intent of that particular statute—and it was never its intent to regulate a situation when someone was hungry and had nothing else to eat.

Another example would be a law contained in Deuteronomy 22:12, commanding that tassels be made on the four corners of one’s clothing. The reason is given in Numbers 15:38–40: “...that you may look upon it and remember all the commandments of the LORD to do them... and so be holy to the LORD.” A similar law is found in Deuteronomy 11:18–20, command-

ing the writing of the Ten Commandments on the doorposts of our houses. Today, God’s Holy Spirit reminds us of God’s law. Ancient Israel needed those physical reminders, however, as the Holy Spirit was not promised or given to them. Under the New Covenant, those physical reminders should not be necessary, as the law of God is being written on our hearts and minds.

Let us briefly review a few examples of Old Testament laws, which are clearly still binding today, as neither the letter, nor spiritual principles of the New Testament, nor any ritual character of such laws would indicate otherwise.

For instance, Deuteronomy 22:5 prohibits cross-dressing. A man is not to wear women’s clothes and *vice versa*. This law deals with transvestism.

Deuteronomy 22:9 forbids sowing a vineyard with different kinds of seed. The principle is to plant seeds together that will each continue to reproduce *after its own kind*, in order to avoid substandard products or hybrids. There is nothing wrong, then, with planting peas or beans among corn, or planting two pasture grasses together. On the other hand, cucumbers should not be planted with watermelons because they will cross and produce a perversion. Likewise, various members of the muskmelon and cantaloupe family

should not be planted near pumpkins or certain types of squash, as they will mix.

Finally, Deuteronomy 22:11 prohibits, correctly translated, the wearing of a garment “of different sorts, wool and linen mixed together.” [The words, “such as” have been added and do not appear in the original Hebrew.] Leviticus 19:19 contains the same prohibition. Wool is an animal product, while linen is a plant product. Such products should not be combined, as an improper blend, as they produce clothes of lesser quality.

In addition, as we have already discussed, laws that have NOT been abolished include the Ten Commandments, the commandments to keep God’s annual Holy Days and to tithe faithfully.

The Law of Physical Circumcision

There is one additional law that is no longer mandatory—the law regarding physical circumcision. And since this is so, the covenant of circumcision that God made with Abraham is no longer valid.

We read in Galatians 5:1–3, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become *circum-*

cised, Christ will profit you nothing. And I testify again to every man who becomes *circumcised* that he is a debtor to keep the whole law.”

Here, the phrase “the whole law” refers to *every* law that God has ever given to man—including the sacrifices and the rituals. Paul is saying here, If you think that you can become justified just because you are physically circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing, because you still don’t understand the need to obtain the Father’s and Christ’s *forgiveness* of your sins (Galatians 5:4).

GENTILES—PART OF THE NEW COVENANT?

We read earlier that the New Covenant is going to be made with the house of Israel *and* the house of Judah. Does this mean that Gentiles don’t have access to that New Covenant relationship with God? Of course they do, but in order to make the Gentiles a party to the New Covenant, the specific law of physical circumcision that was given in the Old Testament had to become obsolete.

Notice Ephesians 2:11–15: “Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called *Uncircumcision* by what is called the *Circumcision made in the flesh* by hands—that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the

commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the **covenants of promise**, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made *both one*, and has broken down the **middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances**, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace.”

What is that “law of commandments contained in ordinances” that was abolished? Which law was it that prevented the Gentiles from having access to the covenants of promise? None other than the law of physical circumcision and the rituals and ordinances related thereto. In doing away with that requirement, Gentiles could then become “spiritual” Israelites and Jews, and thus parties to the New Covenant.

HAS THE NEW COVENANT BEEN MADE YET?

We saw that God made covenants with ancient Israel, and that God will make a New Covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah “after these days”—that is, after Christ’s return. At that time, God will call the Israelites to

repentance and He will resurrect those who have not been called to spiritual salvation before, to offer them the opportunity to become a party to the New Covenant.

But what about us today—converted Christians—spiritual Israelites and Jews?

We understand that the New Covenant is compared to a marriage agreement. Recall, too, that Jesus Christ already shed His blood, the blood of the New Covenant, for the remission of our sins. In the Old Testament, ancient Israel listened to the conditions that God gave them and they agreed to those conditions. Then, God sealed the covenant with blood.

Christ clearly told us the conditions of the New Covenant, and we accepted them at the time of our baptism. As ancient Israel said, we also said, “Everything that the LORD has said, we will do.” We also, of course, accepted Christ’s shed blood that forgives our sins, and we acknowledged that we had entered into a covenant with God at the time of our baptism.

Does this mean, then, that the New Covenant has already been made with us at the time of our baptism? Well, yes and no.

The New Covenant is a marriage agreement. The *consummation of our marriage* with Jesus Christ—the

bridegroom and the Lamb—is still in the future. This is where the biblical concept of betrothal becomes important. In biblical times, the parties went through a period of “betrothal” before they actually consummated the marriage. Mary was already betrothed to Joseph when she was found to be with child (Matthew 1:18). Since they had not consummated the marriage, Joseph thought that Mary was guilty of fornication. But Mary and Joseph were already called, at the time of their betrothal, husband and wife (Matthew 1:19–20, 24; compare also Deuteronomy 28:30). Betrothal was a binding agreement or contract of marriage, and it could only be severed through a divorce. With this contract, the husband had promised his wife to consummate the marriage with her, after a certain period of time.

In the same way, we, when we became baptized, entered into a covenant with God, and into a contract of betrothal with Jesus Christ. The *consummation* of our marriage will occur, once Jesus Christ returns to establish His Kingdom. At that time, we will be immortal Spirit beings—born-again members of the God Family.

In addition, this marriage contract with Christ is also an agreement to inherit what had been

promised, through covenants, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and to their descendants. It is not only a will, or a testament that can be changed by the testator at any time before his death, but it is a legally binding, enforceable agreement. In any event, the testator, Jesus Christ, who inherited the promises from Abraham and his offspring, did already die, so His will, as promised to us by a contract, cannot be changed anymore. A will or a testament, in biblical times, was more like a mutual contract of inheritance. In fact, the Greek word for “covenant” and for “testament” is exactly the same, i.e., “*diatheke*.” Both parties had to agree to the terms of the covenant of inheritance. This contract could be based on certain conditions, and the agreement could only be carried out, and the inheritance obtained, if both parties fulfilled the conditions.

Also, such a contract of inheritance could very well say that the inheritance was not going to be obtained until a *certain specified time after the testator’s death*. In the meantime, the inheritance could be reserved for the heir and administered for him. And, of course, the contract of inheritance could say that the heir would actually come into possession of the inheritance only if he proved himself to be

worthy of it. One of those conditions could have been that the heir *had to be married* at the time of taking possession of the inheritance.

When we consider these concepts and apply them to our situation, we reach the following conclusion: We, as spiritual Israelites, must be married in order to obtain the inheritance. The New Covenant tells us to whom we have to be married—Jesus Christ. But a marriage can only occur and last if both parties are willing to marry each other, and to remain faithful to each other. Christ has already made a marriage agreement with us—a betrothal—and He will spiritually consummate His marriage with us at His return, if we remain faithful (Revelation 19:7–9; Matthew 22:2; 25:1).

This is not to say that we cannot or will not sin today, even though we have already entered into the New Covenant relationship with God. The Bible tells us specifically that we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us, if we say that we do not sin today (1 John 1:8). But, we do not *practice the way of sin anymore*. Rather, when we sin and “confess our sins,” God is “faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Christ will not reject us if we show Him in this life that we are willing to obey Him, even though we

may sometimes slip and fall. He knows that only once we are born-again immortal members in the Family of God, we cannot sin anymore (1 John 5:18).

On the other hand, if we become disobedient and rebellious and begin again to practice the wrong way of life, Christ has the right to divorce us. Remember, Joseph, a just man, was willing to leave his wife to whom he was betrothed when he thought that she had become unfaithful to him (Matthew 1:19).

We can understand, then, what the New Covenant means for us today. It is a contract, which is based on God’s law. God called and chose us to become a party to His contract. By our obedience to God’s laws, we show Him that we want to become parties to His covenant (Acts 5:32). When we are baptized, we enter into a covenant relationship with the Father and Jesus Christ. This agreement contains conditions that we must fulfill. It promises us a certain inheritance in the future, including sonship in God’s Family, kingship over this earth and the universe, and priestly functions. This future inheritance is being preserved for us right now in heaven.

This contract is also a marriage agreement. We are already betrothed to Jesus Christ and we are to consummate the marriage with Him,

when He returns to establish His Kingdom. In addition, this contract includes a will or a testament from the testator, Jesus Christ, to share with us the promises that He inherited as the Seed of Abraham. Christ's will shows us how we must live worthy of Him, and it requires of us to do so, so that He *will* consummate His marriage with us, and so that we *can* take possession of our promised inheritance.

Therefore, as long as we stay faithful, as long as we do not trample the Son of God and His holy law under foot, and as long as we do not insult His Spirit of grace, Christ is

going to consummate His marriage with us in just a few years from now, and we *will* inherit the promises that God made to us in the New Covenant. If we become obedient servants of our God, and remain so until Christ's return, we will never have to hear Him say to us, "I never knew you, depart from Me, you who *practice lawlessness*" (Matthew 7:23).

While lawlessness abounds all around us, let us be different! Let us obey God and His Word and thereby become shining lights of righteousness that will be noticed in this dark and evil world (Matthew 5:14–16; Philippians 2:14–16).

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