

LAW & COVENANTS



**Gospel Transition
To A Better Covenant**

DICKSON

Law And Covenants

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INTRODUCTION

One of the first principles to understand in reference to Bible study is the difference between the Old and New Testament, especially in reference to whether Christians are under law or grace. If one does not understand that Christians are now under a new covenant than the one the Jews were under from Mount Sinai to Calvary, then he will never be able to rightly divide the word of truth. More confusion has resulted in the application of God's law over this point than most subjects in Bible study.

People understand that we do not offer animal sacrifices today, but they usually do not understand why. They know that we do not throw the Old Testament away because we are not under a law to offer animal sacrifices. But people have a difficult time distinguishing between Old Testament history and the prophets, and the Mount Sinai law that was given only to Israel. The confusion that prevails in misunderstanding that the Sinai law is dead has hindered many from fully appreciating the superiority of the covenant of Christ that Christians now have with God. God delivered us from the bondage of the Sinai law. He delivered us unto a new covenant wherein grace and truth reign as the foundation upon which our salvation

rests. If we do not understand the difference between the old and new covenants and laws, we cannot understand the Bible, and thus, appropriated God's law correctly today.

One of the most misunderstood concepts in the religious world has been a misunderstanding concerning the Christian's relationship with the Sinai law and covenant. The foundation of this misunderstanding has been based primarily on how people generally view the Bible. Most view the Bible as one book that was sent from God to man, and as one book it must be obeyed in every detail by all men of all time. It is true that the Bible is the book of God for man. However, all that is in the Bible is not meant for all people of all ages. If one does not understand this point, the Bible will become a confusing assortment of rules, covenants and historical events that seem to have little relevance to one's life today. Not only this, but one will be led to endless frustration in trying to determine what laws of God apply to us today. Unless we have a clear understanding of the division between the Old and New Testaments, we will continually be confused as to what we feel must be obeyed in order to please God.

In the religious world there is a

basic misapplication of Sinai law in reference to our relationship to God today. The ten commandments that were given through Moses to Israel are considered to be a listing of laws for us to obey. When one mentions that the “ten commandments,” as a part of the Sinai law, are no longer binding, there is usually great confusion in the minds of those who do not understand the relationship the Christian has with the ten commandments that were written for Israel only on Mount Sinai around 1445 B.C.

There is even less understanding concerning the fact that the Sinai law was given to the nation of Israel on

Mount Sinai, and thus, it is a law to which Christians are not obligated to obey. This thought often confuses those who do not have a correct understanding concerning the application of the Sinai law given to Israel and the law of faith and grace under which Christians live today.

We must clarify the purpose of the Sinai law, as well as, the Christian’s relationship to its ordinances. Once a clear understanding of the purpose of the Sinai law is in our minds, then there is little difficulty in understanding its relationship with the Christian today.

Chapter 1 COVENANTS AND LAWS

It is imperative in discussions concerning the Bible that we understand the fundamental mediums upon which we base our communication. In other words, we must come to a biblical definition of words that are used by the Holy Spirit to convey to us our covenant relationship that God has established with His people at and since the cross. The laws of God’s covenants must be clearly defined in order that we understand the conditions for the covenants that God has communicated and established with His people. When we discuss sub-

jects concerning the Old and New Testament covenants and laws that God established with His people throughout different periods of time in history, then it is important that we understand how God has communicated the laws of His covenants to man through the inspiration of chosen men.

In a religiously divided world in which we now live, it is very important that we understand some basic definitions that are biblically determined. We must understand key words that were used by the Holy

Spirit who communicated to us the covenant relationship that God desires to establish with all men.

A. Definition of key words:

When studying in the Bible God's relationship with man, two things are always central to this relationship. These two things are **covenant** and **law**. Man has no salvational relationship with God without a covenant. In conjunction with the establishment of a covenant, there is no covenant without law. Law is the condition for keeping a covenant. Covenants without conditions are simply statements of words that mean nothing. If God established a covenant with man without conditions, then men could do their own wills and live according to their own religious rites and rituals, while at the same time claiming to live in a covenant relationship with God. A covenant without law would have no meaning. Therefore, whether during the Old Testament or New Testament periods, man's relationship with God has always been based on a covenant that contained conditions of law.

1. Covenant: The term "covenant" (Gr. *diatheke*) refers to an alliance or standing contract between two parties. This is the making of a standing agreement between two parties

who seek a common goal for the establishment of the covenant.

When God delivered Israel out of Egyptian captivity, it was a time when He established a covenant with them as a nation. At the time when this covenant was made with God, Moses said that Israel stood before the Lord so that they "*should enter into a covenant with the Lord your God, and into His oath*" (Dt 29:12; see 2 Ch 15:12). When Israel entered into a covenant relationship with God, God gave the people laws by which to live. The laws were the conditions for keeping the covenant. If they broke the laws, then they would nullify the covenant. Their enjoyment of the blessings of the covenant, therefore, depended on their keeping the laws of the covenant. If they obeyed the laws, they would receive the blessings of the covenant. Therefore, it was very important for the Jews to keep the Sinai law.

God establishes covenants with man in order to prepare men for promises and blessings that are contained as promises within the covenants. In order to receive the promises and blessings, the conditions of the covenant must be kept. God established a covenant with Noah wherein He made promises to Noah and all mankind (See Gn 6:18; 9:8-17). God made a covenant with Abraham wherein He promised that Abraham's

descendants would receive a land, and eventually, the blessing that would bless all nations (Gn 15,17). God's covenants with the nation of Israel, David and the church, are all based on the promises of God concerning what God will do for the benefit of those with whom He has established a covenant relationship.

Christians are in a covenant relationship with God today. The promises and blessings of this covenant were based on the sacrificial blood of Jesus (Ep 1:3,7). Every Sunday, Christians remember this covenant when they partake of the Lord's Supper (Mt 26:26-29).

2. Law: The term "law" in the Bible refers to a code of ethics, morals or ceremonies that God has commanded men to observe in order to be in compliance with the covenants He establishes with His people. God's laws that are given to His people can be either negative or positive. A **negative law** would be a law wherein God tells man something that he should not do. The commandment, "*You will not steal*" is a negative law (Ex 20:15). Within the law is the instruction of what man should not do.

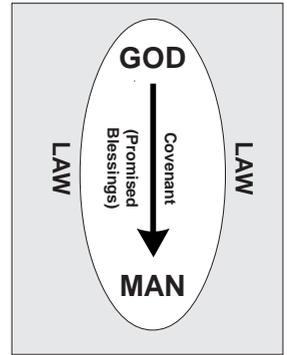
A **positive law** is a commandment that God tells His people to do. "*Take care of orphans and widows*" is a positive law (Js 1:27). Within the law there is an affirmation of what must be done. Both the Old Testa-

ment and New Testament contain many laws that God has given to those with whom He has established a covenant.

One must not look at law simply as conditions for keeping a covenant relationship with God. Law is given to us by God in order to govern our relationships with one another. As free-moral individuals who are in an environment that allows choices to be made, we must have a source of guidance that is above the invention of man.

It is not within man to determine his own moral codes of conduct. Man's moral or social laws are constantly changing, and often, they often change to the detriment of the society that invents them. However, with law that is given from God, there are unchangeable principles that permeate all history. The statement of the law in reference to ceremonies and sacrifices may change, but the principles of moral laws are unchanging. (More on this later.)

In reference to law, we must always keep in mind that it is impossible for man to be justified before God through perfect keeping of law (Gl 2:16). It is impossible for God's



people to keep perfectly the law of the covenants that God establishes with His people. For this reason, God's people have always been under the law of grace and faith. Habakkuk 2:4, "*the just will live by faith,*" has always been the foundation of any law that was given to man by God (See Gl 3:11). God's covenants, therefore, are not conditional on perfect keeping of law, but God's grace toward those who seek to live according to the law of God.

B. The Christian's relationship to the Old Testament and Sinai law:

The purpose of the Old Testament for the Christian today is explained in Romans 15:4 and 1 Corinthians 10:11. In Romans 15:4 Paul wrote, "*For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, so that we through the patience and encouragement of the Scriptures might have hope.*" In 1 Corinthians 10:11 he added, "*Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.*"

Christians' use the Old Testament record of the events of people's lives, the nation of Israel, and other nations, for the purpose of knowing how God worked in history. These

things were recorded for our admonition. When we understand how patiently God worked with Israel in order to bring His Son into the world, then we understand how patiently God works with us in order to fulfill His promises to us concerning heaven to come.

Now here is where most people become confused in reference to how they view the Old Testament. Not all things that were written in the Old Testament are to be considered law. There are lessons we learn from the Old Testament that are simply historical lessons. We must understand that **there is a difference between the wisdom of lessons learned from recorded Old Testament history and the Sinai law of the Old Testament that was given only to Israel.** If we can understand difference between the Old Testament as a whole and the Sinai law, then a great deal of confusion will be avoided as we study through the Bible in order to learn from those things what were written for our learning.

The Sinai law of the Old Testament was given only to the Jews who lived before the coming of Jesus and His death on the cross. The Sinai law, and the activities of the Jews before Christ, were written for the purpose of providing us today with information on how God worked among men in times of old. The Old Testament,

therefore, is to be studied in order to understand God's eternal plan of saving man throughout the ages. Though Christians today are under the law of Christ, this does not mean that the Old Testament should be discarded. Christians today are under the "perfect law of liberty." Nevertheless, they have a library of thirty-nine books in the Old Testament in order to appreciate the law of liberty by which they live today.

Many religious groups today, however, limit the law of Christ by teaching that portions of the Sinai law that was given to the Jews through Moses are still binding on Christians today. It is taught, therefore, that Christians today should submit to either portions or all of the Sinai law that was given to the Jews by God on Mount Sinai. In making this application, those who bind Sinai laws today reveal their belief that the law of Christ is insufficient. They also reveal their inconsistencies in their application of the Sinai law, for usually none of these people are teaching that we must now be offering animal sacrifices.

C. Principal concepts concerning the purpose of the law:

There are several misunderstandings of the Old Testament that are promoted in the religious world today

concerning the Christian's relationship to the Old Testament, and specifically, to the Sinai law that was given to Israel. In order to answer these misunderstandings, there are some principal concepts concerning our understanding of the Sinai law that every Christian must know. Understanding these principal concepts will clarify our relationship with the Sinai law, but at the same time, open up an opportunity to review again the great riches of the Old Testament. As we make our journey throughout the remainder of this book, please keep these thoughts in mind:

Principles Of The Sinai Law

- When God gave the Sinai law to Israel, He never intended it to be a means of self-sanctifying atonement for sin through law-keeping apart from the atoning sacrifice of the cross.
- References as "law of God" and "law of Moses" are synonymous terms that refer to the Sinai law that God gave to Israel alone.
- When God made a covenant with the nation of Israel, we must understand that the conditions for that covenant were given specifically to them.
- When God established a covenant relationship with Israel at Mount Sinai, He envisioned a change in this covenant to a new covenant that would come many centuries later.
- When God changed the high priest-

hood from the Aaronic priests to the high priesthood of Jesus, there was the necessity of a change from the Sinai law of the Old Testament to the law of Christ.

- When Jesus died on the cross, a new covenant relationship was activated between God and His people, which covenant necessitated the passing of the old covenant that God made with Israel.
- Because it is impossible for man to maintain the laws of two covenants with God, there was the necessity of the old covenant law giving way to the new covenant law.
- It is necessary for Christians today to maintain the conditions for the new covenant relationship they have with God and not seek to restore an old covenant that was established between God and the nation of Israel.
- Because of the superiority of the New Testament covenant and law of Christ over the Sinai covenant and law, we should today seek to obey God through the new conditions of our covenant relationship with God.

Once the above concepts are understood, there is no difficulty in understanding the covenant relationship that the Christian has with God today.

By understanding the superiority of the new covenant relationship one has with God through the blood of Jesus, there should be no desire for anyone to return to the old covenant. In fact, if one seeks to restore the old covenant, he is making a proclamation that the new covenant of Jesus is insufficient. He is denying the sufficiency of the blood sacrifice of the Son of God on the cross.

When John recorded the statement of John 1:17, he stated a principle of change from the Sinai law to the New Testament law. ***“For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ”*** (Jn 1:17). This statement should alert every Christian concerning both the contrast and connection between the Old and New Testaments. The Sinai law and covenant were given to Israel through Moses. However, grace and the revelation of the truth of the gospel came through Jesus. We now rejoice in the fact that we are under grace that was revealed through the cross. Christians are no longer under the Sinai law. We are under grace, and thus, rejoice in the fact that we have been delivered from the ordinances of the Sinai law that God gave to Israel (See Cl 2:14).

Chapter 2

JUSTIFICATION THROUGH THE CROSS

The Sinai law was not given to justify man apart from the atonement of Jesus on the cross. The cross is the central factor of atonement for all people for all history. Any view of the purpose of the Sinai law without the necessity of the cross is simply a misunderstanding of any law of God. It is important to understand, therefore, that justification from sin is possible only by the sacrificial blood-offering of Jesus.

Under the Old Testament Sinai law, the offering of animal sacrifices could not atone for sins. There was no atonement for sins in animal sacrifices in and of themselves. Because of this, there was the need of an offering that would accomplish the cleansing of our sins. This offering is found in the atoning sacrifice of the incarnate Son of God on the cross.

A. The Sinai law did not justify.

The Sinai law “*made nothing perfect*” (Hb 7:11,19), “*for it was not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins*” (Hb. 10:4). The sacrifices of the law could not make perfect those who sought to draw near unto God (Hb 10:1).

The sacrifices of animals could

not atone for sin simply because animals are the result of the creative work of God. In other words, it was not possible for God to create something from nothing that would be an adequate sacrifice between that which is created (man) and that which creates (God). Nothing that was purely of this created world could ever be a sacrifice between the God of heaven and man who is of this creation. In order for a sacrifice to be sufficient, there had to be a Mediator who would be both God and man. In order to reconcile man to God, the eternal God had to partake of His creation in order to stand between Himself and man.

In conjunction with the inability of animal sacrifices to atone for sin, the law itself could not make us perfect because we **cannot keep law perfectly**. This is the Hebrew writer’s point in Hebrews 8:7: “*For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for the second.*” One might assume that the Hebrew writer was here speaking of the Sinai law and covenant, that it was changed to the new law and covenant because the first had faults. However, Paul wrote concerning the old law and covenant, “*Therefore the law is holy,*

and the commandment holy and just and good” (Rm 7:12). The problem was not with the Sinai law and covenant. The problem was with those to whom it was given. Hebrews 8:8 continued to explain, “*For finding fault with them, He says: ‘Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant.’*” The problem was with us, for we cannot keep any law of any covenant perfectly in order to justify ourselves before God.

The preceding problem is why Paul wrote that “*no one is justified by law in the sight of God*” (Gl 3:11). We cannot be saved by any system of law-keeping. **We cannot be saved by law-keeping simply because no one can keep law perfectly in order to save himself.** Therefore, no one could be justified by perfect obedience to the Sinai law in order to earn salvation (Gl 2:16). To the Christians in Rome Paul wrote, “*Therefore by the works of law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by law is the knowledge of sin*” (Rm 3:20).

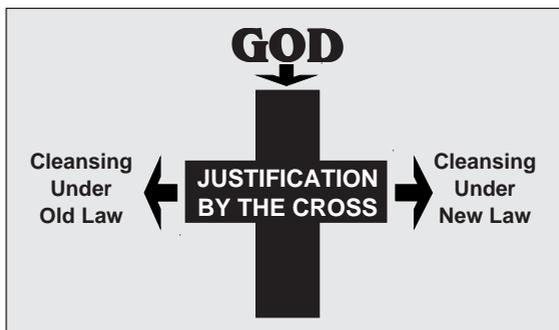
Under the Sinai law, the Jew was condemned in his own sin. He could not keep the law perfectly in order to jus-

tify himself. He could not do good deeds in order to atone for any sin against law. Neither could he be cleansed of sin by the blood of animals. He was thus confined to condemnation if all that God had in mind for atonement was the law itself.

The Jew by faith knew that a loving and merciful God would not leave man in such a situation. Therefore, those under the bondage of the Sinai law looked for something else. This is the meaning of what Paul said to Peter in Galatians 2:16:

... knowing that a man is not justified by works of law but by the faith of Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus so that we might be justified by the faith of Christ and not by the works of law, for by the works of law no flesh will be justified.

Since God had something else in mind concerning justification when He gave Israel the Sinai law and covenant, He pointed Israel toward the cross. Therefore, justification and cleansing of sin under the Sinai law had to be accomplished only in view of the blood sacri-



fice of Jesus that was yet to come. Though the Jews to whom the law was given did not understand the mystery of the gospel of God that was to be revealed through the cross, they walked by faith in the fact that God was planning a “Blessing” that would affect all men (See Gn 12:1-4).

Paul wrote, “... *whom [Christ] God set forth to be an atoning sacrifice by His blood, through faith in order to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins in the past because of the forbearance of God*” (Rm 3:25). The fact that God “passed over” the sins of the Sinai law does not mean that He either “rolled them forward” or forgot they were there. God sees all things through the omniscient nature of who He is. He views history from beginning to end in an instant as we would view a photograph. He saw sin under the Sinai law, but saw it through the blood of Christ. Therefore, because of His omniscient knowledge of history in reference to His eternal plan that was devised before the foundation of the world, sin under the Sinai law was forgiven in view of the cross. It was not the animal sacrifices that merited the forgiveness of the sins. It was obedience to keeping the sacrifices as a result of faith that activated God’s forgiveness through the cross that was yet to come.

The Hebrew writer said it thus,

And for this reason He [Jesus] is the Mediator of a new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who have been called might receive the promise of the eternal inheritance” (Hb 9:15).

The “retroactive” cleansing effect of the cross could not have been stated more clearly. When Jesus died on the cross, His blood cleansed the obedient who had faithfully lived under the Sinai law. The blood of Jesus cleansed them because of their **obedient faith**, not because of any works of merit they might have performed in an attempt to earn forgiveness by keeping the ordinances of the law.

The faithful Jew was saved by obedient faith and God’s grace (Hk 2:4). Christians today are also saved by obedient faith and God’s grace. Jesus was the manifestation of God’s grace, both to the Jew and to those who live after the cross (See Ti 2:11). For this reason, therefore, it is not possible to understand the purpose of the Sinai law without understanding the historical purpose of the cross in relation to man’s sin problem.

When discussing sin in reference to our relationship with God, whether under the Sinai law or the law of Christ, we must never understand forgiveness of sins in reference to our supposed own self-sanctification.

Sanctification (cleansing) from sin is always the work of God, whether for the Jews under the Sinai law, or for Christians today. Though the Jews moved into a religion of self-sanctification through meritorious efforts to cleanse themselves, the fact that they made this move was the existence of the religion of Judaism when Jesus came into the world (See Gl 1:13,14). At the time the Jews sought through their own self-sanctifying righteousness to cleanse themselves of sin, and thus marginalized the work of God through the sanctification of the offering of Himself on the cross. Of the Jews' effort to self-sanctify themselves of sin, Paul wrote, "*For they [the Jews] being ignorant of God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God*" (Rm 10:3).

B. Sanctification, and thus justification, came through Jesus Christ.

Animal sacrifices under the Sinai law were insufficient to accomplish sanctification, that is, the cleansing of sin. But under the gospel of grace we have the cleansing blood of Jesus, "*for by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified*" (Hb 10:14; see 13:20,21). The Hebrew writer af-

firmed that "*we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all*" (Hb. 10:10). Christians are sanctified by the blood of Jesus (Hb 9:13,14; 10:29). This was God's onetime part in our salvation. It is therefore stated that Christians should have "*boldness to enter the holy place [of heaven] by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way*" (Hb 10:19,20). The way that Jesus dedicated the new covenant was with His blood (Hb. 9:15-18). This is why Jesus said, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, but through Me*" (Jn 14:6).

We must conclude that Christians today are justified and able to enter into heaven **only through the new covenant**, not through the old covenant. We must also conclude that before the cross, only those who lived by faith were justified by the sanctification that would later come through the offering of the blood of the Son of God. This is also true today. Our faith is in what Jesus did once and for all time on the cross.

The Sinai law moved Israel toward the cross. It was holy, just and good (Rm 7:12). However, because of the inability of any man to keep law perfectly in order to be justified by law, honest believers who recognized their sin were driven to faith in God to justify them by grace. When the grace of God was eventually revealed

at the cross, honest believers fled to Christ (Gl 2:15,16). They fled to Christ because they saw in Christ freedom from the bondage of perfect law-keeping as an attempt to be justified

before God. They saw that there was no sanctification in works of merit, and thus, realized that in some way all cleansing of sin had to originate from God.

Chapter 3

DEAD TO THE SINAI LAW

Because of a misunderstanding concerning the application of the laws and covenants of God as they are revealed in the Bible, there seems to be a concerted effort on the part of some to bring over into the new covenant and law of Christ remnants of the Sinai law. In an effort to do this, some have made a distinction with the Sinai law between the “law of Moses” and the “law of God.” It is assumed that the term “law of Moses” supposedly refers to the ceremonial laws of the Sinai law. It is affirmed that this law was actually nailed to the cross. Laws as animal sacrifices, feast days and ceremonial cleansings were part of the “law of Moses” and were subsequently terminated at the cross. However, a different part of the Sinai law is presumed to be the moral law that is identified as the “law of God.” This law was not nailed to the cross, but is in force today as part of a continuing existence of the Sinai law.

In order to clarify some of the confusion that surrounds the above claims, it is necessary to understand

some terms that the Holy Spirit used in reference to the Sinai law. Clarification of terms in this area of study in law and covenants is very important in order to be able to understand the annulling of the whole Sinai law at the cross. Though ceremonial laws of the Sinai law were nailed to the cross, there were moral principles of the law that existed before the giving of the law, which principles continue even to this day. However, this does not mean that the Sinai law itself was not nailed to the cross.

Much of the confusion in this area of biblical studies comes from interpreters who do not understand the covenant relationship that God specifically established with the nation of Israel. With this covenant relationship came the Sinai law that included **moral laws that existed from the very beginning of the creation of man**. These moral laws were restated in the Mount Sinai law.

Some interpreters become confused concerning the nailing of the Sinai law to the cross. They correctly

see the continuation of the moral laws of God that have always existed from the beginning. But they conclude that there is a continuation of civil and ceremonial Sinai laws because of the continuation of the moral laws.

A failure to understand that the Sinai covenant and law was a special law/covenant relationship that God established with Israel, which relationship was nailed to the cross, makes it difficult for some to understand that God's moral laws have always existed. These moral principles will continue to exist as long as there are free-moral beings who must be governed by divine moral laws. However, we must not fail to see God's work in terminating the "law of Moses" ("law of the Lord") at the cross in order for Jesus to usher in a new covenant and law.

A. The law of Moses is the law of God.

Much of the confusion in this area of study lies in the fact that people have sought to divide the law of the covenant that God gave to Israel into different laws. It is assumed that the term "law of Moses" is used to identify the ceremonial laws of the Sinai law. It is affirmed that when the New Testament speaks of nailing the "law" to the cross, reference is to nailing to the cross the "law of Moses," or cer-

emonial laws. It is assumed that the term "law of God" is used to refer to the moral laws, which laws were not nailed to the cross as were the ceremonial laws.

It is true that the moral laws of God that were in existence before the cross, and which continue even to this day, were not nailed to the cross. They were not because these laws existed before the Sinai law, and they exist today after the termination of the Sinai law. However, we must not misinterpret some terms that are used in the Bible to refer to the totality of the law of God that was given to Israel as conditions for their keeping the covenant. The point is that the terms "law of Moses" and "law of God" are used as synonymous terms in the Old Testament to refer to the same law. In conjunction with these two terms, the phrase "law of the Lord" is also used. These are all terms that refer to all the Sinai law that was given to the nation of Israel.

1. Nehemiah 8: In Nehemiah 8, Nehemiah used the terms "law of Moses" and "law of God" to refer to the same law. In verse 1, the people *"told Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses that the Lord had commanded to Israel."* However, in verse 8, it says that *"they read in the book in the law of God distinctly"*—the same book as verse 1—*"from the*

law of God.” Again in verse 18 it is recorded that Ezra “*read in the book of the law of God.*”

Nehemiah, therefore, used the terms “law of Moses” and “law of God” to refer to the law “*which the Lord had commanded Israel*” (Ne 8:1). There were not two separate laws given to Israel, one moral and the other ceremonial. There was only one law given that was referred to with different terms or phrases.

The reason the phrase “law of Moses” is used is simply because the “law of God” was given through Moses. Moses never claimed to give any law to Israel that originated from himself. He was only the mediator through whom the law of God was given. In other words, the law of God was given to Israel through Moses, and thus, the law was delivered by Moses, but it was given to Moses by God.

The one law of God is the Sinai law. However, this God-ordained law contained ordinances that dealt both with **civil relationships** as well as **citizen relationships**. The civil laws of the covenant were given directly to Israel by God who established the nation as a **theocratic government**. As a theocratic government, God intended to rule Israel **directly** from heaven by His ordained civil laws that He gave through Moses.

Though men today are to be obe-

dient to civil laws of governments (Rm 13:1,2), governments are established **indirectly** by God. God has set forth that civil governments exist to govern the civil activities of men. However, it is man who determines the specifics of his own civil laws. God has only ordained that government exist. Though man’s governmental laws may contradict the law of God, it is still true that God has ordained that government exist.

Through the theocratic government of Israel to whom God directly gave law, God gave laws that would govern the moral relationships of the Israelites. “You will not kill” would be a moral law that one not violate the right to life of his fellow citizen. However, keep in mind that this was not a new law for mankind. “You will not kill” has always been a law of God for man. When Cain killed Abel he violated this law. Though we do not have a written record of the “you-will-not-kill” law at the time Cain lived, it was a law of God before the establishment of the covenant and law that God made with Israel. It is still a law today. There are, therefore, basic moral laws of the Sinai law that have always been in existence from the beginning of time. They are still in existence today though the law of God that was given through Moses to Israel was nailed to the cross. (More on this later.)

2. Nehemiah 9:13,14: This text explains how God delivered His law to the Jews. The Sinai law originated with God. It was delivered only to Israel through Moses. Nehemiah 9:13,14 made this clear when he wrote the following:

You came down also on Mount Sinai, and spoke with them from heaven. And You gave them right judgments and true laws, good statutes and commandments. And You made known to them Your holy Sabbath, and commanded them precepts, statutes and laws by the hand of Moses Your servant (Ne 9:13,14).

From what Nehemiah stated in this passage, it is easy to conclude that the law of God that was given to the Jews was referred to as the law of Moses only because it was given to Israel through Moses. The ten commandments, as well as all the Sinai law, came from God to Israel through Moses (Ex 20:22; Mk 7:10). The Sinai law was “*spoken through angels*” (Hb 2:2), but it was “*appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator*” (At 7:53; Gl 3:19). That mediator was Moses. It is called the “law of Moses” simply because it was given to Israel through Moses.

3. Luke 2:22-24: Luke 2:22-24 is a New Testament reference that emphasizes the fact that there is no differ-

ence between the “law of the Lord” and the “law of Moses.” Luke recorded,

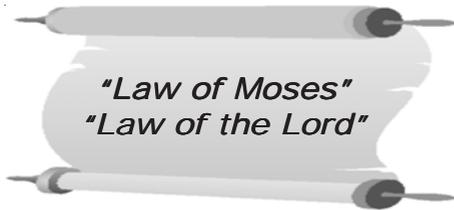
And when the days of her [Mary’s] purification according to the law of Moses were fulfilled, they brought Him [Jesus] to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord)” (Lk 2:22,23).

Luke 2:22-24 refers to various ceremonial laws surrounding the birth of Jesus. After the birth of Jesus, Mary and Joseph had to offer a sacrifice because Jesus was their firstborn son. This was a “ceremonial law” of the Sinai law (See Ex 13:2,14; Lv 12:2-8). In Luke 2:22, however, it is stated that these laws were part of the “law of Moses.” Luke also refers to these laws in verses 23 and 24 to be “*the law of the Lord.*” In this context, the phrases “law of Moses” and “law of the Lord” refer to the same ceremonial laws of the Sinai law.

We must be careful in our studies in reference to the law of God, therefore, lest we confuse the use of the preceding terms. The point is that when God speaks to give instructions to man, those instructions are considered part of the law of God. In the Old Testament era, God initially gave law to Israel at Mount Sinai. However, throughout the history of the nation of Israel, God continued to refer Israel back to this law.

Neither Luke, nor any other New Testament writer, saw any difference between the phrases “law of Moses” and “law of the Lord.” They were phrases that referred to the same law that was given to Israel at Mount Sinai. Therefore, if the “law of Moses” and “law of God” are the same, then the “law of Moses” and “law of the Lord” must not be separated in their reference to the law of God. All three terms refer to the same law, the law that originated from heaven from God and was given to Israel through Moses at Mount Sinai.

THE SINAI LAW



B. Christians are dead to the law by the body of Christ.

When the New Testament discusses the law that was given to Israel, one must not divide the law into parts in an effort to carry over into the new law and covenant ordinances of the Sinai law. God considered the Sinai law as one law in reference to His giving of law to Israel. This brings us to Paul’s discussion concerning meritorious obedience to law in Romans 7.

1. Paul knew sin through law. In Romans 7:7 Paul said that he “*would not have known sin, except through law.*” The Greek text here does not use the article “the” before the word “law.” Therefore, Paul uses the term “law” here to refer to **law in general**. In the context he states the law to which he is referring. He quotes Exodus 20:17: “*You will not covet.*” This is one of the ten commandments of the Sinai law. This informs us that Paul is discussing at least the ten commandments in the context of Romans chapter 7. He refers to one of the ten commandments in order to refer to all the Sinai law.

2. Paul was made dead to the law. In Romans 7:4 Paul had said that Christians were made “*dead to the law through the body of Christ.*” We must not interpret the term “law” in verse 4 to refer to a different law than what is discussed in verse 7. Both verses use the term “law” to refer to the Sinai law given to Israel, though verse 4 is the commentary as to which law Paul had in mind in verse 7. When he used the article “the” with the word “law” in verse 4, he was specific. He was referring to the Sinai law under which he once lived as a Jew.

3. Christians today are dead to the law. The theme of the context of Romans 7 is the fact that Christians are made dead to the necessity of per-

fect law-keeping in order to be justified before God. They are made dead to law if they have joined themselves to Christ.

There were some in the church of Rome, however, who contended that one must keep certain Sinai laws as circumcision in order to be justified before God. However, in Paul's refutation of the arguments of these brethren, he affirms that Christians are dead not only to the necessity of perfect law keeping, but also to the Sinai law. Christians are not under the Sinai law because they have been made dead to such through the sacrificed body of Christ.

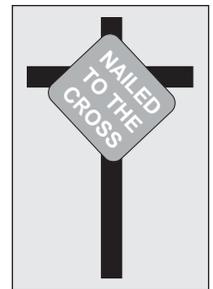
We must also not miss the point that the term "law" is used in the New Testament to refer to all ordinances of the Sinai law when the context is referring to any part of that law. On many occasions, Jesus referred to statements in the Psalms by using the term "law." When the Psalms are quoted in the New Testament, the Holy Spirit referred to the Psalms with the word "law" (See Jn 1:18; 3:9-19 in reference to Ps 35:19; 69:4; see Jn 7:19; 10:34 in reference to Ps 82:6; see Jn 12:34 in reference to Ps 89:36; 110:4; Mt 12:5; Jn 15:25).

Luke refers to the book of Leviticus by using the terms "the law of Moses" and "the law of the Lord" (Lk 2:22-24). Paul used the term "law" to refer to the Psalms, Isaiah

and Genesis (See Rm 3:9-19 in reference to Ps 5:9; 10:7; 14:1; 36:1; 140:3; Is 59:7ff). When the New Testament speaks of Christians being dead to the law, it must be understood that they are dead to any part of the Sinai law that was given exclusively to the nation of Israel.

4. Christians are not subject to man's religious ordinances. In Colossians 2:4-8 Paul reminded the Colossians that Christians are not subject to the religious ordinances of men. In fact, verse 8 states that such "philosophies" and "traditions" make spoil of Christians. In reference to such religious rites, rituals and ceremonies, Paul wrote, "... *whipping out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He took it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross*" (Cl 2:14).

Jesus nailed all religious rites, rituals and traditions to the cross. This would indeed include the Sinai law that was given to Israel. Romans 7:4 teaches that Christians, in their obedience to the gospel, are made dead to the Sinai law. Colossians 2:14 says that Jesus nailed all the ordinances of religious law—this would also include the Sinai law—to



the cross. The scope of teaching in these passages is that Christians **are not justified by law-keeping, whether the laws originated with God or man.** Salvation is by grace and faith. Paul stated this in Romans 5:1,2:

*Therefore, having been **justified by faith**, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have **access by faith into this grace** wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*

Therefore, one is not justified by meritorious law-keeping in God's sight (Gl 3:11). *"The just will live by faith"* (Rm 1:17).

In God's relationship with Israel, He established a covenant and law with the nation. The law and covenant were to be theocratic in that God intended to reign over Israel directly from heaven. This meant that moral laws for the state of Israel were incorporated into the Sinai law that had been in existence before the giving of the law. This also meant that these moral laws were in force in reference to the Gentiles at the time of the existence of Israel.

We must not allow ourselves to be put into the interpretive position to separate what some consider the moral or ceremonial laws of the Sinai law. Some interpreters do such in

order to bring over into the New Testament law and covenant some of the ceremonial laws of the Sinai law. If one views the Sinai law as a law of morals and ceremonies that were given to Israel as a package in order that Israel remain in a covenant relationship with God, then it is easy to understand what the New Testament means when it speaks of terminating the Sinai covenant and law that God had with Israel.

We can begin anew in reference to our covenant and law we have now in our relationship with God through Jesus. It is the task of the Christian, therefore, to search the New Testament in order to determine the will of the Lord. The foundation upon which the Christian now lives is built on the "perfect law of liberty." This law came to us through Jesus. It did not come to us through Jesus via the Sinai law.

The purpose for the existence of the nation of Israel was to bring the incarnate Son of God into the world in order that He go to the cross. In order to bring the Redeemer into the world, God first made a covenant with Abraham, and then, with his descendants, the nation of Israel. The promise was thus made to Abraham that in him *"all the families of the earth will be blessed"* (Gn 12:3). God subsequently made a covenant with Abraham and his seed (Gn 15:18; 17:6),

promising that He would preserve Abraham's seed (Israel) through whom the Messiah and Savior would come into the world (Gl 3:15-18).

We must not forget, therefore, that the purpose of all the Old Testament, including the Sinai law, was to bring the Blessing of the Seed of woman into the world (Gn 3:15). The Old Testament is about the gospel of this Seed. In every book of the Old Testament there is mention of the

coming revelation of the gospel of the incarnate Son of God. If we lose sight of this, we will fail to understand the purpose of God establishing a covenant relationship with the nation of Israel. We will not understand that the laws of the covenant were meant to preserve a segment of society (the nation of Israel) as the social environment from which the Savior of the world would come.

Chapter 4

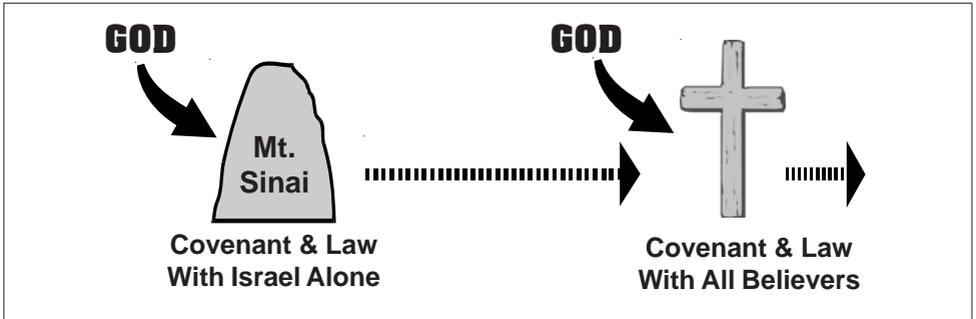
CHANGE FROM THE OLD TO THE NEW

At Mount Sinai God made a covenant with the nation of Israel, the seed of Abraham. It is important to remember that this covenant was made **only with the nation of Israel**. At the time, Moses said to the nation, *"The Lord did not make this covenant [the Sinai covenant] with our fathers, but with us [Israel], even us who are all of us here alive this day"* (Dt 5:3).

With the covenant came the conditions for keeping the covenant. This was the law that was given to Israel through Moses at Mount Sinai. In reference to this law, Paul wrote in Romans 3:1,2, *"What advantage then has the Jew? First of all because to them were committed the oracles of God."*

When the nation of Israel arrived

at the foot of Mount Sinai after coming out of Egyptian captivity, God spoke to Israel through Moses concerning His covenant relationship that He was establishing with the nation of Israel. *"Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you will be My own possession above all people, for all the earth is Mine. And you will be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation"* (Ex 19:5,6). In order to keep this covenant, the nation of Israel had to obey the voice of God. God continued, *"These are the words that you will speak to the children of Israel"* (Ex 19:6). When Moses encountered God on Mount Sinai, God delivered to Israel the law of the covenant through Moses, which law included



the ten commandments (Ex 20).

After the giving of the law on Mount Sinai, Israel subsequently sinned by not entering the land of promise immediately. They were condemned to wander in the wilderness of Sinai for forty years. After the forty years, and prior to their entrance into the promised land, Moses again delivered to the nation words concerning the covenant and law God had established with them alone. He reminded them of the giving of the covenant and law at Mount Sinai forty years before.

And He declared to you His covenant that He commanded you to perform, even, the ten commandments. And He wrote them on two tablets of stone. The Lord commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and judgments, so that you might do them in the land which you are going over to possess (Dt 4:13,14).

In order to keep the Sinai covenant, Israel had to observe (obey) the

statutes and judgments of the covenant. Moses continued, “*Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your ears today, that you may learn them and keep and do them.*” (Dt 5:1). Moses then reminded them of the covenant that God had established with them at Sinai. “*The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb [Sinai]. The Lord did not make this covenant with our fathers, but with us, those who are here today, all of us who are alive*” (Dt 5:3). Moses then reviewed the “word of the Lord” (the law) that was given in conjunction with the covenant (Dt 5:5-22).

Throughout Israel’s history, God exhorted Israel to “*remember the law of Moses, My servant, that I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments*” (Ml 4:4). Moses dedicated this covenant with blood. He said, “*Behold, the blood of the covenant, that the Lord has made with you [Israel] concerning to all these words*” (Ex 24:8). Israel was thus entrusted with the

oracles of God (Rm 3:1,2). Nehemiah recorded that the Jews asked “*Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, that the Lord **had commanded to Israel***” (Ne 8:1). The Sinai law, therefore, **was given exclusively to the Jews**. It was a law given for the purpose of preserving a segment of society, the nation of Israel, through whom God would eventually bring the Redeemer into the world.

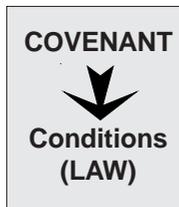
Once the Redeemer was brought into the world, there was no purpose for the continuation of the nation of Israel. It was thus in Christ that the generations of Israel ceased to exist (Gl 3:26-29). Once the mystery of the gospel was revealed, and the generations of Israel terminated. There was then no purpose for the exclusive law and covenant that God had made with the nation of Israel at Mount Sinai.

It is important to understand, therefore, that when God gave the Sinai law to Israel because of the covenant He had established with them, He never intended that the law and covenant be a permanent law/covenant relationship with this specific nation until the end of time. God had in His eternal plan a new law and covenant, which law and covenant He prophesied would eventually come at the time He would discontinue His cov-

enant with Israel (Jr 31:31-34). Until the new covenant and law came, Israel was bound to the covenant and law that had been established with them at Mount Sinai.

A covenant is an agreement between two or more parties. Those who make a covenant may base its binding force upon certain conditions (See Gn 17:1-14). God made a **conditional covenant** with Israel (See Ex 19:4-6; Dt 29:1,9). Moses said to Israel prior to their entrance into the land of promise, “*Therefore keep the words of this covenant and do them, that you may prosper in all that you do*” (Dt 29:9). Israel had to remain faithful to the laws of the covenant in order for them to receive the promises of the covenant and continue to receive God’s blessings during their stay in the land of promise.

When the first covenant with Israel was made, God foresaw the time when He would establish a new covenant with the house of Israel (the northern kingdom) and the house of Judah (the southern kingdom) (Jr 31:31-34). This new covenant would reach beyond the nation of Israel. It would reach unto all nations. The fact that God prepared Israel through prophecy for a change to this new covenant, assumes the fact that the old covenant that was established with Israel at Mount Sinai was meant to be a temporary covenant. Since the cov-



enant was to be temporary, then we must conclude that the law of the covenant was also to be temporary. When the covenant came to a close, therefore, we must assume that the conditions for keeping the covenant also came to a close. This means that the keeping of the Sinai law came to a close when God terminated the special covenant relationship that He had established with the nation of Israel at Mount Sinai.

A. God promised of a change to a new covenant.

Through Jeremiah God announced that He would in the future establish a new covenant with Israel.

Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, that 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 bring them out of the land of Egypt, which covenant they broke, although I was a husband to them, says the LORD (Jr 31:31,32).

Jeremiah 31:31-34 is a promise that God would establish another covenant. At the time the prophecy was given, the promise was directed to the nation of Israel. Also at the time the prophecy was made Israel had been

divided into the northern and southern kingdoms, both at the time were in captivity or going into captivity. The new covenant that God promised would be established would be made with both the houses of Israel and Judah when they were brought together as one nation and one people after the captivities. However, when we study the fulfillment of this prophecy in conjunction with the relationship the church now has with God, it is clearly understood that the covenant would reach far beyond the nation of Israel. The covenant would be with all those who would seek to come into a covenant relationship with God.

B. There was a reason for a change to a new covenant.

If there were to be a change to a new covenant, then one would question why the change if the first covenant was sufficient to establish an eternal relationship with God? The fact that God was going to make a change in law and covenant clearly assumes that the first law and covenant were exclusively for Israel and limited in reference as a condition for eternal life. The first covenant was sufficient for the purpose for which it was given. However, it was insufficient in relation to God's final purpose of a covenant with those who would be redeemed through the cross.

Under the old law and covenant, it was *“not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins”* (Hb 10:4). Under the old law and covenant, no man was *“justified by law in the sight of God”* (Gl 3:11), for *“by the works of law no flesh will be justified in His sight”* (Rm 3:20; see Hb 10:1-4). Under the old law and covenant, there was *“a reminder of sins year after year”* (Hb 10:3). The limitations of the Sinai law and covenant, therefore, assumed that God would establish a new law and covenant that was far better.

Under the new law and covenant God promised, *“I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more”* (Compare Jr 31:34 with Hb 8:8-12; 10:16,17; see also Jr 33:8; 50:20). Jeremiah recorded the prophesied promise of God, *“For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more”* (Jr 31:34). This statement said two things to the Jews under the old covenant. It first said that under the covenant in which they lived at the time that there remained a remembrance of sins. When they offered the animal sacrifices of the covenant, there was a remembrance of their sins that could not be remitted by the sacrifices of animals (Hb 10:3).

The second teaching that was made by the promise of Jeremiah 31:34 was that under the new cov-

enant God would forgive sins in order not to remember sins. Forgiveness under the new covenant would be based on the sacrificial blood of the Son of God, not the blood of animals. This promise, therefore, moved Israel toward the future in reference to their sin problem. When the fulfillment of the promise eventually came, the old covenant and its sacrifices faded away.

God promised Israel and Judah that after they returned from captivity, a new covenant relationship would reveal His justification for sin. This was why a new covenant had to be established between God and mankind. It had to be a covenant under which sin was completely abolished, for sin separates man from God (Is 59:1,2).

Since all men sin (Rm 3:23), God had to establish a covenant with all men that would satisfy our sin problem. It would be under this new covenant, therefore, that the Father would remember our sins no more (Jr 31:34). When sins were forgiven, they would be forgiven in a sense that those who sinned would know that there was no more remembrance of sins because of the blood of Jesus. We would not be striving for forgiveness through the blood of animals. We would be looking to the blood of the cross, and thus, we would have the assurance that our sins were remembered no more. Is-

rael did not have this privilege under the covenant of animal sacrifices.

C. **The old law and covenant were the foundation for the new.**

In order to understand the necessity for the change to the new law and covenant, we must understand the purpose for the old. The old was “*a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things*” (Hb 10:1; see Cl 2:16,17; Hb 8:5). In other words, the great things of the new covenant **cast a shadow back in time to the Jews in order to give them an indication of greater things to come**. The righteous Jews certainly understood this when struggling to live under the old law. They concluded, “There must be something better than this?” There was enough indication in the very nature of the old system to indicate that there was something to come, something that was better. The old law, therefore, was the shadow of the new that was to come.

Under the Sinai law it was impossible to receive remission of sins through the blood of bulls and goats. It was impossible to keep the law perfectly in order to be justified through law-keeping. Therefore, the law was a curse if one sought justification before God through meritorious obedience to its ordinances. Paul wrote,

“For as many as are of the works of law are under a curse, for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things that are written in the book of the law, to do them’” (Gl 3:10).

The Jews were cursed because they could not keep law perfectly in order to justify themselves before God. One sin makes a sinner, and thus, it takes only one sin to separate one from God (Is 59:1,2). The result is that one is dead in sin because of his inability to live perfectly before God through the keeping of law. Since there is no meritorious forgiveness through good works, then all those who lived under the Sinai law were cursed. They were cursed because there was no forgiveness for those who lived exclusively by law.

The purpose of the Sinai law was to usher the Jews to the cross. Paul wrote, *“Therefore the law was our headmaster to bring us to Christ so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a headmaster”* (Gl 3:24,25). The Sinai law ushered in the New Testament law. It educated man concerning sin in that it convicted those living under it that they were sinners (Rm 3:20). In this way it was a tutor or headmaster that gave guidance and direction. It also frustrated sincere believers who sought to be justified before God. The frustra-

tion was in the fact that they knew that the blood of bulls and goats could not take away sins. Their frustration, therefore, moved them to look for something greater that was yet to come.

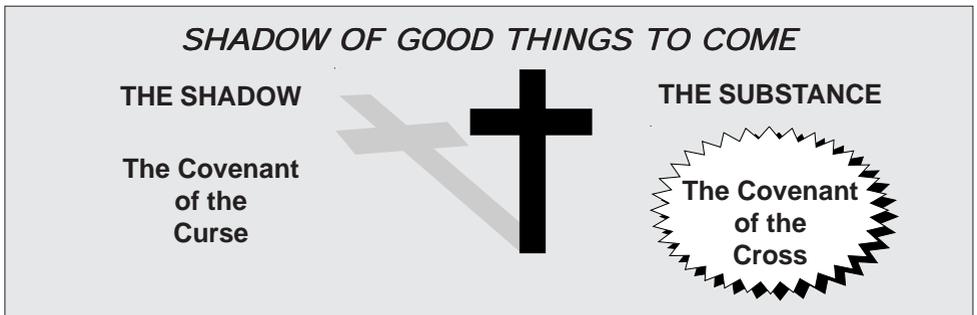
D. The new law and covenant was established to fulfill the old.

Hebrews 8 teaches that Jesus is our “*high priest who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens*” (Hb 8:1). Jesus has “*obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He also is the Mediator of a **better covenant**, that was established on **better promises***” (Hb 8:6). After making these statements in reference to the new covenant, the Hebrew writer then quoted Jeremiah 31:31-34. **He associated the new covenant of Jeremiah 31 with the new covenant relationship that we now have with God in Christ.** This is the new covenant wherein the law of the covenant is written on our hearts.

Jesus is “*the Mediator of the new covenant ... for where a covenant is the death of the one who made it must be established*” (Hb 9:15,16). This new covenant (testament) contains things that are far better than the Sinai law:

- Better hope (Hb 7:19)
- Better covenant relationship with God (Hb 7:22)
- Better promises (Hb 8:6)
- Better sacrifices (Hb 9:23)
- Better possession (Hb 10:34)
- Better country (Hb 11:16)
- Better resurrection (Hb 11:35)
- Better blood of sprinkling than the blood of animals (Hb 12:24).

The new covenant was not given to a specific nation. It is given to “*whoever believes*” (Jn 3:16). It is a covenant made with individuals throughout the world. It is a covenant where sins, once forgiven by God, are remembered by Him no more. The conclusion of this point would be Hebrews 10:9. “*He [Jesus] takes away*



the first so that He may establish the second.”

The fact that the Hebrew writer continued to use the word “better” to explain the comparison between the old covenant and the new, clearly indicates that there was an insufficiency on the part of the first law and covenant, as well as being temporary. Therefore, when studying this subject we must assume that the new is better simply because the old was taken away.

The old Sinai covenant was not the last covenant God would establish with man. It was the means to the end of all God’s covenants with man. The end is the new covenant that we now have with God through

our obedience to the gospel. Jesus took away the binding force of the old covenant, and thus, the law of the covenant. He did so in order to offer to all who would believe on Jesus a new covenant and law.

All Christians today, therefore, are subject to the laws of this new covenant. Since the new covenant has been established, then we must look for the new conditions of this covenant. We thus look into the New Testament in order to determine the laws of the new covenant in order that we establish and maintain a covenant relationship with God that is established on better things than the Sinai covenant that God had established with the nation of Israel.

Chapter 5

CHANGE IN PRIESTHOOD AND LAW

It was never God’s intention to establish the Levitical priesthood of Israel as a priesthood that would last throughout the existence of time here on earth. Nor did He intend that the Levites should function as priests for the entire world until the end of time. The Levitical priests were to function as priests to a nation of people, which Israel was at the foot of Mount Sinai when the people were established as a nation.

Israel’s priesthood was a priest-

hood to all nations, not just the nation of Israel. The Levitical priests were to focus their efforts to the edification of Israel for the sake of the nations of the world. The Levitical priesthood was only a temporary ministry in order to prepare all men for the change to the universal high priesthood and law of the new covenant of Jesus that would be offered to all nations. In this way, therefore, the high priesthood of Aaron was a shadow of the high priesthood of Jesus that was to come.

This change of high priesthood in reference to the law necessitated the change of the law when Jesus became a high priest. The change in the high priesthood, therefore, necessitated a change from the Sinai law to the law of grace and faith. Since the Sinai law was exclusively given to the nation of Israel, a change in the law had to be made when the high priesthood of Jesus extended beyond the nation of Israel to all nations of the world.

A. Change of the priesthood:

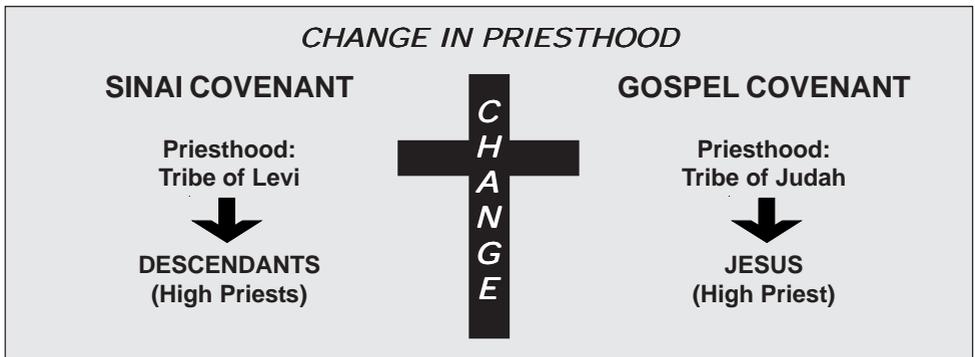
Exodus 29 teaches that under the Sinai law **only the descendants of Aaron** could be high priests. In the context of Exodus, Aaron and his sons were consecrated as priests of Israel alone. However, when we come to Hebrews 7 we discover that a change of law had to be made because there was a change in the God-appointed high priest from the descendants of Aaron to that of Jesus. The ascended Jesus was a high priest for all humanity.

One of the reasons for the change in priesthood was because there was no perfection under the Levitical priesthood of the Sinai law.

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? (Hb 7:11).

The point is that there was no perfection from sin under the priesthood of Aaron. Therefore, Jesus became a priest “according to the order of Melchizedek” (Hb 6:20; 7:17) and not “according to the order of Aaron” (Hb 7:11). As Melchizedek was a universal Gentile priest to all men, so Jesus was the same.

Now here is the problem the Hebrew writer posed to some Jewish Christians who were seeking to return to the Levitical priesthood. It is “evi-



dent that our Lord descended from **Judah**; of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood” (Hb 7:14). Jesus thus belonged “to another tribe” (Hb 7:13). He was of the tribe of **Judah**. According to the law, therefore, He could not have become a priest. Only those who were of the tribe of Levi could function as priests in Israel under the Sinai law. For Jesus to be a high priest, therefore, there had to be a change of the law. The exclusive Sinai covenant and law had to be opened to a new covenant and law that included the world.

God changed things in reference to law and priesthood in order that Jesus function as a high priest for all believers, whether Jews or Gentiles. **Jesus’ priesthood took precedence over the application of the Sinai law that was given exclusively to one nation of people.** In other words, the law was changed because the priesthood was changed to Jesus.

The priesthood was not changed because the law was changed. Because there was a change of priesthood, “*of necessity there is also a change of the law*” (Hb 7:12). The Hebrew writer concluded, “*For on the one hand, there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness, for the law made nothing perfect ...*” (Hb 7:18,19). The law was changed because all glory was to be given to the

ascended incarnate Son of God who was reigning over all things at the time the letter of Hebrews was written (Hb 8:1).

There was a change to the law of the new covenant because God changed to the priesthood of Jesus. Since Jesus is now a high priest after the order of Melchizedek, He has “*become a guarantee of a better covenant*” (Hb 7:22). Through this better covenant that includes all men, Christians can “*draw near to God*” for a **better hope** (Hb 7:19). Jesus’ priesthood, therefore, was more important than the Sinai law. The Sinai law was thus sacrificed for the establishment of the priesthood of Jesus.

Since God had planned before the creation of the world that Jesus would function as the high priest for all men of the world, then the logical conclusion is that God never intended that the Sinai law with Israel and the Levitical priesthood should last throughout all ages. The Sinai law and covenant were only temporary. They served for the purpose of bringing Israel to Christ. However, now that Christ has come, we are no longer subject to either the Levitical priesthood of the Sinai law or the law itself. God has taken both out of the way in order to establish the high priesthood of Jesus. We are now under the priesthood of Jesus that is superior to the Levitical priesthood. We

have a high priest who is now at the right hand of God. He is there pleading our case before the One against whom we sin. Therefore, our assurance of forgiveness is through the high priesthood of the Son of God.

The fact that God always intended to establish Jesus as the final priest for all people clearly proves that it was never the intention of God to maintain the Sinai law and covenant as an unending Levitical system throughout the history of the world. Both the Sinai law and the Levitical priesthood were always meant to be temporary.

This point must be clearly understood as we progress to the next point concerning some key words that were used in the Old Testament in reference to the Sinai law and covenant. These words have caused some confusion in the minds of those who fail to see the temporary and preparatory work of the Sinai law and covenant.

B. Change of heritage:

God told the Israelites to look forward to a new covenant that He would establish with them. But until the time when it would be established, Israel was to keep the law of the covenant that had been given through Moses on Mount Sinai. To emphasize the necessity of their keeping the Sinai law, God used words as “per-

petual,” “forever” and “everlasting” in reference to the ordinances and ceremonies of the Sinai law. Moses recorded, “*Therefore the children of Israel will keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a **perpetual covenant**. It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel **forever***” (Ex 31:16,17). “*It will be a **perpetual statute** for your generations throughout all your dwellings*” (Lv 3:17; see Nm 19:21).

The offering of sacrifices was called a “*perpetual statute*” (Lv 3:17). God gave the land of Palestine to Israel as an **everlasting** possession (Gn 17:8). The Passover was an **everlasting** (forever) ordinance of the law (Ex 12:24). The high priesthood of Aaron was an **everlasting/perpetual** priesthood (Ex 29:9; 40:15; Lv 3:17; see Nm 25:13).

The words “perpetual” and “everlasting” (“forever”) are used in the Old Testament in reference to a **limited time**. These terms are even used in reference to the Sinai law that God made with Israel. But if the use of these terms means that the Sinai law and its statutes and ordinances must be observed **without end**, then when must the law and its precepts be concluded, if ever? Should the Sinai law ordinances be observed in heaven and forever? The answer is obviously no.

Through the use of the terms “perpetual” and “everlasting,” **God**

meant that they would eventually end. The end, however, would come only when God intended that the end should come. The end was when the Sinai law was changed at the time the priesthood was changed from Aaron's heritage to Jesus.

In view of the above, one must understand that the words "perpetual" and "everlasting" meant that these ordinances were to last only **throughout their intended time of duration.** In other words, they would not cease to exist until they continued throughout the established time of their observance that the Father determined. In reference to the statutes of the Sinai law, therefore, this meant that these statutes were to be observed until their intended end, which end came when men were made dead to the law by the body of Christ (Rm 7:4). This is why Paul wrote the following to Christians who were under the law of Christ: "**Therefore, let no one judge you in food or in drink, or respect to a festival or a new moon or of sabbaths**" (Cl 2:16). No one could make judgments in reference to these matters because the standard by which the judgments could be made no longer had any force as law. Since the Sinai law had passed away at the time Paul wrote the words, then no one could make any judgments concerning the keeping of the Sabbath, or any other Jewish feast day, accord-

ing to the instructions of the Sinai law.

This thought was also in the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:18. "*Until heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the [Sinai] law, **until all is fulfilled.***" The thought is that nothing would be made void until the fulfillment was accomplished. Keep in mind that this statement was made during the earthly ministry of Jesus, and before the cross. When Jesus began His ministry, He proclaimed, "*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand*" (Mk 1:15). After reading the prophecy of Isaiah 61:1,2, He said to those who heard, "*This day this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing*" (Lk 4:21). There was an imminent fulfillment at hand when Jesus made the preceding statements. And when something was fulfilled, something was terminated.

Jesus was the fulfillment of the law. He became the substance of the shadow of Aaron's priesthood by fulfilling the prophecies that pointed to Him as the substance. His fulfillment of the law subsequently meant the termination of this "everlasting" law in reference to its binding application as a law for God's people. The fulfillment of the law meant the abolishment of the law.

In reference to His fulfillment of the prophecies of the prophets, Jesus said immediately before His ascen-

sion, *“These are the words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled that were written in the law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me”* (Lk 24:44). Therefore, the “perpetual” and “everlasting” Sinai law did not pass away until it was fulfilled by the coming of Jesus. Jesus fulfilled all prophecies of the Old Testament that were written concerning Him. This is the substance of what Paul meant when He wrote of Jesus, *“For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us”* (2 Co 1:20).

By fulfilling the law, Jesus caused it to pass away when He ushered in the new covenant. The fulfillment of the Sinai law was its natural end. The Sinai law remained in effect until its intended end. In this sense it was perpetual. Its application to the Jews did not cease until Jesus fulfilled it.

By using the words “perpetual” and “everlasting,” God wanted Israel to understand that the establishment of the law was sure and certain throughout the generations of the Jews. They were not to change it or add to it (Dt 4:2). They were to understand that its application would not be terminated by the will of man. In this sense, therefore, the Sinai law was binding on Israel as their condition for keeping the covenant that God had es-

tablished with them at Mount Sinai.

This did not mean that the Sinai law would last throughout eternity. It was a law with a limited application that served for a specific purpose during a limited period of time in the history of one nation of people. Now that Jesus has come, we are no longer subject to the statutes of the Sinai law that were given exclusively to the nation of Israel. We have been set free from the Sinai law by the offering of Christ on the cross. We no longer offer animal sacrifices or keep statutes of the Sinai law in order to be justified before God. Jesus has delivered us from the curse of the law, and thus we walk in the freedom of the law of liberty.

There is great wisdom and history throughout the Old Testament. Genesis reveals the beginning of all things. The history of Israel from Joshua to Nehemiah reveals how God worked among the nations of the world in order to bring the Savior into the world. The Psalms, Proverbs and other books of wisdom literature reveal principles by which we are to live according to the gospel. It is for this reason that Bible interpreters must not assume that all this history and wisdom died on the cross with Jesus. Only the Sinai law that was given to the nation of Israel as a condition for keeping the covenant that God made with the nation, was nailed to the cross.

In order to not be confused in reference to the Christians use of the Old Testament Scriptures in our lives, we use the phrase “Sinai law.” The Sinai law is contained in the Old Testament, but not all the Old Testament is the Sinai law. It was the Sinai law that

was terminated by the body of Christ on the cross, not all the principles of the Old Testament. We are now under a new and better law and covenant through Jesus Christ, though we still gain wisdom for the Old Testament (See Rm 15:4; 1 Co 10:11).

Chapter 6

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE NEW COVENANT

When Jesus died on the cross, a new covenant was brought into force and the old was cancelled. The old covenant was given for the purpose of bringing Israel to a final solution for the forgiveness of sins. When the fulfillment of the Sinai covenant was accomplished, it no longer had a purpose for existence as covenant between God and His people. It had fulfilled its purpose, and thus, it naturally faded away as the new and better covenant of Jesus came into being. With the passing of the Sinai covenant came also the passing of the conditions (the law) that were required to be maintained to keep the covenant.

A. Activation of a (covenant) testament through death:

In the context of Hebrews 9:15-20 the word that is sometimes translated “testament” in some versions is

from the word *diatheke*. It can be translated “covenant” in this context. The Hebrew writer’s argument was in reference to the Old Testament practice that a covenant between two parties was dedicated by the blood of an offered animal. In the case of the Sinai covenant, the covenant that God established with the nation of Israel was dedicated with the blood of animals (Hb 9:19,20).

In this context, consider the statement of the Hebrew writer in Hebrews 9:17: “*For a covenant is ratified upon death, since it has no force while the one who made it lives.*” While one lives, the conditions of one’s final testament, or will, has no binding power since the blessings of the testament are activated by the death of the testator. After there is death, then the force of the testator’s will is brought into existence to which the heirs of the testator must submit.

Jesus ushered in His new testa-

ment (will) by His death on the cross. *“He is the mediator of the new covenant ... by means of death”* (Hb 9:15). Though Colossians 2:14 refers primarily to the legal binding of any religious traditions or rituals in order to sanctify oneself through law-keeping, the principle of Paul’s statement is applicable to the binding application of the Sinai law in reference to the cross. Paul said in Colossians 2 that by death Jesus blotted out *“the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He took it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross”* (Cl 2:14). Paul also wrote in Ephesians 2:15 that Jesus *“abolished in His flesh the enmity, which is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances.”*

Since it is impossible for man to live at the same time under two systems of God’s laws, Jesus took *“away the first [law] so that He may establish the second”* (Hb 10:9). Christians, therefore, are not obligated to keep the Sinai law that was the condition for maintaining the Sinai covenant. By it, Paul wrote, *“let no one judge you”* (Cl 2:16).

It is not possible, therefore, for God’s people today to live under two laws at the same time. For this reason, the first law was taken away in order to bring into force the second. It is under this second law that Christians live today. Since the Sinai law

has been taken away, we must understand that the covenant of the law has also ceased. In fact, the law was terminated when the Sinai covenant with Israel was terminated. When God concluded His special covenant relationship with Israel, the conditions of the covenant were no longer in force.

B. Illustration by God’s marriage law:

In Romans 7:1-7 Paul used the marriage law of God to illustrate that Jewish Christians to whom he was writing were made dead to the Sinai law by the death of Christ at the cross. Therefore, those who have come into a covenant relationship with Christ through their obedience to the gospel are not subject to the conditions of the Sinai covenant.

Do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know law), how that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives? For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. However, if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. So then, if while her husband lives she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress. But if her husband is dead, she is free from that law, so that she is not an adulteress, though she is married to

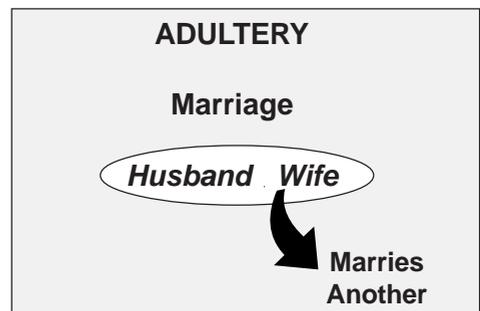
another man. Therefore, my brethren, you also became dead to the law through the body of Christ, so that you should be married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead, so that we should bring forth fruit to God (Rm 7:1-4).

In the preceding text, Paul used God's marriage law for man in order to illustrate the relationship Christians have both with the Sinai law and the New Testament law. The reason for Paul's statements in Romans 7 was based on the attempt of some Jewish Christians who sought to bind on Christians certain parts of the Sinai law, specifically circumcision and other ceremonies. They were doing such because they believed that unless the Gentile Christians were circumcised, they could not be saved. These Jewish Christians taught, "Except you are circumcised after the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved" (At 15:1).

Romans 7:1-4 is actually the continuation of Paul's major thesis of Romans 3:20, "Therefore, by the works of law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by law is the knowledge of sin." In dealing with the problem of legal justification that was taught by some Jewish Christians, Paul explains the relationship Christians now have with the law as a result of their relationship with the cross. In the context, therefore, Paul's purpose in writ-

ing the Romans 7:1-7 context was to encourage Christians not to allow others to bind any part of the Sinai law on them as a condition for justification.

1. Bound by law: In Romans 7:3 he emphasized that if a woman is married to another man while the first husband lives, "she will be called an adulteress." This is true because "the woman who has a husband is bound by law to her husband so long as he lives." But if the first husband dies, then "she is released from the law of the husband" (Rm 7:2). She is free to marry another without committing adultery. Her marriage to the first husband is dead because of his death. His death releases her from the obligation of marriage to this first husband. Therefore, her marriage to the second husband can be valid only if the first is dead. It is very important to remember this point as Paul applies it to the Christian's relationship with the Sinai law.

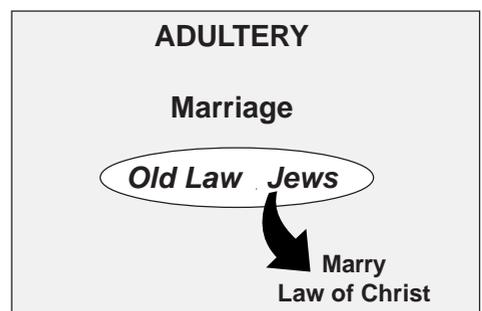
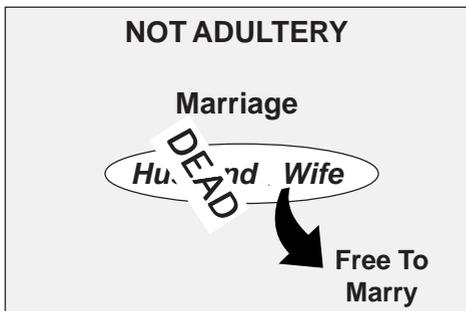


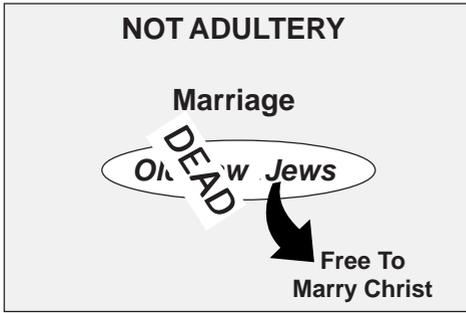
2. Freed by death: Before Jesus came, the Jews were married to the Sinai law because they were in a covenant relationship with God that was established at Mount Sinai. However, Jesus came with a new law, “*the perfect law of liberty*” (Js 1:25). The problem among the disciples in Rome with whom Paul deals in the letter to the Romans was that some of the Jewish Christians wanted to live under the ordinances of the Sinai law, and at the same time, live under the law of grace and faith. In doing such they were essentially committing spiritual adultery. They were trying to live under the conditions of two covenants at the same time, and thus, they were compromising their allegiance to Christ with whom they came into a covenant relationship when they obeyed the gospel.

We would thus caution people today who do the same, particularly in reference to the Sinai law of tithing. If we impose on the people of God today any portion of the Sinai law, including tithing, then we are com-

mitting spiritual adultery. We are violating the principle Paul is discussing in the context of Romans 7. We are turning from living under grace to living under law. We are thus forgetting what Paul wrote to the Roman Christians in the chapter before Romans 7: “*For you are not under law, but under grace*” (Rm 6:14).

Paul’s teaching in Romans 7 is that we “*have become dead to the [Sinai] law through the body of Christ ...*” (Rm 7:4). We were made dead to the Sinai law and its ordinances in order that we should “*be married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead*” (Rm 7:4). Thus, “*we are delivered from the law, ...*” (Rm 7:6). To warn Christians against committing “spiritual adultery,” Paul wrote to the Galatians, “*You have been severed from Christ, you who seek to be justified by law. You have fallen from grace*” (Gl 5:4). It is a serious matter, therefore, to claim to be joined to Jesus, and at the same time, religiously bind on men various Sinai laws that were appli-





cable only for the Jews who lived before the cross of Christ.

Regardless to law, anyone who would seek to live perfectly according to any law, he or she has fallen from grace. The reason for this is that no one can keep law perfectly in order to merit salvation.

In the context of Romans 7, and at the beginning of the chapter, Paul used the word “law” without the article “the.” In the letter of Romans, therefore, Paul’s argument is against using any law as a means of meritorious justification. The absence of this article occurs in Romans 3:20 when he stated the proposition of the letter. The *International King James Version* reads correctly. “*Therefore, by the works of law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by law is the knowledge of sin*” (Rm 3:20; see Gl 2:16).

In the context of Romans 7 he does not want the Jewish Christians to misunderstand what law to which he referred in their case. Therefore, in verse 7 he said, “*I would not have known sin except through law, for I*

would not have known covetousness except the law had said, ‘You will not covet.’” In the context of Romans 7:7, therefore, Paul referred to the Sinai law to which one is dead if he or she has obeyed the gospel.

When one comes into a covenant relationship with Jesus through obedience to the gospel, he comes under the conditions of the covenant that God establishes with him. Jesus activated His covenant when He died on the cross. The “official” reading of the conditions of the covenant were announced by Peter on the day of Pentecost in A.D. 30 (At 2:38), and then, later revealed through the apostles (Jn 14:26; 16:13). When men and women sought to establish a new covenant relationship with God through Jesus, they had to give themselves over to submission to the conditions of this new covenant. Some of the Jewish converts struggled with this in the early days of the church. They sought to bring over into the new covenant conditions of obedience of the Sinai covenant that God had established with their fathers on Mount Sinai. However, in order for them to be married to Christ without committing spiritual adultery, they had to sever their relationship with the old covenant and law in order to be joined to Christ.

It is the same today. When one becomes a part of the body of Christ,

he becomes dead to the Sinai law by the sacrificial body of Christ. This does not mean that the rest of the Old Testament has no value in the life of the Christian. We are to look to the Old Testament in order to be admonished through the work of God with Israel (Rm 15:4; 1 Co 10:11). What it does mean is that the Sinai laws of

the Old Testament are not binding on Christians as they were on the Jews before the cross. The Jews lived under law. Christians live under the grace and faith of Jesus Christ. To know the difference is to understand the freedom that we now have in Christ (Gl 5:1,2).

Chapter 7

SUBJECTS OF THE NEW

When Jesus died on the cross, He brought into force a new covenant with a new law. Therefore, since the time Jesus died on the cross, God has spoken to all men through Jesus. The Sinai law accomplished its purpose by bringing Israel to the cross. But at the cross, it ceased. The law of grace and truth is the law through which Jesus now reigns in the hearts of men. For this reason, Christians must be subject to the new covenant law of Christ, His word (Jn 12:48), and not to the Sinai law.

Christians cannot divide their loyalties between the old and the new. Any effort to reestablish the ordinances of the Sinai law today is an effort to leave the grace of God that was revealed through the cross. It is an attack against the sufficiency of the law of Christ simply because it is an addition to that which is complete (2 Tm 3:16,17).

A. God speaks to us today through Jesus.

On the mount of transfiguration, God spoke from heaven, *“This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him”* (Mt 17:5). God could not have made His point more clear. At the time this statement was made, Peter impetuously suggested, *“Lord, it is good for us to be here. If You wish, I will make here three tabernacles, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah”* (Mt 17:4).

Peter, James and John who were with Jesus on the mountain of transfiguration did not understand the significance of the vision or the statement by God out of heaven. They had lived under the great lawgiver, Moses. They had listened to the great prophets as Elijah. But now they were in a time of transition. They were in a time of transition from the Sinai law and the

prophets to the time when they should listen to the One who was standing before them. They were in a time of transition from the old to the new, and thus they should listen to Jesus.

John wrote that *“the law was given through Moses, but **grace and truth came through Jesus Christ**”* (Jn 1:17). Jesus said, *“The words that I speak to you, they are spirit and they are life”* (Jn 6:63). It is important to understand from previous points that before Jesus came, *“God ... spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets.”* (Hb 1:1). However, *“in these last days”* God has *“spoken to us by **His Son**”* (Hb 1:2). For this reason, Jesus said, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life. **No one comes to the Father but through Me.**”* (Jn 14:6).

Those who come to the Father through Jesus will be judged at the final judgment by the words of Christ and not by the Sinai law. Therefore, Christians should not fear when others try to bind on them other religious laws and traditions that are not a part of the word of Christ. They will not be judged by the rites, rules and traditions of any religion. All men since the cross will be judged by the word of Christ.

In John 12:48 Jesus said, *“He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has one who judges him. **The word that I have spoken the same will judge him in the last day.**”*

The standard by which all Christians will be judged in the final judgment is the word of Christ. No Christian will ever be brought before God with the standard of the Sinai law that was given to the nation of Israel. Neither will Christians be judged by the rules of any religion that is created after the traditions of men.

B. God governs through eternal principles.

Some wonder about the ten commandments and our relationship to such today if the Sinai law is no longer binding. There are those who would contend that we must observe all these commandments today as specific laws from God for all nations. However, there is a basic fundamental error that is promoted when interpreters do not separate the principles of God’s law that existed before the giving of the Sinai law, from the law itself. These fundamental principles still exist today, though the Sinai law that was given to the nation of Israel has passed away.

During His ministry, Jesus emphasized the authority of His word over all laws and interpretations of the Sinai law. He did such by saying, *“You have heard that it was said ... you will not murder. **But I say to you**”* (See Mt 5:21-48). When Jesus made these statements in the Sermon on the

Mount in Matthew 5, He was not contrasting the Sinai law with what He was teaching. He was contrasting the interpretations of the law by the scribes and Pharisees with what He was teaching. These statements were Jesus' declaration that men should listen to Him.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus was turning His audience to listen to Him as opposed to those who corrupted the teachings of the Sinai law by their traditional interpretations. For example, Jesus said, "*You have heard that it was said, 'You will love your neighbor and hate your enemy'*" (Mt 5:43). The law that God gave to Israel on Mount Sinai never made such a statement. The saying, "Love your neighbor and hate your enemy" was an added interpretation to the law by the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus was not arguing against something that the law had actually said. He was arguing against those who had erroneously applied the law by their erroneous interpretations. Throughout the contrasts that Jesus made in the Sermon on the Mount, His point was, "*But I say to you.*"

The concept that Christians are dead to the ten commandments because they are dead to the Sinai law is not hard to understand. Think of it in this way: In the early days of history, the United States and several other countries of the world, were

under the sovereign law of England. The law of England prohibited murder, stealing and other such crimes. But today, the United States, for example, is under its own system of law. This law also prohibits murder and stealing. But does mean that U.S. citizens today are subject to the law of England? Both the laws of England and America contain the same principles concerning murderers and thieves. And, the law of England predates the law of the United States just as the Sinai law predated the law of Christ. The answer to the above question is that in the United States, murderers and thieves will all be judged by the law of the United States, not by the law of England, even though both systems of law contain ordinances against murder and stealing. For this reason, Jesus said in John 12:48 that men in this dispensation of time will be judged by His word and not the ten commandments.

It is interesting to note here that all the principles taught in the ten commandments are taught in the New Testament law of Jesus, except one. **The fourth commandment is not taught in the New Testament.** This commandment deals with the keeping of the Sabbath. The Sabbath is nowhere commanded to be observed in the New Testament. (More on this later.)

A very important point is illus-

trated by the lack of mention of the keeping of the Sabbath in the New Testament. Those fundamental truths and fundamental moral principles that are stated in the Old Testament are determined to be fundamental because they are also stated in the New Testament as fundamental. Therefore, any truth or moral principle of the Sinai law that is not stated in the New Testament cannot be judged to be fundamental teaching in reference to morals and salvation. The Holy Spirit's inspiration of the New Testament, therefore, is the Spirit's witness to those teachings of the Sinai law that are fundamental and have existed since the beginning of time for the direction of the lives of men.

When we say that we are not under the ten commandment law today, we mean that as a part of the Sinai law that was given to the nation of Israel, we are subject to the principle of the commandments as they are **restated** in the New Testament. Except for the keeping of the Sabbath, the principles of the ten commandments preceded the giving of the law on Mount Sinai. These principles have also been reaffirmed through principles that are taught in the New Testament. Nevertheless, to say that

the ten commandments are binding today because they were given as the law of God on Mount Sinai is to misunderstand the principle of moral principles being a part of all God's laws that He has given to man since the beginning.

There are many moral principles that are unchanging. They have been with man from the very beginning and will stay with man until the end of the world. Simply because these moral principles are clearly stated in a particular law of God that was given to man at one particular time in history does not mean that these principles have come and gone with the changing of any particular system of law that was given at any one time in the history of a specific people.

We must keep in mind that God speaks to us today through His Son. *"God, who at various times and in different ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son"* (Hb 1:1,2). Again we must recall what Jesus said: *"He who rejects Me and does not receive My words, has one who judges him. The word that I have spoken, the same will judge him in the last day"* (Jn 12:48).

Chapter 8

SUPERIORITY OF THE NEW

When something is better, then it is superior to that with which it is compared. When one has that which is better, then there should be no inclination to trade that which is better for that which is inferior. So it is with our relationship between the old and new laws and covenants of the Bible.

When the New Testament speaks of the superiority of the New Testament covenant, then it is assumed that the Sinai covenant and law were never meant to be a covenant and law that would last until the end of time. Both were only temporary until the better came. Therefore, when people seek to reestablish portions or all of the Sinai law of the covenant that was given to Israel, they are seeking to establish again something that God never intended to be permanent. They are also attacking the superior nature of the New Testament covenant and law of Christ.

The major argument against those of the Hebrew writer's audience who sought to return to the Sinai law and covenant was the superiority of the New Testament law and covenant. Since the new covenant and law are better, then the old law and covenant are inferior. One of the primary arguments of the Hebrew writer to con-

vince his audience not to return to the Sinai law was based on the superiority of the New Testament covenant and law. Hebrews 7:22 states that "*by so much was Jesus made a guarantee of a **better covenant.***" It is better because its blessings and promises are far greater than the old covenant.

The Hebrew writer compared the old law with the new that was brought in to replace the old. He then concluded, "*For the [Sinai] law made nothing perfect. On the other hand, there is a bringing in of a **better hope,** through which we draw near to God*" (Hb 7:19). The new law and covenant produce a better hope that is based on **better promises** (Hb 8:6) and a **better blood of sprinkling** that was poured out for the establishment of the new covenant (Hb 12:24). All that pertains to the New Testament law and covenant are better simply because they are based on the sacrificial offering of the incarnate Son of God.

BETTER THINGS OF THE NEW COVENANT

Better hope (Hb 7:19)

Better covenant relationship (Hb 7:22)

Better promises (Hb 8:6)

Better sacrifices (Hb 9:23)

Better possession (Hb 10:34)

Better country (Hb 11:16)

Better resurrection (Hb 11:35)

Better blood of sprinkling (Hb 12:24)

God calls men today through things that are better than they were under the Sinai law and covenant. A comparison between the old and new laws helps us understand that God intends that we should draw near to Him through the better law. Christians have greater blessings, promises and hope by living in a gospel covenant relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

CONTRAST BETWEEN THE OLD AND NEW

1. The Sinai law **was given through angels** (At 7:38,53; Gl 3:19; Hb 2:2), but the New Testament law **was ordained by Jesus**, the Son of God (Hb 2:1-4).
2. The old **was given to one nation** (Ne 8:1; 9:13,14), but the new **was given to all nations** (Mk 16:15).
3. The old **was dedicated by the blood of animals** (Hb 9:19,20), but the new **was dedicated by the sacrificial blood of the Son of God** (Hb 10:19,20; 1 Pt 1:18,19).
4. The old **had animal sacrifices that could not take away sins** (Hb 10:4), but the new **has the sufficient blood sacrifice of the Son of God** (Hb 10:10,18).
5. The old **had a high priest of man** (Lv

1,2), but the new **has the Son of God as a high priest** (Hb 8:1; 9:11).

6. The old **had many offerings for sin** (Hb 10:1-4), but the new **has the offering of Jesus that is sufficient for all time** (Hb 9:28).
7. The old had **the ordinance of circumcision of the flesh** (Ep 2:11), but the new has **circumcision of the heart** (Rm 2:29).
8. Under the old, **sins were remembered yearly** (Hb 10:1-3), but under the new, **sins are remembered no more** (Hb 10:17).
9. The old was a **reign of death** (Rm 7:5-24), but the new gives **life** (Rm 8:1,2).
10. The old was **written on tables of stone** (2 Co 3:3-6), but the new is **written on the hearts of men** (Hb 8:10).
11. The old was a **shadow of the good things to come** (Hb 10:1), but the new is **the substance** (Hb 10:1).
12. The old was **unable to purge the conscience** (Hb 9:9), but the new is **able to purge the conscience** (Hb 9:14).
13. The glory of the old has **passed away** (2 Co 3:7,11), **but the glory of the new continues** (2 Co 3:11).

The Sinai law was given exclusively to the Jews. But its purpose was to prepare the way for Christ and a new law. The new covenant and law were inaugurated by the precious offering of the Son of God. When Jesus died on the cross, the old covenant and

law were taken away and the New Testament of Christ was brought into force. We cannot live under the old law and the new law at the same time. Christians are married to Christ and thus are dead to the Sinai law that was given through Moses. The old law was sufficient for its purpose. But when the new priesthood came, with Christ as the high priest, there was the need for a change from the old to the new. The change was made to a new and better covenant and law, under which sanctification was made possible by the blood of Christ. Any who would try to be justified by legally keeping the laws of the old are fallen from grace (Gl 5:4). Today, God expects us to obey the same command He gave to Peter, James and John on the mountain where Jesus was transfigured. *“This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. **Hear Him**”* (Mt 17:5). In order to please the Fa-

ther today, therefore, we must obey the Son. Our obedience to the will of the Father is evidence that we have committed ourselves to the new covenant and law of the Son.

The historical context of the entire book of Hebrews was developed on the basis that there were some Jewish Christians who were being intimidated into returning to the Sinai law and priesthood. The book of Hebrews was written to counter this apostasy. Because of the purpose for which the book of Hebrews was written, this is the first New Testament book that one should study in order to determine the contrast between the Sinai law and covenant and the new law and covenant. This is the New Testament book that will answer all questions concerning any effort to reinstate any of the Sinai law commands today on the people of God.

Chapter 9

THE LAW AND THE SABBATH

Whenever there is a discussion concerning the abolishment of the Sinai law and covenant, immediately there are questions concerning the Sabbath day. There are those who vigorously contend that the keeping of the Sabbath is a salvational issue since it was supposedly God’s intention

from the beginning of time that men observe the Sabbath. However, in this and the following chapters, we want to present some thoughts that will challenge this assumption, and thus, reaffirm again that Christians are not subject to ordinances of the Sinai law.

Under the Sinai law the Jews

were obligated to keep the Sabbath. Its observance was a part of the law, and thus a sign of the covenant that God had made with Israel. However, there are only a few scriptures in the Pentateuch (Gn through Dt) that discuss the Sabbath.

THE LAW AND THE SABBATH

1. Exodus 16:23-29; 20:8-11; 31:13-16; 35:2,3
2. Leviticus 19:3,30; 23:3-8; 24:8; 25:2-8; 26:2,34,35,43
3. Numbers 15:32; 28:9,10
4. Deuteronomy 5:12-15

There are those today who believe that Christians should keep the Sabbath as the Jews did under the Sinai law. “God hallowed the seventh day,” it is affirmed, “therefore, men of all ages should observe it as a day of worship.” It is also affirmed by many that true believers are separated from false believers on the condition of whether one keeps the Sabbath. These and many other arguments are set forth in order to affirm that the Sabbath is still binding today.

The Sabbath is indeed a subject that gives rise to questions by those who have not yet made a distinction between the Sinai law and the gospel covenant that Christians now have with God through Jesus Christ. But answering the questions concerning the application of the Sinai law today

answers most of the questions concerning the Sabbath.

There are, however, some very important concepts to learn concerning the Sabbath. Once these concepts are understood, then one can better understand the purpose for which the law of the Sabbath was given to Israel.

CONCEPTS CONCERNING THE SABBATH

1. The Sabbath was given as a day of rest for the nation of Israel.
2. The Sabbath was given to the nation of Israel as a sign of the covenant that God had established with them.
3. The Sabbath was not given to the Jews as a day of assembled worship.
4. The Sabbath is not a special day of worship that is emphasized in the New Testament.
5. As a part of the Sinai law, the Sabbath was abolished.
6. The Sabbath is not a special day that should be observed as a holy day by Christians.
7. The Sabbath was not an ordinance of the Sinai law that was to be kept without end.

The seventh day was originally designed to commemorate God’s “rest” after He had completed the creation. *“And God blessed the seventh*

day and sanctified it, because in it He had rested from all His work that God created and made” (Gn 2:3; see Ex 20:8-11). This very first mention of the seventh day should give the first clue as to the meaning and purpose of the Sabbath. The Sabbath was based on the seventh day of the week, the day when God ceased His work of creation. It was a day of rest. In fact, the word Sabbath means “to rest,” “to cease,” or “to desist.” In other words, when God rested on the Sabbath after creation, it meant that **He ceased from creating**. This defines one of the primary purposes for the Sabbath as we see it commanded in the Sinai law. God meant for Israel to cease from work on this day. This is the very foundation upon which God based the commandment concerning the Sabbath in the ten commandments. *“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you will labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you will do no work”* (Ex 20:8-10).

We must keep in mind that there were many Sabbath rests in the Old Testament besides the seventh day of the week:

- The Sabbath of the **day of Atonement** (Lv 16:29-31).
- The Sabbath of the **seventh year** (Lv 25:1-7).

- The Sabbath of the **fiftieth year, the year of Jubilee** (Lv 25:8-12).

These Sabbaths were just as important as the seventh day of every week. **All of the Sabbaths of the Sinai law were the Lord’s Sabbaths** (Ex 20:10; Lv 19:30). Therefore, **if one contends that the Sabbath be a binding day to be religiously observed today, then he must, in order to be consistent, also bind all the Sinai law Sabbaths**. One would certainly not be consistent if he sought to bind the weekly Sabbath, and at the same time, refused to keep the other Sabbaths of the Sinai law.

A. The Sabbath was established with Israel at Mount Sinai.

There has been much discussion concerning the keeping of the Sabbath before the giving of the law to Israel on Mount Sinai. A brief historical study of those few passages in the Old Testament that mention the Sabbath should settle this issue.

1. Origin of the seventh day: As previously stated, the first mention of the importance of the seventh day of the week in the Bible is found Genesis 2:1-3. Moses stated that ...

... on the seventh day God ended His work that He had made. And He

rested on the seventh day from all His work that He had made. And God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He had rested from all His work that God created and made.

Reference here is not to God's resting because He had become tired of His creating work. God is not as man. He does not need a physical rest. But He had to set an example and reason for the seventh day.

The meaning of Genesis 2:1-3 is that **God ceased His creating work.** Genesis 2:1-3 is not a commandment to keep the Sabbath. It is only a historical record of what God did many years before Moses wrote these words in the book of Genesis around 1,400 B.C. One must not assume, therefore, that the mention of this historical fact constitutes a commandment that the Sabbath must be kept as a day of worship today.

2. Origin of the Sabbath: Genesis 2:1-3 is the last mention of the seventh day in the Old Testament until the Jews were called out of Egyptian captivity in 1,445 B.C. There is no biblical evidence that suggests that those who lived before the events of Mount Sinai—the place and time where the Sabbath commandment was officially given to Israel—observed this day as a special day of worship. It was **after** the Jews came

out of Egyptian captivity that God made it known that He wanted Israel to observe the Sabbath.

Forty years after the exodus from Egypt and the giving of the commandments on Mount Sinai, God commanded through Moses,

And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord your God brought you out of there through a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm. Therefore, the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day (Dt 5:15).

In the above passage the word “commanded” is in the past tense, therefore, **the giving of the command to keep the Sabbath came before Moses wrote the commandments of the Lord in the book of Deuteronomy.** Moses wrote the book of Deuteronomy after the giving of the law on Mount Sinai and before Israel entered the land of promise. Therefore, **it was after Mount Sinai when Israel began observing the Sabbath.** This means that Israel as a nation did not observe the Sabbath before the commandment was given through Moses.

Nehemiah 9 tells us when God **officially** made the Sabbath a law for the Jews. Verses 13 and 14 state that God came down on Mount Sinai and **“made known to them** [the Israelites]

Your holy Sabbath, and commanded them precepts, statutes, and laws by the hand of Moses Your servant.” It was on Mount Sinai, therefore, that God made the Sabbath known and an official day that the Israelites had to keep. Before this time there was no written commandment that they keep the Sabbath, though God instructed that Israel begin observing the Sabbath before they arrived at the foot of Mount Sinai (Ex 16:22-30).

3. Origin of the Sabbath command: After Genesis 2:1-3, the next biblical reference to the seventh day is found in Exodus 16:22-30. **This is the first indication we have where God commanded that the seventh day be kept as a Sabbath rest.** The historical setting of Exodus 16:22-30 was that the Israelites were to gather twice as much bread that was given from God on the day before the Sabbath. They were to do such because Moses said, *“Tomorrow is the rest of the Sabbath to the Lord”* (Ex 16:23). What they were actually commanded was not to gather the bread on the Sabbath. There is no mention here that they were to observe this day as a day of worship. God was simply stating that they would not be able to gather the bread from heaven on the Sabbath.

What had happened in the historical context of the statements of Exodus 16 was that God was institut-

ing the Sabbath rest for Israel. He gave the command that no gathering of food take place on the Sabbath, for the Sabbath was to be a day of rest (Ex 16:30).

Nevertheless, some of the people went out to gather food on the seventh day (Ex 16:27). They apparently went out on the seventh day because it was their custom to do so. This day had evidently not been a day that was observed by Israel while in Egypt, since as slaves, the Egyptians did not give the Jews a day off. The fact that it was not a special day for the Jews in captivity is in the fact that God had to make a commandment in Exodus 16 that they keep the day as a day of rest. It is certain that the taskmasters of Egypt did not observe the seventh day of rest, nor did they allow the Jews to do such. Therefore, throughout Israel’s history in Egyptian captivity, we would assume that Israel did not observe a Sabbath rest.

Another interesting point here is that the purpose of the seventh day was to be a day of rest, not a day of assembled worship wherein they came together at a particular location. In Exodus 16:29 the Lord said, ***“Remain every man in his place and let no one go out of his place on the seventh day.”*** It seems that if one would use passages as Exodus 16 to teach that Christians observe the Sabbath as a day of assembled worship, then cer-

tainly it would be wrong for Christians to leave their homes in order to congregate with others for a day of assembled worship. What God commanded Israel in the case of Exodus 16 was that they **stay in their homes on the Sabbath**. This was a specific command that they not venture out of their homes in order to congregate for any assembled worship.

The reason for the command not to venture out of their homes was based on the purpose for which the Sabbath was given. Since it was given as a day of rest, God did not want them to use it for work. The commandment that they stay in their homes guaranteed that they would not obligate one another to venture out for work on this day.

It would be only an assumption to affirm that the patriarchs regarded the seventh day as a special day before the events of Exodus 16. There are no scriptures that state they honored this day above any other day of the week. Nehemiah 9:14 states that God made the Sabbath known to Israel just before they arrived at Mount Sinai after the exodus from Egypt. Exodus 16:22-30, therefore, is a commandment of God that was given in view of the official commandment that would come later with the giving of the law on Mount Sinai.

4. Origin of the Sabbath practice: In the context of John 7, the Jew-

ish religious leaders accused Jesus of violating the Sabbath. In John 7:22, Jesus responded to their accusations, **“Moses therefore gave to you circumcision (not because it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and you on the Sabbath circumcise a man.”** From this verse we learn that the law of circumcision was given **before** the law of the Sabbath. This is true because circumcision came through Abraham who lived many years **before** Moses and the giving of the Sinai law (Gn 17:10). In other words, Abraham and his descendants were practicing circumcision many years before the giving of the law of the Sabbath through Moses at Mount Sinai (Ne 9:13,14).

Jesus did not use the fathers who lived before Moses as examples of those who practiced circumcision on the Sabbath. He used Moses because it was from the time of Moses that the Sabbath was a law of God for Israel. Therefore, **the Sabbath law was not a practiced commandment before it was made known through Moses**. Israel simply did not keep the Sabbath until it was commanded through Moses. At Mount Sinai they were commanded to keep it as a sign of the covenant.

5. Nature of the Sabbath: Contrary to the belief of some, the Sabbath was not a **moral law**. A moral law is a law that is both eternal and

good for the existence of men in their relationships with one another. Jesus said that “*the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath*” (Mk 2:27). He made this statement in the context of what He and His disciples did in passing through the corn (maize) fields, plucking off ears of corn on the Sabbath (Mk 2:23-58; see Mt 12:1-12). What Jesus affirmed to the accusing religious leaders in Mark 2:27,28 was that the Sabbath could be violated if man’s needs were greater. In Matthew 12:1-12 He affirmed that out of necessity one should do that which is good on the Sabbath. Even the Jews circumcised on the Sabbath, if the Sabbath fell on the eighth day after birth (Jn 7:22,23). This view of the Sabbath, therefore, manifested that the Sabbath was not considered to be a moral law in the sight of God. It was not considered a moral law simply because **there is no justification for violating a moral law.**

Jesus did not consider the Sabbath a moral law. It was classified with the ceremonial laws of the Sinai law (See 1 Ch 23:31; 2 Ch 2:4; 8:13; 31:3; Cl 2:16). As all Sabbaths of the Old Testament, the weekly Sabbath was considered a ceremonial law for the benefit of the Jews (Lv 23:2,3). A ceremonial law could be overridden by a greater need or good. Moral laws always had precedence over ceremonial laws. But God nowhere justified

the violation of a moral law by any greater need or good, for there is no greater need above moral laws. Therefore, men were not made for the Sabbath. The Sabbath was made as a physical benefit for man. It was a day of rest.

As a ceremonial law, the Sabbath prohibited many activities of the Jews. They were to kindle no fires (Ex 35:1-3), nor to do any work on this day (Ex 20:10). The Jews were not allowed to leave their dwellings on this day (Ex 16:27-29; Lv 23:3). Those who violated the Sabbath were to be put to death (Ex 31:15; 35:2; see Nm 15:32-36).

We must keep in mind, however, that by the time Jesus came, the Jews had added many religious rites and rituals that were connected to the Sabbath, such as the Sabbath day’s journey. These “traditional laws” of the Jews were added in order to guarantee that the Sabbath was observed. But it is interesting to note that none of these added laws had any reference to an assembly of the Jews. They were laws that were added in order to guarantee that the Sabbath rest be observed.

We must keep in mind that these laws were not a part of the Sinai law. These and many other unnecessary laws and traditions were condemned by Jesus in Mark 7:1-9. It seems that today many people add their own laws

in reference to the Sabbath as a day of assembled worship. But such was never the purpose of the Sabbath as part of the Sinai law. We would conclude, therefore, that the adding of “assembly laws” to the Sabbath would fall under the same condemnation that Jesus made in reference to the scribes and Pharisees who added their traditional laws to the Sinai law.

B. The seventh day was hallowed.

The seventh day of the week was mentioned in a unique way in the Genesis account of creation. Exodus 20:8-11 enlightens us as to why God did the work of creation in six days, and then, ceased from such on the seventh day. It is important to understand why God set aside the seventh day and what application such had for Israel.

1. The seventh day was set apart. The Bible teaches that God **hallowed** the seventh day (Gn 2:3; Ez 44:24; see Ez 20:24). Moses recorded, “*Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy*” (Ex 20:11). “To hallow” or “to sanctify” means “to make holy,” “to consecrate,” “to honor as sacred,” or “to set apart.” In other words, in Genesis 2:1-3 God set the seventh day apart from the other days of the week.

Being set apart, however, does not mean that God made the seventh

day a day of assembled worship. This is not stated in Genesis 2:1-3 nor any other Old Testament passage that discusses the seventh day. The seventh day was sanctified, or set apart from the other days of creation in Genesis, for it was the day on which God ceased creation. This should teach us one of the purposes of the seventh day as it was commanded to Israel. **The seventh day was to be a day of rest for Israel.** This emphasis is in both the Exodus 16 and Exodus 20 discussions of the seventh day.

2. The seventh day was a rest. Exodus 20:8-11 explains at least one reason why God gave the Sabbath to Israel.

Six days you will labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you will not do any work For in six days the Lord made heavens and earth, the sea and all that is in them. And He rested the seventh day (See Ex 20:8-11).

Exodus 20:8-11 explains that God created the universe and rested on the seventh day. Now He could have created the universe in six seconds and rested on the seventh second. But His time of creation was given as an **example for man.**

Exodus 20:8-11 states that He wanted the Israelites to work six days

and rest on the seventh. He told the Israelites that the seventh day was the “*rest, of the holy Sabbath to the Lord*” (Ex 16:23). If anyone was caught working on this day, he was to be put to death (Ex 31:14,15). Therefore, the Sabbath was set apart for Israel as a day of rest.

There is a vast difference between hallowing a specific day (that is, setting it apart) as a day of rest and instituting such as a day of worship. Israel was commanded to hallow many material things (Ex 28:38; see 2 Kg 12:4). Even the temple was set apart for a specific purpose (2 Ch 7:16). The setting apart of something for a specific purpose is the only significance we can attach to the meaning of hallowing. One would certainly not contend that because a physical thing was hallowed that it was then to be worshiped.

It would be wrong to contend that because the seventh day was hallowed, it subsequently became a day of assembled worship. Israel was commanded to hallow the **fiftieth year**, the year of Jubilee (Lv 25:8-12). Planting of crops was not to be done during this year. It was a year of **rest** for the land. But it was not a year of rest in the sense that Israel ceased all work. The people still had to prepare food for themselves. They had to feed their livestock.

Because the fiftieth year was hal-

lowed did not mean that it was a year of worship on every day of the entire year. Those today who say that we must observe the Sabbath as a day of assembled worship because God hallowed it have certainly forgotten that God also hallowed the fiftieth year. Are we to quit our jobs every fiftieth year in order that we might give 365 days to assembled worship? This at least illustrates the point that the Sabbath was never set aside as a day of assembled worship because it was hallowed. It was simply set apart as a day of rest, a solemn rest.

It is difficult to understand exactly what the Israelites did on the Sabbath. At least Exodus 16:29 was a command that they stay in their homes. They did not assemble in groups, for they were a rural people scattered throughout the land of Palestine. There are no instructions in the Sinai law in reference to any weekly assembly of the people.

One must also keep in mind that the “synagogue assemblies” about which we read in the New Testament **were not a part of the Sinai law**. Synagogues did not come into the Israelite religious culture until after the Babylonian captivity of 536 B.C. On the Sabbath, the Jews possibly had family prayer and devotions. The Old Testament does not give us any information as to exactly what they did on this day. We would be cautious, there-

fore, to make any conclusions concerning what was done on the Sabbath among the Jewish families.

The strict observance of the Sabbath laws can be understood only in the context of the theocratic government of Israel as a rural culture. In this theocracy, God ruled Israel directly as a nation from heaven through the Sinai law. Israel did not have a central government as the world has today. In Israel, civil laws were determined by God in the giving of the Sinai law.

The law that one was to be stoned if he violated the Sabbath existed because the Sabbath law came directly from God (Ex 31:14,15). The law that people stay in their homes on the Sabbath also came directly from God (Ex 16:29). Therefore, if one violated the Sabbath by leaving his home, he was violating a commandment of God, since the law came directly from God in the theocratic system of Israel's government. Therefore, the keeping of the Sabbath law that one not leave his home on this day could exist only as a theocratic system of law under which Israel lived.

We would assume that the harsh law in reference to the violation of the Sabbath is in that the Sabbath was a sign of the covenant that God made with Israel. If the nations saw that the Jews ignored the laws concerning the Sabbath, then they would con-

clude that the laws of their God were not relevant to their behavior. They would also conclude that the Jews living in violation of that which was a sign of their special covenant relationship with God.

People throughout the world during Israel's existence were not obligated to keep the Sabbath because they were not under the theocracy of the Sinai law. People today throughout the world are also not obligated to keep the Sabbath law simply because we too do not live under a theocratic system of the Sinai law that was given only to Israel directly from God. Jesus never instituted the Sabbath as a sign of the covenant that Christians now have with God.

For one to use the Old Testament in order to bind the Sabbath on people today, is to do an injustice to the Sinai law itself. The Sinai law was given to Israel in their theocratic covenant relationship with God. Christians today throughout the world do not live in theocratic governments that have come directly from God. Therefore, those today who try to bind on the consciences of Christians laws concerning the Sabbath are forcing believers today to go out of their homes on the Sabbath. There are some who have to work at their secular jobs on Saturday because of the demands of their employers. Are these people to be stoned?

It is erroneous to extract out of a theocratic system of law specific laws that should apply to believers who live under secular governments through-

out history and throughout the world. Such manifests a failure to understand the very purpose for which the Sinai law was given to the nation of Israel.

Chapter 10

THE SIGN OF THE SABBATH

The observance of the Sabbath was not a commandment to be obeyed by those who lived **before** the giving of the Sinai law on Mount Sinai. The keeping of the Sabbath law was given through Moses to Israel and not through any patriarch who lived before him. Neither was the Sabbath bound on the Gentiles who lived contemporary with the Jews. We have no Bible commandment stating that the Gentiles were to keep the Sabbath. Isaiah 56:6,7 teaches that *“the stranger”* (the Gentile) had to become a **Jewish proselyte** before the Sabbath law was binding on him. Today, there is no commandment that Christians are to be subject to the Sabbath law. The keeping of the Sabbath was between God and Israel. **It was a sign of the covenant that God established with the nation of Israel in their theocratic relationship with God.**

God initiated a covenant with the nation. He established a covenant with Israel in fulfillment of a promise that He made to Abraham (Gn 12:1-4). At the time of the Israelites' entrance into the promise land, Moses stood up before Israel and said in Deuteronomy 5:2,3 that *“the Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. The Lord did not make this covenant with our fathers, but with us, even all of us here alive this day.”*

A covenant was established on Mount Sinai (Mount Horeb) between God and Israel. It was not established with anyone before or after Mount Sinai who was not of the nation of Israel. This covenant was with Israel and with no other nation. Therefore, the conditions for maintaining this covenant relationship with God were applicable only to the nation of Israel. One of these conditions was the keeping of the Sabbath.

A. God initiated and established a covenant with Israel.

B. God gave the Sabbath as a sign of the covenant.

When Israel was at Mount Sinai,

The Sabbath was a **sign. It was**

a sign of the covenant that God established with Israel at Mount Sinai. The fact that the keeping of the Sabbath was a sign to all nations that God had a special covenant relationship with Israel reveals that **no other nation was keeping the Sabbath.** Israel's keeping of the Sabbath would not be a sign of God's covenant with Israel if all other nations were also honoring the Sabbath.

The Sabbath and the rite of circumcision were both visible signs of a special covenant relationship that God made with Israel. God said to Moses,

*Speak also to the **children of Israel**, saying: "Surely My **Sabbaths you will keep. For it is a sign between Me and you** throughout your generations so that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you" (Ex 31:13).*

The sign of the Sabbath was to be kept throughout their generations, that is, throughout the generations of Israel. God was not referring to the generations of any other nation than the nation of Israel. Therefore, the commandment of Exodus 31:13 refers specifically to the nation of Israel. It does not refer to us today.

Through Ezekiel, God stated, "*Furthermore, I also give them [Israel] My Sabbaths, to be a sign be-*

tween Me and them" (Ez 20:12; see verse 20). The Sabbath, therefore, was given to Israel as a sign of God's covenant with the house of Israel. It was a sign that God set Israel aside as His own people (Ex 31:13). It was a sign of His creative power (Ex 31:17) and His deliverance of Israel from Egyptian captivity (Dt 5:15). Therefore, it was not given as a day of worship or a law to be observed by any other people. Israel was given the Sabbath, and thus, required to keep the Sabbath as a sign of the covenant between God and the nation.

If one contends that the Sabbath is to be bound on all believers today as it was bound on Israel as a sign of their covenant relationship with God, then the giving of the Sabbath as a sign of their covenant with God meant nothing. **The signs of circumcision and the Sabbath were signals to the rest of the world that God had established a special covenant relationship with the nation of Israel.** If the signs of circumcision and the Sabbath were to be practiced by all nations of the world, then obedience to the signs would not signal anything to other people. Therefore, that which was meant to be a sign of a covenant between God and Israel alone cannot be a sign of a supposed covenant between God and any other nation of people.

C. **The covenant was established only with Israel.**

It was Israel that God brought out of Egyptian captivity. It was Israel that received the Sinai law on Mount Sinai. And it was to Israel that Moses said, “*The Lord your God commanded you [Israel] to keep the Sabbath day*” (Dt 5:15). It should be clear, therefore, that God gave the Sabbath to Israel alone (Ne 9:13,14). It was not given to anyone else. This includes all Christians who have lived after the cross of Christ. For this reason, Paul told the Colossian Christians, “*Therefore, let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or of a new moon or sabbaths* (Cl 2:16). Since the covenant was established with Israel alone, only Israel was obligated to keep the sign of the covenant.

In Isaiah 56:6,7, Isaiah wrote,

Also the sons of the foreigner who join themselves to the LORD in order to serve Him, and to love the name of the LORD in order to be His servants—everyone who keeps the Sabbath from polluting it, and takes hold of My covenant, even them I will bring to My holy mountain and make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted upon My altar, for My house will be called a

house of prayer for all people.

The above passage is often used to defend the position that the Sabbath law was extended to the Gentiles, and thus, to all believers today. In other words, in order to be blessed by God, the Gentiles should have kept the Sabbath. For this reason it is assumed that we should keep the Sabbath today.

But notice carefully that Isaiah 56:6,7 is talking about the Gentile who **became a Jewish proselyte**. It talks about those who would accept the entire Sinai law and come into the covenant relationship that God had established with Israel. Keeping this covenant would include keeping the animal sacrifices. Since there are those today who would use this passage to prove that Christians should keep the Sabbath, then they are obligated to teach that the animal sacrifices should also be instituted. If one takes the Sabbath from this passage to be applicable today, then he must also take the animal sacrifices.

In Ephesians 2:12 Paul stated that the Gentiles were “*aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise.*” They “*do not have law*” (Rm 2:14) because the oracles of God were committed to the Jews (Rm 3:2). The oracles of God were not given to the Gentiles. The Gentiles were “*a law*

to themselves” (Rm 2:14). They did not receive the Mount Sinai covenant, neither were they subject to the Sinai law that included the Sabbath.

If the keeping of the Sabbath as a sign between God and man in general was a binding law on the Gentiles before Israel arrived at Mount Sinai, then the significance of the sign of the Sabbath would have meant nothing. If all those who were servants of God other than the nation of Israel also kept the Sabbath as a sign of a covenant, then there would be no distinction between the sign of the covenant with Israel and any other people.

The significance of the sign of the Sabbath was unique in that it was

given to Israel alone. The Israelites’ observance of the Sabbath was their manifestation that they were obeying the conditions of the covenant. When the nations around Israel asked concerning Israel’s observance of the Sabbath, they could reply that they observed the Sabbath because of their covenant relationship with God. When their children asked concerning the observance of the Sabbath, the parents could reply that they kept the Sabbath because of their covenant relationship as a nation with God. Since the nations around Israel did not keep the Sabbath, then Israel was unique in her relationship with God because the people kept the Sabbath.

Chapter 11

DAILY WORSHIP OF CHRISTIANS

It must be understood that the Sabbath was not given to Israel as a day of assembled worship. It was given as a sign to the world of a covenant that God had established with Israel. As a ceremonial law of the covenant, it was given as a day of rest. However, when the Sinai law passed away in Christ, the significance of the Sabbath as a sign between God and Israel also passed away.

Someone might ask, “Then what is the correct day of worship for Christians?” The answer to this question

is **every day**. God simply did not designate for Christians a “day of worship.” The phrase “day of worship” is found nowhere in the New Testament. For the Christian, every day of the week is an opportunity for worship. The Christian’s worship is not confined to a specific day.

This would have also been true of the Israelites under the Sinai law. The Sabbath was not designated as a day of worship. It was hallowed, that is, it was set apart as a day of rest. However, it was not set apart as a spe-

cial day of worship from every other day of the week. What worship the Jews did on the Sabbath did not minimize their responsibility to worship on every day of the week.

The Christian has been crucified with Christ (Gl 2:20). He does not have a designated day off from his sacrificial life of worship. The individual Christian is a priest of God (1 Pt 2:5,9). He does not have a day off from service as a priest. The Christian has presented his body a living sacrifice to God (Rm 12:1,2). He does not have a day wherein he can ignore his commitment to live the gospel of a sacrificial life. Our worshipful reverence of God is not confined to one day of the week. Though the Christian worships on Sunday with others, this does not mean that he will not worship every day throughout the week.

The early New Testament Christians understood the fact that their entire lives were committed to worship and service of God. *“And continuing **daily** with one accord in the temple and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and sincerity of heart”* (At 2:46). *“And **daily** in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ”* (At 5:42). Christianity is not a once-a-week worship and service of God. It is a daily commitment to serve

and praise God throughout one’s life.

Once one develops the thinking that his worship of God is confined to one day of the week, then he develops the thinking that the rest of the week belongs to himself. He can thus confine God to a location, time and day of the week. He feels that he can then escape into the world where he can live as he pleases. When he leaves the “location of worship” and the “hour of worship,” he feels he can escape into the secular world wherein he feels no obligation to worship God. His supposed “Christianity” is thus confined to a location (building) and a “worship hour” on a certain day of the week. Such thinking is entirely contrary to the nature of the gospel-centered life that is revealed in the New Testament.

Those who have emphasized Saturday as the day of worship for Christians have fallen into the above theology concerning the Sabbath. Their emphasis on the Sabbath as the correct day for “Christian worship” has led them to confine their worship of God to a specific day of the week, and thus, there is less emphasis on dedicated worship of God throughout the rest of the week. They have localized both God and worship to a specific location and day, and thus, released themselves from a reverential worship of God at any time throughout the week.

In the business/industrial world it has been easy for some to develop a concept of worship that is foreign to the New Testament. In the business/industrial world everything is departmentalized. We have time that is designed for work on the job. There is time that is designated for play, for the family, and for a vacation. Our lives are departmentalized because of the world in which we live. It is easy in such a world to departmentalize one's worship. Such is what has happened with many in the religious world. We have departmentalized our worship of God to a specific location and to a time (the "hour of worship").

Many have even confined their worship to the actions of a few ceremonies that are performed. When the worship ceremonies have been performed, they as worshippers can walk away having soothed their conscience that they have completed their worship for the week. But such thinking and behavior is contrary to gospel living. Once Satan has convinced one that he has worshiped God in a specific place and time on a specific day, then he has that person the rest of the week. Once the worshipper has convinced himself that he can departmentalize his worship, then Satan has him when he lives outside his departmentalized "hour of worship." God gets the person for the "hour of worship" and Satan has him the rest of

the week.

The New Testament does emphasize an assembly of Christians on the first day of the week, not the Sabbath. The purpose for this assembly is to meet together for the opportunity to exhort one another in song and singing praises to God as a group. It is an opportunity for Christians to stir one another unto love and good works (Hb 3:13; 10:24,25). It is an opportunity where Christians can bring their worshipful attitudes together in order to praise God in an assembly of worshipful saints.

The disciples' gathering together is an opportunity to worship God together. However, the worship of Christians together on the first day of the week does not confine their worship to just one day of the week. Simply because the New Testament emphasizes the first day of the week (Sunday) as a special time when the early Christians came together, does not mean that their worship was confined to this one day of the week.

There are two sources of information that emphasize the first day of the week as the day on which the early disciples had a special assembly for exhortation and praise of God. The first source is the inspired record of the New Testament. This is our primary source. But to emphasize the practice of the early Christians, we also read the early historical writings

of the early church leaders. This gives us information concerning how the early Christians put their gospel living into practice.

But we must caution ourselves on using the example of the early Christians meeting on the first day of the week to establish a law for the assembly of the saints. We must keep in mind those passages that speak of the early Christians meeting on a daily basis. Mention of the early Christians' meeting on the first day of the week cannot establish a law for the meeting of the church, **otherwise we would be inconsistent if we did not also bind as a law their meeting on a daily basis.**

A. The New Testament emphasizes Sunday.

Though every day of the week is an opportunity for worship, the New Testament indicates that indeed Sunday was the Christians' special day of assembly. It was a day of assembly, though the New Testament does not explain the Sunday assembly as an exclusive day of worship. Since Christians worshiped God throughout the week, we only assume that when they came together into assembly on Sunday, they worshiped God. This is the correct deduction from passages that refer to the first day of the week in the New Testament. Therefore, the

emphasis on the first day of the week in the New Testament is made for several reasons.

1. Jesus was resurrected on Sunday. According to the gospel records, Jesus was resurrected on the first day of the week (See Mk 16:1ff; Lk 24:1ff; Jn 20:1ff). Mark 16:9 reads, "*Now when Jesus was risen early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene.*" Mark clearly states that Jesus was resurrected on Sunday, not Saturday.

2. The Holy Spirit was poured out on Sunday. It is also important to notice that the promise concerning the baptism with the Holy Spirit was fulfilled on the first day of the week (See Jl 2:28-31; At 2:1-4,16ff). The events of Acts 2 took place on the Jewish feast day of Pentecost. Leviticus 23 explains that the day of Pentecost was the day after seven Sabbaths after Passover. This would be Sunday, the first day of the week.

3. The first gospel sermon was preached on Sunday. After the baptism of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:1-4, Peter stood up with the eleven apostles and made the first proclamation that Jesus was King and head over all things. He preached the incarnation, death, burial and resurrection, ascension and coronation of Jesus (At 2:22-36). This was the first official announcement of

Jesus' gospel reign. This all took place on a Sunday, the first day of the week.

4. The church was established on Sunday. The church was established on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 when men and women submitted to the first official announcement of the gospel reign of King Jesus (At 2:41,47). Pentecost is on Sunday as stated in the previous point. Therefore, the church was established on Sunday.

The first day of the week was important to the early Christians because of the preceding major events. This day later became known to Christians as the "**Lord's day**" (Rv 1:10). It was upon this day that the early Christians assembled for the purpose of partaking of the Lord's Supper. Luke records, "**Now on the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread Paul had discussions**" (At 20:7). This was a regular meeting day of the early Christians. Since it was the regular time of meeting of the saints, Paul encouraged the Corinthian brethren to take this opportunity to contribute to those of Judea who were suffering from a famine. He wrote, "**On the first day of the week let each one of you put something aside**" (1 Co 16:1,2). This was the early Christians' regular meeting time (See 1 Co 11:17-24). It was on

this day that the early Christians assembled to exhort one another through fellowship.

The Sabbath is mentioned six times in the book of Acts in relation to the activities of early Christians (See At 13:14,42; 15:21; 16:13; 17:2; 18:4). However, it is mentioned in reference to the activities of the early evangelists who were preaching the gospel to the Jews. It is thus mentioned in an **historical context**. In other words, Luke historically recorded in Acts that the early evangelists went to the synagogues on the Sabbath **for the purpose of preaching and teaching the Jews who were assembled there** (At 9:20; 18:1-4,19). Paul "*reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks*" (At 18:4). Paul's specific purpose for being in the synagogue on the Sabbath, therefore, was **evangelistic**, not worship. He went there on the Sabbath because that was where the lost sheep of Israel were located on that particular day. It was there that the most spiritually minded Jews were located. Therefore, it was to the synagogues he went when he entered into cities on his missionary journeys.

The case of Aquila and Priscilla illustrates the evangelistic outreach of the early Christians in the synagogues. After partnering with Paul in Corinth, Aquila and Priscilla went with Paul

to Ephesus (At 18:18,19). Paul left the couple in Ephesus and he traveled on to Jerusalem. When in Ephesus, Aquila and Priscilla continued their evangelistic outreach, meeting regularly in the synagogue of the Jews. On one particular Sabbath, they encountered a young man named Apollos from Alexandria, Egypt (At 18:24-28).

What happened in the conversion of Apollos illustrates the reason why the early Jewish Christians continued to meet in synagogues for some time after the establishment of the early church. The synagogue was the religious center where those interested in the Scriptures went for fellowship and cultural identity as Jews. And for this reason, the early synagogues were the ideal place to discuss the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies.

In reviewing the preceding material, we could also approach this subject from a different perspective. The Holy Spirit guided the apostles into all the truth (Jn 14:26; 16:13). The apostles received and preached all this truth to the early Christians (At 20:27). They taught by word of mouth (At 2:40), by inspired letters (1 Co 14:37; 1 Tm 3:16,17), and by **example** (1 Co 4:16; 11:1; Ph 3:17; 1 Th 1:6). The apostles taught the significance of the Lord's Supper. They emphasized that Christians should partake of the Supper in remembrance

of Jesus (Mt 26:26-28; 1 Co 11:23-26). They were to observe it when they "*came together*" (1 Co 11:17-26). But there is **no direct command** recorded in the New Testament concerning the **day** Christians should set aside to partake of the Lord's Supper. However, we do have an example of the **day** on which the early Christians celebrated with the love feast, during which they partook of the Supper. This day was the first day of the week, Sunday (At 20:7).

The early Christians were meeting on the first day of the week. We therefore suppose that the apostles taught the first Christians to assemble on Sunday for the love feast and Supper. Therefore, we conclude that the early Christians came together on this day on a regular basis in order to partake of the Lord's Supper during their love feasts. Since the Lord's Supper was the greatest memorial of the Christian's life, then we would assume that it would be only natural for the early Christians to gather regularly as often as possible in order to remember Jesus and the cross of grace.

B. The early church writers emphasized Sunday.

Under Roman law, there was no Sunday day off from work. The Roman economic system possibly gave a day off to slaves on Saturday, but in

a historical context where Christianity was persecuted, Sunday was not observed as a Christian holiday. The persecuting Roman government certainly did not give the Christians a Sunday holiday since some Caesars sought to stamp out Christianity. For this reason, the early Christians surely met in the evenings on Sunday because those who were slaves could not meet during the day.

The early Christian writings of the second century state that the early Christians assembled for exhortation on Sunday. These are Christian writings that were produced during the second century. We must remember, however, that these writings were **not inspired**. Nevertheless, these writings do give us a good commentary on the assembly practices of Christians who lived only a few decades after the first Christians. The following are some statements that were made by these early Christian writers:

1. Epistle of Barnabas (A.D. 150):

“Wherefore, also, we keep the eighth day (Sunday) with joyfulness, the day also on which Jesus arose again from the dead” (chapter 15).

2. Ignatius (A.D. 107): *“... let every friend of Christ keep the Lord’s day.”* Also in *Magnesians* (chapter 9:1), Ignatius wrote, *“If then they who walk in ancient customs come to a new hope, no longer living for*

the Sabbath, but for the Lord’s day on which also our life sprang up through him and his death.” (Note that this statement explains that these second century Christians did not understand the “Lord’s day” to refer to the Sabbath.)

3. Justin Martyr (A.D. 140): *“But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly”* (*First Apology*, chapter 67).

4. The Didache (A.D. 150): *“On the Lord’s Day of the Lord come together ...”* (chapter 14).

5. Tertullian (A.D. 197): *“We solemnize the day after Saturday in contradistinction to those who call this day their Sabbath”* (*Apology*, chapter 16).

Though these statements were made in the second century, it is doubtful that Christians would have fallen away from such an important day of regular assembly in such a short time after the first century. In other words, if Saturday were the day of assembly in the first century, then it is unlikely that they would have given up that day for Sunday by the time the above church historians wrote. It is more reasonable to assume that Sunday was always the special day on which the early Christians assembled for mutual edification and worship.

The claim by some that the Roman Catholic church changed the assembly of Christians from the Sabbath

to Sunday is not true. Some have affirmed that Constantine, the Emperor of Rome, made such a change in A.D. 313 in the Edict of Milan. But the above quotes clearly show that the first day of the week was the Christians' day of assembly years before the Edict of Milan was issued by Constantine. Christians were meeting on Sunday before the existence of the Catholic Church.

There is simply no rational argument that proves that the early Christians assembled for mutual edification and worship on the Sabbath. The Scriptures affirm that Sunday was a special day for assembly. History confirms this fact, and thus, the truth is that the early Christians assembled on Sunday. Now to determine exactly the purpose of the assembly is another topic. But to state that the Sabbath was a special time of assembled worship for the early Christians is simply not true.

The context of Hebrew 10:24,25 should be considered since it speaks of the assembly of Christians. The writer stated,

And let us consider one another to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembly of ourselves together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and so much the more as you see the day approaching.

This statement does not mention the time of the assembly of Christians. It does not mention the location. It does not mention how many times Christians are to assemble. It does not mention how many of the Christians in a particular area are to meet together at any one time.

Hebrews 10:24,25 does mention what Christians are to do in reference to some of their assemblies. They are to stir up love and good works. The assembly about which Hebrews 10:24,25 speaks is an occasion wherein Christians are to encourage one another to express their love for one another. This would certainly not be a love that is expressed only at the time of assembly. It would be love that would be expressed throughout their time of contact with one another.

Hebrews 10:24,25 also states that Christians are to assemble in order to stir up good works. In other words, the assembly should deal with the planning and implementation of doing good deeds to others. The assembly about which Hebrews 10:24,25 speaks is a meeting wherein Christians plan good works in order to manifest their love for one another and others. Since the context does not mention the time of these assemblies, then we would assume that Christians are not to forsake assemblies wherein plans are made for implementing the expression of our love through good works.

We must always keep in mind that the historical context of Hebrews 10:24,25 is the apostasy of some Jewish Christians who were seeking to return to Judaism. The purpose of the assembly about which the Hebrew writer was speaking was to prevent an apostasy from the gospel of Jesus. Their meeting together any time of the week was to bring them into closer contact with one another, and thus strengthen the fellowship of the disciples.

Throughout the New Testament, emphasis is on Christians assembling

together. However, there is no emphasis on the Sabbath as a special day for their assembly. All emphasis in the New Testament is on Sunday. The absence of any statements concerning Christians assembling on the Sabbath should speak clearly that there is no religious significance on the Sabbath in the New Testament. Therefore, Christians cannot be judged in reference to keeping the Sabbath since a special observance of the Sabbath was never a part of the function of the body of Christ.

Chapter 12

ABOLISHMENT OF THE SABBATH LAW

There is no revelation in the New Testament concerning the Christian's relationship with the Sabbath other than for evangelistic purposes as is illustrated in the ministry of Paul, Aquila and Priscilla. However, we could assume that those Jews who obeyed the gospel would have in some way continued to honor the Sabbath for some time after the establishment of the church. Though they would have assembled on Sundays, they would have in some way met at the synagogues for the traditional reading of the Old Testament Scriptures.

The Gentiles would not have been bound to the Sabbath traditions,

and thus, would not have met on the Sabbath for any reason. It seems that some Jewish brethren sought to bind the Sabbath on the Gentiles, and thus, Paul wrote the exhortation of Colossians 2:16 wherein he stated, "*Therefore, let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival, or a new moon, or of sabbaths.*"

Though God was patient with the early Jewish converts in transitioning from the Sabbath to the first day of the week, in the time of transition, the Jews were not to bind the Sabbath on the church.

The following points are questions that are often asked by those who

would bind the observance of the Sabbath on Christians today. These questions are presented in this last chapter in order to review the Sabbath laws of the Sinai law. In answering these arguments that are used to defend the observance of the Sabbath today, it is clearly seen that the Sabbath law is no longer applicable to Christians.

A. “If the ten commandments were abolished, then we would not be under any law of God?”

Those who state this objection often fail to realize that the people of God have always been under a law of God, even before the ten commandment law was given on Mount Sinai. The patriarchs who lived before the giving of the Jewish law on Mount Sinai were subject to God’s laws that were given through the fathers (Hb 1:1).

Those who contend that we would be under no law today if the ten commandment law were abolished, must also say that the patriarchs who lived before Mount Sinai were under no law before the ten commandments were given. But the Bible clearly states that the patriarchs were subject to a law of God (See Hb 1:1,2). Christians are also under the gospel of grace today, but not the law given specifically to the Jews at Mount Sinai.

Today, the disciples of Christ are subject to “*the law of Christ*” (Rm 8:2; 1 Co 9:21; Gl 6:2). James identifies this as “*the perfect law of liberty*” (Js 1:25; 2:12). By it we must live and by it we will be judged. We must continually be reminded of what Jesus said in John 12:48. “*He who rejects Me and does not receive My words, has that which judges him. The word that I have spoken, the same will judge him in the last day.*” This is a clear statement that Jesus’ disciples will be judged by His words, not the Sinai law that included the ten commandments.

This is exactly what Jesus meant in Matthew 5. Christians should not be bound to the Sinai law, neither to any Jewish interpretations of that law. Jesus emphasized in Matthew 5 that we should obey Him and not the religious traditions and interpretations of the Sinai law (See Mt 5:21,33,38,43).

It is interesting to compare the ten commandments with New Testament teachings. The principles of the ten commandments can be found in the New Testament with the exception of the fourth commandment which is the keeping of the Sabbath. The general moral laws that are the foundation of the ten commandments are eternal laws. In the Sinai law they were included in order to represent the entire law given to Israel.

With the exception of the Sab-

bath, moral laws are to be observed by man in any age of time on earth. The following list of the New Testament scriptures state the principles of nine of the ten commandments in the New Testament. The fourth commandment is not stated:

**“NINE COMMANDMENTS”
IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**

1. **Worship one God:** See Matthew 4:10; Acts 14:15; 17:23-28; 1 Corinthians 8:5,6; Revelation 22:9
2. **Do not worship idols:** See Acts 14:15; 15:20; 17:29; Romans 1:20-25; 1 Corinthians 8:4-6; 10:7; 1 John 5:21
3. **Do not swear:** See Matthew 5:34; 12:36; Ephesians 4:29; Colossians 3:8; James 5:12
4. **Keep the Sabbath:** ???
5. **Obey parents:** See Ephesians 6:1-3; Colossians 3:20; 1 Timothy 5:8
6. **Do not hate:** See Matthew 5:21,22, 38,39; Romans 13:9; 1 Peter 4:15; 1 John 3:15
7. **Do not lust:** See Matthew 5:27,28; 19:8,9; 1 Corinthians 6:9; Galatians 5:19
8. **Do not steal:** See 1 Corinthians 6:10; Ephesians 4:28; 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12; 1 Peter 4:15
9. **Do not lie:** See Ephesians 4:25; Colossians 3:9; Revelation 21:8; 22:15
10. **Do not covet:** See Luke 12:15; 1 Corinthians 5:11; Ephesians 5:3; Colossians 3:5

B. “We should keep the Sabbath because Jesus and the early disciples kept it.”

Jesus did honor the Sabbath. The disciples who lived before Acts 2 also kept the Sabbath. They did because they, as Jews, lived under the Sinai law.

1. Jesus lived under the Sinai law. Jesus was a Jew who lived before the establishment of the new covenant. He was therefore subject to the Sinai law. He kept the Sabbath (Lk 4:16). However, we must keep in mind that He came to take away the Sinai law (Hb 10:9). He did not do so, however, until His death on the cross and resurrection to fulfill all prophecy concerning Him. At the cross, the Sinai law was nailed to the cross with Him. Paul says that it was at the cross that Jesus blotted “*out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He took it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross*” (Cl 2:14).

To replace the Sinai law, Jesus enacted a new covenant. He enacted His covenant that was based on the gospel (Hb 9:15-17). The law of this covenant does not contain the Sabbath ordinance. Therefore, all who live in a covenant relationship with Jesus today are not subject to the Sinai law and the Sabbath. They are subject to the gospel of Christ.

2. Christians evangelized in the synagogues on the Sabbath. It has already been stated why the early Christians went to the synagogues on Saturday. They went there to evangelize. Therefore, because Paul and the first Christians took this opportunity to preach the gospel to the Jews on the Sabbath does not mean that we should observe the Sabbath today as a day of assembled worship. We must remember that the early evangelists also went to pagan temples to preach the gospel. But this does not mean that we must worship in pagan temples on pagan days of worship.

3. Keeping part of the Sinai law means that we must keep all of it. If we use the Sinai law as the authority by which we should keep the Sabbath, then we must wonder concerning all the other Jewish feast days and ordinances of the Sinai law that Jesus kept. Should we keep all these other ordinances? If Jesus' observance of the Sabbath proves that we must observe it today, then His observance of Pentecost, animal sacrifices and every other ordinance of the Jewish law, proves that we must obey them also. Paul said in Galatians 5:3 that if we obey part of the law in order to be justified before God, such as circumcision or keeping the Passover, then we are "*obligated to keep the whole law.*" In other words, if one desires to keep the Sabbath of the Sinai law in order

to be justified before God, then he must also offer animal sacrifices.

If one would keep any part of the Sinai law in order to be justified before God, then he must assume the burden of keeping the entire Sinai law as his means of justification. However, one cannot keep the Sinai law perfectly in order to be justified (See Rm 3:20; Gl 2:16). This is why Christians rejoice. They are under grace and truth that bring justification apart from meritorious law-keeping (Jn 1:17).

4. The Sinai law and its ordinances have been taken out of the way. Jesus said that He came to **fulfill** the law (Mt 5:17,18). Fulfillment of the law meant taking it out of the way by completing the purpose for which it was given. When He fulfilled it, therefore, it was blotted out (Hb 8:7-13). This is exactly what the Holy Spirit inspired Paul and all the other apostles to teach (Rm 7:1-6; Gl 3:23-25; Ep 2:11-21; 4:21-5:1).

Concerning the abolishment of the Sabbath, Jesus did not contradict Paul and Paul did not contradict himself or Jesus. Paul said that the Sinai law was dead and that men should not be brought under its bondage again (Rm 7:4; Gl 5:4; Cl 2:16). Understanding this is essential to understand the Bible. Christians are now under the grace of God. Their response to the gospel of God's grace has delivered

them from the bondage of law-keeping.

C. “Should we not keep the Sabbath because it is a ‘perpetual’ commandment?”

Exodus 31:16,17 is often used to promote the position that the Sinai law would continue in force after the revelation of the gospel in Acts 2. Verse 16 says, “Therefore the **children of Israel** will keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath **throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant.**”

In examining this and similar scriptures, we must remember that the covenant that God made with Israel was to last only “**throughout their generations.**” The perpetuity of the law was based on this condition. It was a “forever” covenant only in the sense that the generations of Israel continued in the sight of God. However, the generations of Israel have ceased. God no longer considers the Jews to be a separated nation of people for His purpose of redemption.

The Jews continue as a culture of people, but this does not mean that God is using them in reference to our salvation as He did the Jews before the cross. What is important to remember now are the following points in reference to all those who obey the gospel:

1. The generations of Israel ended in Christ. God promised Israel in Jeremiah 31:31 that He was going to “*make a new covenant*” with the houses of Israel and Judah. This new covenant would **include all nations.** This new covenant of which Jeremiah wrote was to be established between the Messiah and all those who would submit to the conditions of the covenant.

The Hebrew writer quoted Jeremiah 31:31 in Hebrews 8:8-13 and applied the promise of Jeremiah 31:31 to the new covenant of Christ. Under this new covenant there is **no distinction of race or nationality.** All are one “**in Christ.**” Paul wrote,

*For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. **There is neither Jew nor Greek. There is neither bondservant nor free. There is neither male nor female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus** (Gl 3:27,28; see Ep 2:11-21).*

Therefore, the generations of Israel ended when the new covenant was established. Today “*he is a Jew who is one inwardly*” (Rm 2:29). When one obeys the gospel, he or she is not considered be special in reference to nationality. In other words, when a Jew obeys the gospel, he is no longer a Jew in Christ, though culturally, he would retain his cultural identity. But

in the eyes of God, he is simply a son of God.

2. *The perpetual covenant of the Sabbath ceased.* The covenant that included the Sabbath was to last until the establishment of the new covenant. God intended that the old covenant end at the time of the revelation of the gospel. The Sinai covenant and law was taken away in order that the gospel of the Jesus be established (Hb 10:9). Therefore, when the new covenant was established, the ordinances of the old Sinai law ceased. These ordinances would include the Sabbath. The perpetual nature of the Sinai law meant that it would be binding until the time God intended that it end. It ended when people first responded to the preaching of the gospel of Jesus. In Acts 2 in A.D. 30 about 3,000 people died to the Sabbath law when they obeyed the gospel (At 2:38,41).

3. *There were other Sinai laws that were also perpetual ordinances.* We must remember that there were many Sinai laws that were considered “perpetual,” “forever,” and “everlasting.” The Jewish Passover (Ex 12:24; Lv 23:5), incense (Ex 30:8), burnt offerings (Ex 29:42; 40:15) and Pentecost (Lv 23:14-21) were all perpetual ordinances of the Sinai law. Even the land of Palestine was to be a perpetual possession of Israel (Lv 25:34).

All the preceding ordinances and possessions were part of the Sinai law that was abolished when one obeyed the gospel in order to come into Christ. They are not binding today on any person who has obeyed the gospel. Therefore, we must understand that “perpetual,” “forever” and “everlasting” refer to that which is to last **only throughout its intended age of duration.**

God used words as “perpetual,” “forever,” and “everlasting” in the Old Testament in order to emphasize the fact that the ordinances of the Sinai law would **positively not be abolished until the law was fulfilled.** The Sabbath, as well as Pentecost, Passover and the other “perpetual” Jewish laws, were to be strictly obeyed throughout the history of the Jews and until the death of Jesus on the cross. This was what God intended. However, when one obeyed the gospel, he was delivered from every “perpetual” law or ceremony of the Sinai law.

Notice the use of the word “forever” as it is used in Exodus 31:17 in reference to the Sabbath. Moses recorded, “*It [the Sabbath] is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever.*” Some say that this proves that we should be observing Saturday as the Christians’ special day of assembly. But if we take the word “forever” literally, we would be ob-

serving the Sabbath **in heaven**. In other words, if the Sabbath is to be kept forever in the literal sense that some would contend, it will exist throughout eternal heaven.

This, of course, cannot be true, for heaven will not be a place of honoring special days that are determined by the function of time. Such thinking makes heaven a physical realm, with a sun and moon. Heaven is the eternal rest for the Christian. However, we do not believe it will be a place where time will be measured by the days of a week as men now measure time. In our transition into eternal dwelling, we will leave the dimension of time and pass into eternity.

D. “Did not Jesus state in Matthew 5:17,18 that He would not abolish the law?”

If one affirms that Jesus taught that He would not abolish the Sinai law, then he misunderstands the work of Jesus to establish a new covenant in fulfillment of the Sinai law. In order to establish this new covenant, the old covenant had to be abolished. With the abolishment of the old covenant was also the abolishment of the conditions for maintaining the covenant. Therefore, when Jesus came, he came with the intention of abolishing the law of the Sinai covenant by establishing a new covenant.

1. Jesus came to fulfill the law.
In Matthew 5:17,18, Jesus said,

*Do not think that I came to destroy the law or the prophets. I did not come to destroy, **but to fulfill**. For verily I say to you, **until** heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law **until all is fulfilled**.*

Notice that Jesus said the law would not pass away **until** all was accomplished, or fulfilled. The word “until” assumes that there would be a time when the law would be fulfilled. Jesus came to fulfill the law. His work (Jn 5:17) was to work the works of the Father (Jn 9:4; Hb 10:9). He came to accomplish a specific work. That work was to confirm the promises of the Old Testament that were made to the fathers. Therefore, He did His work in order that He might “*confirm the promises made to the fathers*” (Rm 15:8).

Concerning Jesus’ fulfillment of all prophecy in reference to Himself, Paul wrote, “***For all the promises of God in Him are “Yes,” and in Him “Amen,” to the glory of God through us***” (2 Co 1:20). In Matthew 5:17,18 Jesus was saying to His immediate audience that the Sinai law would not be done away until the promises that were made to the fathers had been fulfilled. The law would not be done

away “until” He had accomplished His work of redemption.

2. Jesus fulfilled the Sinai law. At the end of His ministry and while on the cross, Jesus said, “*It is finished*” (Jn 19:30). He had finished His work of doing the redemption work of the Father. After His resurrection, He told the apostles that all things written in the law, prophets and Psalms concerning Him **had been fulfilled** (Lk 24:44). He had fulfilled all prophecies concerning His part in God’s eternal plan of redemption. He had accomplished the purpose of the Sinai law by fulfilling every prophecy in reference to His redemption work. The Sinai law brought man to faith in Christ, and then faded away (Gl 3:23-25; Hb 8:13). Jesus’ work was truly finished when He announced the completion of the redemption prophecies. It was for this reason that Jesus said in Matthew 5:18 that the law would not pass away until all things were accomplished. He fulfilled all prophecies of the Old Testament that were written concerning Himself and the new covenant. He thus fulfilled the purpose for which the Sinai law was given. Therefore, it was blotted out, taken out of the way (Cl 2:14).

The Hebrew writer wrote, “*He takes away the first so that He may establish the second*” (Hb 10:9). Therefore, the Sinai law and covenant

that focused on the Sabbath, has been terminated. For this reason Christians are not obligated to keep any of the Sinai law ordinances or ceremonies in order to be justified before God. Christians are thus not obligated to keep the Sabbath. When Jesus took away the first law, He also took away the Sabbath law.

The Sabbath was not given to Israel until the Sinai covenant and law were made with Israel at Mount Sinai. The Sinai law was given only to one nation, for it was only with Israel that God made the old covenant. The Sabbath was a part of the Sinai covenant. It was a sign of the covenant between God and Israel. But God guided Israel to look forward to a new law and a new covenant. The new covenant would be vastly different from the old law and covenant. The new covenant did not include the observance of the Sabbath. Those who are now in a covenant relationship with God have come into this relationship in their obedience to the gospel. Therefore, they are not under the law that was given to Israel at Mount Sinai. Christians today are under the grace of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Sinai law does not fit into the new order of grace. This does not mean, however, that we throw away our Old Testaments. The Old Testament is not all law. There is history

and wisdom recorded throughout the Old Testament. There are lessons of history wherein we learn how God worked in the affairs of man. It was for this reason that Paul wrote the following:

For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, so that we through patience and encouragement of the Scriptures might have hope (Rm 15:4).

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ABBREVIATIONS

OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis - **Gn**, Exodus - **Ex**, Leviticus - **Lv**, Numbers - **Nm**, Deuteronomy - **Dt**, Joshua - **Ja**, Judges - **Jg**, Ruth - **Rt**, 1 Samuel - **1 Sm**, 2 Samuel - **2 Sm**, 1 Kings - **1 Kg**, 2 Kings - **2 Kg**, 1 Chronicles - **1 Ch**, 2 Chronicles - **2 Ch**, Ezra - **Er**, Nehemiah - **Ne**, Esther - **Et**, Job - **Jb**, Psalms - **Ps**, Proverbs - **Pv**, Ecclesiastes - **Ec**, Song of Solomon - **Ss**, Isaiah - **Is**, Jeremiah - **Jr**, Lamentations - **Lm**, Ezekiel - **Ez**, Daniel - **Dn**, Hosea - **Hs**, Joel - **Jl**, Amos - **Am**, Obadiah - **Ob**, Jonah - **Jh**, Micah - **Mc**, Nahum - **Nh**, Habakkuk - **Hk**, Zephaniah - **Zp**, Haggai - **Hg**, Zechariah - **Zc**, Malachi - **Ml**

NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew - **Mt**, Mark - **Mk**, Luke - **Lk**, John - **Jn**, Acts - **At**, Romans - **Rm**, 1 Corinthians - **1 Co**, 2 Corinthians - **2 Co**, Galatians - **Gl**, Ephesians - **Ep**, Philippians - **Ph**, Colossians - **Cl**, 1 Thessalonians - **1 Th**, 2 Thessalonians - **2 Th**, 1 Timothy - **1 Tm**, 2 Timothy - **2 Tm**, Titus - **Ti**, Philemon - **Pl**, Hebrews - **Hb**, James - **Js**, 1 Peter - **1 Pt**, 2 Peter - **2 Pt**, 1 John - **1 Jn**, 2 John - **2 Jn**, 3 John - **3 Jn**, Jude - **Jd**, Revelation - **Rv**