The Mosaic Or Old Covenant

Hebrews 8:8 and 8:13 speak of the New Covenant. This reveals there was also an Old Covenant. The context of Hebrews 8:1-10:18 shows this Old Covenant was the one God made through the prophet Moses as recorded in the Book of Leviticus and in parts of the Books of Exodus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. When Hebrews 8:7 and 9:1 speak of the "first covenant", they are referring to the Old Covenant.

These expressions “Old Covenant” and “first covenant” are said relative to the New Covenant only. For example, the Old is first and the New second when only these two are considered. Observe God made older covenants than the Old Covenant. These older covenants were obviously the Noahic and Abrahamic Covenants.

Because the Old Covenant was given through Moses, it can be called the Mosaic Covenant. The Mosaic Covenant included the Law of Moses. The Mosaic Covenant was given to the nation of Israel at Mount Sinai after they had left Egypt. Here are some of the main features of this covenant:

- God gave it to the nation of Israel (see Deuteronomy 33:2-4 and Psalm 147:19-20).
- It gave God’s laws for the people of Israel in relation to morals. For example, Exodus 20:2-17 lists the Ten Commandments.
- It provided civil laws by which Israel was to operate as a nation, for example Deuteronomy 19:1-21:21 and Exodus Chapters 21-23.
- It established for Israel a priesthood, religious festivals, sacrifices and offerings, most of which were a symbolic representation of what Jesus Christ was going to achieve through His death (see Hebrews 10:1-18).
- Hebrews 10:28 and Deuteronomy 17:2-6 show that physical death was the punishment due for any Israelite who rejected the Mosaic Covenant and Law. Hebrews 10:28 says: “Anyone who has rejected Moses’ law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.”
- The Mosaic Covenant contained certain aspects of the Abrahamic Covenant (see Leviticus 26:40-42, Deuteronomy 6:10-11, 9:4-6, 29:13 and 30:20).
- God established the Mosaic Covenant on the basis of blood sacrifice – the death of innocent animal substitutes for humans (see Exodus 24:4-8).
- It revealed God is our life (see Deuteronomy 30:20).
- After Jesus’ death and resurrection, for believers the Mosaic Covenant was replaced by the New Covenant (see Jeremiah 31:31-32, Galatians 3:15-25 and Hebrews 7:22-8:13).
- Even during the New Covenant period, the Ten Commandments and other Mosaic moral laws can be used by God to show the unsaved they are eternally condemned because of their sin (see 1 Timothy 1:8-11, Romans 3:20, 7:7 and 7:13).
The Law or “Torah”

In the original Hebrew, the word “law” is torah”. ¹ The word “torah” means “law, direction, instruction” ² or “law, teaching”. ³ The word “torah” is used in relation to God’s ceremonial laws in Leviticus 6:9, 6:14, 6:25, 7:1, 7:11, 7:37, 12:7, 14:2, 14:32, Numbers 5:29-30, 19:2 and 19:14.

“Torah” is used in Leviticus 11:46 relative to distinguishing between clean and unclean animals. In Deuteronomy 1:5, 4:8, 4:44-45, 17:19, 27:26, 28:58, 28:61, 29:21 and 30:10, “torah” is used in a broader sense to refer to all the laws, commandments, testimonies, statutes and judgements found in the Law of Moses. Genesis 26:5 uses “torah” to refer to God’s laws before the Mosaic Law had been given.

Covenant and Law

The Mosaic Law can be described as the written terms and conditions of the Mosaic or Old Covenant. Psalm 78:10 expresses this close relationship between the Mosaic Covenant and Law: “They did not keep the covenant of God; they refused to walk in His law.”

The broader Law of God written on human conscience and summarised in the two love commandments existed prior to the beginning of the Mosaic Covenant (see Genesis 26:5). This broader Law of God applied to all humans, not just to the Israelites and their Gentile converts living under the Mosaic Covenant.

Other Old Testament Books being quoted as part of the Law

In John 10:34, the Lord Jesus Christ quoted from Psalm 82:6 as being a part of the Law. In 1 Corinthians 14:21, Paul quoted from Isaiah 28:11-12 as a part of the Law. He did the same in 1 Corinthians 14:34 when he refers to Genesis 3:16 as being a component of the Law.

There are three possible explanations for the above facts. First, the Books of Genesis, Psalms and Isaiah are not a part of the Law of Moses written in Leviticus, Deuteronomy and parts of Exodus and Numbers. But Christ and Paul quoted them as being parts of the Law in the sense they were not contrary to the Mosaic Law. Also the Book of Genesis was in some senses a background for why the Law was given.

The Books of Joshua through to Malachi as well were in many but not all respects an expansion or deeper revelation of various aspects of the Law. These Books of Joshua to Malachi revealed many things about Jesus Christ and other matters as well. But they do deal with many matters of the Mosaic Law as well. This emphasis on expanding, amplifying and agreeing with previously written Books of Old Testament Scriptures can be seen in Zechariah 1:4 with its emphasis on what God’s former prophets said.

The second possibility is that Jesus Christ and Paul are referring to the whole Old Testament as the broader Law of God which is written on conscience (see Romans 2:14-16), was revealed by the Holy Spirit to Abraham and obeyed by him (see Genesis 26:5) and is

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¹ Vine, page 133.
² Ibid, page 133.
³ Harris, Archer and Waltke, page 403.
summarised in the two love commandments (see Matthew 22:37-38). Note Matthew 22:37-40 shows the Law and the Prophets – the whole Old Testament writings – are based on love for God and others. As stated previously, in the Hebrew Old Testament, the word “torah” which is used to refer to the Law of Moses (see Deuteronomy 4:8 and 17:18) is also found in Genesis 26:5 to refer to what Abraham obeyed – the broader Law of God.

The third possibility is that Christ and Paul were using the expression “the Law” to be an abbreviation of the expression “the Law and the Prophets”. The latter phrase refers to the whole Old Testament Scriptures.

Testimonies

The Old Covenant also refers to obeying God’s “testimonies” or “edut” in Hebrew. The word “testimonies” refers to the Ten Commandments written on stone (see Exodus 31:18, 32:15-16 and 34:29). Deuteronomy 6:17, 6:20, 1 Kings 2:3, 2 Kings 23:3 and 1 Chronicles 29:19 mention the importance of obeying God’s testimonies or Ten Commandments.

God’s grace and mercy in the Mosaic Covenant and Law

Some aspects of the Mosaic Covenant had none of God’s grace or mercy expressed in them. These relate to the demands of the Mosaic Law for obedience and the pronouncement of terrible punishments on anyone who disobeyed these (see Leviticus 26:14-39 and Deuteronomy 28:15-68). 2 Corinthians 3:6-9 reveals the Ten Commandments ministered to people that they were condemned by God the Supreme Ruler and Judge to a punishment of death. Verse 7 refers to this “ministry of death” and verse 9 mentions this “ministry of condemnation”.

In other respects, however, the Law of Moses was an expression of God’s grace and mercy. Firstly, through its priesthood and substitutary blood sacrifices, the Law was a shadow or anticipation of Jesus’ death through which God could be gracious and merciful to sinful Mosaic Covenant believers. Without Jesus’ future death, Moses, David, Hezekiah and all other believers who lived from the time Moses was given the Old Covenant and Law to the time of Jesus’ death, would have been condemned to dreadful deserved punishment in this earthly life and after death.

This grace aspect of the Law of Moses is seen in Leviticus 16:3-10 and 23:26-32 in relation to the Day of Atonement, Numbers 9:1-14 and Deuteronomy 16:1-8 in relation to the Passover Feast and in the many other verses about atonement and forgiveness of sin. Examples of the latter verses are Leviticus 4:20, 4:35, 5:16 and 6:7.

The emphasis on God’s grace in the Law can also be seen in the fact God commanded His High Priests – signified by the expression “Aaron and his sons” – to bless the people of Israel with a mention of God’s grace. Numbers 6:22-27 records: “And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, “This is the way you shall bless the children of Israel.”’ Say to them: “The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face shine upon
you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace.’”
So they shall put My name on the children of Israel, and I will bless them.”

The Law of Moses reveals God blesses His people out of His undeserved grace and not because of their self-righteousness. Deuteronomy 9:4-6 says: “Do not think in your heart, after the Lord your God has cast them out before you, saying, ‘Because of my righteousness the Lord has brought me in to possess this land’; but it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is driving them out from before you. It is not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart that you go in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord your God drives them out from before you, and that He may fulfil the word which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Therefore understand that the Lord your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stiff-necked people.”

In Deuteronomy 4:25-31 and 30:1-10, God promised to be merciful to sinful Israelites who turned back to Him. Deuteronomy 4:31 says: “(for the Lord your God is a merciful God), He will not forsake you nor destroy you, nor forget the covenant of your fathers which He swore to them.”

In Leviticus 26:40-45, God says He would be gracious to sinful but repentant Israelites on the basis of the Abrahamic Covenant: “But if they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers, with their unfaithfulness in which they were unfaithful to Me, and that I also have walked contrary to them and have brought them into the land of their enemies; if their uncircumcised hearts are humbled, and they accept their guilt – then I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and My covenant with Isaac and My covenant with Abraham I will remember; I will remember the land. The land also shall be left empty by them, and will enjoy its sabbaths while it lies desolate without them; They will accept their guilt, because they despised My judgements and because their soul abhorred My statutes. Yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, nor shall I abhor them, to utterly destroy them and break My covenant with them; for I am the Lord their God. But for their sake I will remember the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God: I am the Lord.”

Deuteronomy 9:4-6 reveals that God was gracious on the basis of the Abrahamic Covenant. But do not think God’s grace was associated only with those verses in the Mosaic Covenant which related to the Abrahamic Covenant. The previous mentions of God’s grace associated with the sacrificial offerings, the Day of Atonement, the High Priestly blessing and the Passover are not specified in the Abrahamic Covenant.

Nehemiah 1:5-11 records that at a later time, Nehemiah asked God for mercy on the basis of God’s promises in Deuteronomy 4:25-31, 30:1-10 and Leviticus 26:40-45. Nehemiah 1:5-11 says: “And I said: ‘I pray, Lord God of heaven, O great and awesome God, You who keep Your covenant and mercy with those who love You and observe Your commandments, please let Your ear be attentive and Your eyes open, that You may hear the prayer of Your servant which I pray before You now, day and night, for the children of Israel Your servant,”

Note the Lord promised in Numbers 6:22-27 to bless the people out of undeserved grace. But this promise was not a magic formula which worked regardless of whether the Israelites trusted God and turned from their sins. The history of Israel after the time of the giving of this blessing proves this. Similarly in Deuteronomy 33:13-17, Moses pronounced other wonderful blessings on the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. But once again, these promised blessings were conditional to some extent. Later when these two tribes turned from the Lord, they lost all these blessings.
and confess the sins of the children of Israel which we have sinned against You. Both my father’s house and I have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against You, and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses. Remember, I pray, the word that You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, “If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, but if you return to Me, and keep My commandments and do them, though some of you were cast out to the farthest part of the heavens, yet I will gather them from there, and bring them to the place which I have chosen as a dwelling for My name.” Now these are Your servant and Your people, whom You have redeemed by Your great power, and by Your strong hand. O Lord, I pray, please let Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant, and to the prayer of Your servant who desire to fear Your name; and let Your servant prosper this day, I pray, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man…”

The Book of Judges contains many marvellous examples of God being very gracious and merciful to sinful people who turned back to Him. 2 Chronicles 33:1-17, Nehemiah 9:16-31, Daniel 9:1-19 and the Book of Hosea contain examples of God’s marvellous grace and mercy to Israelites living under the Mosaic Covenant.

An expression of both condemnation and God’s grace

Even though the Ten Commandments were an expression of condemnation and death as 2 Corinthians 3:6-9 shows, even these laws had a God-given gracious feature. God mercifully used the Ten Commandments to reveal to Israelites in both the Old and New Covenant periods that they were sinners who needed a Saviour – the Messiah, without whom they will be condemned to eternal punishment (see Romans 3:20, 7:7, 7:13 and Galatians 3:24).

Graciously, God used the Ten Commandments to enable the unsaved to see their tragic state. God used His moral laws to lead sinners to His grace and mercy. The Messiah was Abraham’s prophesied Seed by Whom God promised by grace to bless all nations (see Genesis 22:18 and Galatians 3:16). So the Ten Commandments were one of the things God used to fulfill these aspects of the Abrahamic Covenant of grace. Psalm 119:29 shows the Law can be used by God in a gracious sense: “And grant me Your law graciously.”

Another indication of the grace involved in the Mosaic Covenant is the fact the Ten Commandments themselves began with a mention of how wonderfully gracious God had been to the Israelites in the past. Exodus 20:2 says: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.” See also Deuteronomy 5:6.

Solomon’s revelation about the Mosaic Covenant

Solomon understood that the proper relationship of believers to God under the Mosaic Covenant was based on:

- His grace
- and obedience to His commandments, statutes and judgements found in His Law.

In 1 Kings 8:57-58 and 61, Solomon said: “May the Lord our God be with us, as He was with our fathers. May He not leave us nor forsake us, that He may incline our hearts to
Himself, to walk in all His ways, and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, which He commanded our fathers…Let your heart therefore be loyal to the Lord our God, to walk in His statutes and keep His commandments, as at this day.” Note Solomon here was referring to God’s grace operating by His Holy Spirit when he prayed that God “may incline our hearts to Himself, to walk in all His ways and to keep His commandments…”

46 usages of words for grace or mercy in the Mosaic Law

There are about 46 usages of words in the Mosaic Covenant which relate to God’s grace and mercy. These are the Hebrew words “hen” (meaning “grace”), “hanan” and “hannun” (both meaning “gracious”), “hesed” and “racham” (both basically meaning “mercy”), “rahum” (relating to being merciful) and ““kpar” and “kapporet” (relating to atonement by God’s grace). The word “kapporet” is defined later in the section “The Gospel expressed in various features of the Tabernacle”. The rest of these words are fully explained in Chapter “Grace in the Old Testament”, Chapter “God’s mercy, long-suffering, patience and sympathy” and Chapter “Atonement”.

The Hebrew word “hesed” is used in Exodus 20:6, 34:7, Numbers 14:18, 14:19, Deuteronomy 5:10, 7:9 and 7:12. Exodus 34:6-7 states: “And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, ‘The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.’” Numbers 14:18-19 says: “The Lord is longsuffering and abundant in mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He by no means clears the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation. Pardon the iniquity of this people, I pray, according to the greatness of Your mercy, just as You have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now.” The word “hesed” used in these verses means “kindness, lovingkindness, mercy”. These usages of the word “hesed” in the Law of Moses reveal why the idea the Law did not have any emphasis on God’s love, mercy and grace is totally wrong.

Psalm 119 repeatedly mentions the Law of Moses in its 176 verses. But note the author of this Psalm uses the word “hesed” meaning lovingkindness or mercy in relation to the Law in verses 64, 124 and 159. This also shows that some aspects of the Mosaic Law were strongly related to God’s mercy or lovingkindness.

Psalm 119:64 stresses that at that time the whole earth was full of God’s mercy: “The earth, O Lord, is full of Your mercy…” This is also contrary to the view many Christians whom I have spoken to, have of the Mosaic Covenant period. They believe only a small trickle of God’s mercy and grace was available in the Old Covenant period. The New Covenant is the fullest, most complete manifestation of God’s grace. But during the Mosaic Covenant period, His grace and mercy were available and expressed often.

Covenant relationship to God first and then obeying the Law

Deuteronomy 4:32-40, 7:6-11, 20:16-18 and 27:9-10 teach some important things about the Mosaic Covenant. These passages reveal:

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5 Harris, Archer and Waltke, page 305.
God initiated the relationship which He formed with the people under the Mosaic Covenant. Humans did not initiate this relationship by their works of obedience to the Mosaic Law.

On the basis of this initially formed covenantal relationship, God commanded the Israelites to obey the Mosaic Law. The Mosaic Law was the God-given terms and conditions of the Mosaic Covenant.

Deuteronomy 7:6-8 says the Israelites were already God’s holy people, chosen by Him as His possession and His special treasure, loved by Him and redeemed from bondage. Deuteronomy 7:11 shows on the basis of the above facts, the Israelites were commanded to obey the Mosaic Law: “Therefore you shall keep the commandment, the statutes, and the judgements which I command you today, to observe them.” Deuteronomy 27:9-10 says similar things: “Then Moses and the priests, the Levites, spoke to all Israel, saying, ‘Take heed and listen, O Israel: This day you have become the people of the Lord your God. Therefore you shall obey the voice of the Lord your God, and observe His commandments and His statutes which I command you today.’”

One wrong view suggests that the Mosaic Covenant involved the Israelites having to obey the Mosaic Law for a period of time before God would begin a covenant relationship with them. Such attitudes are based on taking Exodus 19:5-6 and Deuteronomy 28:9 in isolation.

Exodus 19:5-6 says: “Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.”

Deuteronomy 28:9 states: “The Lord will establish you as a holy people to Himself, just as He has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the Lord your God and walk in His ways.”

Exodus 19:5-6 and Deuteronomy 28:9 refer to the Israelites living in agreement with what God had already made them under the Mosaic Covenant. God had already separated the first generation Israelites to Himself (see Leviticus 20:26) and made the second generation Israelites His special people (see Deuteronomy 26:18 and 27:9). (Remember the Book of Deuteronomy relates to the Mosaic Covenant and Law being given to the second generation of Israelites. The first generation except Joshua and Caleb died in the wilderness [see Deuteronomy 1:1-2:15].) Note the word “establish” in Deuteronomy 28:9 is “qum” in Hebrew and can be also translated as “confirm.” Substitute the word “confirm” for “establish” in Deuteronomy 28:9 quoted in the previous paragraph and see how the verse reads.

Deuteronomy 14:1-2 and 14:21 also show that the reason the people of Israel were to obey various Mosaic laws was they were already God’s adopted children, holy people, chosen possession and special treasure. Deuteronomy 14:1-2 says: “You are the children of the Lord your God; you shall not cut yourselves nor shave the front of your head for the dead. For you are a holy people to the Lord your God, and the Lord has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.”

Deuteronomy 4:32-40 refers to similar things. Out of love, God delivered the Israelites from Egypt (see verse 37), took them as His possession (see verse 34) and revealed Himself to them (see verses 33-35). Then on the basis of these acts of grace and love, God told them to keep His statutes and commandments (see verse 40).
Heart faith response to God’s covenants and associated grace

Deuteronomy 29:10-13 states: “All of you stand today before the Lord your God: your leaders and your tribes and your elders and your officers, all the men of Israel, your little ones and your wives – also the stranger who is in your camp, from the one who cuts your wood to the one who draws your water – that you may enter into covenant with the Lord your God, and into His oath, which the Lord your God makes with you today, that He may establish you today as a people for Himself, and that He may be God to you, just as He has spoken to you, and just as He has swor[n] to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”

Note the above verses relate to the time the second generation of Israelites whom God had delivered from Egypt, experienced a God-given renewal of their Mosaic Covenant relationship to Him (see Deuteronomy Chapters 29 and 30).

This second generation had previously entered into a relationship with Him under the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants. They entered these covenants through being born into the Israelite nation. Being circumcised was a sign of being under these two covenants.

But note that God required these second-generation Israelites to respond to His covenantal promises and demands by willingly in faith publicly confirming their covenantal vows to God at the time they were in Moab just before entering the Land of Canaan.

Deuteronomy 29:10-13 relates:

a) to the unmerited grace promises of the Abrahamic Covenant in Genesis 17:7. Genesis 17:7 says: “And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you.” Note Deuteronomy 29:13 refers to this when it says “that He may be God to you… just as He has sworn to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.” God’s promise to Abraham to be God to the people of Israel was not a deserved reward for obedience to the Mosaic Covenant’s commands and laws.

b) in a broader context to obeying the commands and laws of the Mosaic Covenant (see Deuteronomy Chapter 30). But note such obedience was a fruit of God’s grace and human faith response.

When Deuteronomy 29:12 says “you may enter into covenant with the Lord your God and into His oath, which the Lord your God makes with you today”, it is not teaching that the people of Israel merited entering into covenant with God after spending many previous days or years obeying the commands and laws of the Mosaic Covenant. Instead it refers to the heart faith response of the Israelites to the promises, terms and conditions of the Mosaic Covenant at the point in time they publicly confirmed their covenantal vows.

The Law of Moses and the Gospel

God gave the Law of Moses to the Israelites not as a temporary alternative to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but to establish beyond doubt it is impossible to be saved except through God’s grace which was manifested through Jesus’ later death. God never intended for the Law to be used as a foundation for a religion of self-righteousness, self-effort and self-reliance.
God promised the Gospel long before He gave the Law through Moses. The promise of the Gospel first came in Adam’s time (see Genesis 3:15) and later in Abraham’s time (see Genesis 12:3, 18:18, 22:18 and Galatians 3:8).

In Romans 3:21-22, Paul says the Mosaic Law itself and the Old Testament Prophets taught a righteousness from God based on faith: “But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God which is through faith in Jesus Christ to all and on all who believe...” Here Paul reveals the Gospel of grace through Jesus Christ was witnessed to by the Law of Moses to some degree.

The Gospel expressed in various features of the Tabernacle

The totally undeserved grace of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is taught in the Law of Moses in relation to various features of the Tabernacle, especially the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark was a rectangular box-like structure made of acacia wood and measured about 4 feet by 2 feet by 2 feet.

The Ark had two carved golden statues of cherubim attached to it at each end. Cherubim are very powerful angels. In Genesis 3:24, we see God sent cherubim to keep humans away from the Tree of Life after Adam and Eve had fallen into sin. Cherubim therefore relate to the fact humans cannot enter God’s Presence because of the evil in their lives.

Cherubim are also spoken of in 1 Samuel 4:4 and Ezekiel 10:1-22 as being closely linked to where God’s Presence and glory are manifested. Exodus 3:1-5 shows God’s Presence was not limited to being only around the Ark of the Covenant. The two cherubim statues attached to the Ark looked down upon the Mercy Seat or Atonement Cover where God manifested His Presence. The Mercy Seat will be explained later.

Other features of the Ark of the Covenant are recorded in Exodus 25:10-40. The Ark was the most sacred of all the pieces of furniture God instructed Moses to have made for the Tabernacle. The Tabernacle was a very large transportable tent where people could approach God through blood sacrifices and He could communicate revelations to them (see Leviticus 1:1 and Numbers 7:8-9).

The Tabernacle is also called “the tent”, “the tent of the Lord”, “the tabernacle of the house of the Lord”, “the house of the Lord”, “the house of God” and “the tent of meeting” throughout the Bible. The Tabernacle consisted of a framework of boards which had linen curtains suspended from them. Goat’s hair and skins were placed over the entire structure. Exodus 26:1-37 discusses these various features.

Later in Solomon’s time, the Tabernacle was replaced by a larger Temple (see 1 Kings 5:1-6:38).

The Tabernacle and the Temple were divided into a number of sections. These were the outer court, the holy place and the most holy place or holy of holies. Any member of God’s people could enter the outer court but only after the blood sacrifice of an animal. At the entrance to the outer court was the bronze altar (see Exodus 38:30) which was also called the altar of burnt offering (see Exodus 30:28 and Leviticus 4:7). This altar showed that no human could approach God except through blood sacrifice (see Leviticus 1:1-17 and 4:1-7:10).

In hindsight, all this was meant to symbolise it was only through the death of the innocent substitute – Jesus Christ – on God’s altar at Calvary that we could approach a perfect holy God (see Hebrews 10:1-18). The seven and one-half feet high curtains around the
Tabernacle were meant to symbolise all humans were cut off from God’s holy glorious Presence because of their sin.

The Ark was placed inside the Holy of Holies – the innermost section of the Tabernacle. Only the Israelite High Priest could go into the Holy of Holies. The High Priest would likely be slain by God if he went in there without the death of a bull occurring as a substitute for the death penalty he deserved because of his own sin (see Leviticus 16:6 and 11-14).

If anyone except a priest who had made blood sacrifices for themselves, attempted to touch the Ark when it was carried from place to place, he was immediately slain by God (see 2 Samuel 6:6-7). This was to stress that ordinary sinful human beings cannot enter God’s Presence and they deserve death.

Two copies of the Ten Commandments were kept inside the Ark (see Exodus 25:16, 31:18, Deuteronomy 10:1-5 and Hebrews 9:4). A copy of the whole Law of Moses was kept next to the Ark (see Deuteronomy 31:24-27). The Ten Commandments and the Law were put in these places as a sign that every human has broken some of God’s commands and as a result are cut off from His Presence and deserve the dreadful punishments listed in the Law for sinners.

On top of the Ark of the Covenant was what is called in English “the Mercy Seat” or in Hebrew “kapporet”. “Kapporet” is better translated as “Atonement Cover” or “Atonement Lid”. This was a rectangular-shaped slab of solid gold which measured about 3 ½ feet by 2 feet with an unknown thickness. It functioned as a lid or cover for the Ark of the Covenant. Statues of two cherubim stood on the Atonement Cover facing each other.

Harris Archer and Waltke say: “kapporet” “always refers to the golden cover of the sacred chest in the inner shrine of the tabernacle or temple. It was from above the mercy seat that God promised to meet with men (Num 7:89). The word, however, is not related to mercy…The word is derived from the root ‘to atone.’”

The Atonement Cover on the Ark expressed the fact God’s undeserved grace and mercy was only available through the death of an innocent perfect substitute offered willingly by a High Priest appointed by God. Once a year on the Day of Atonement, the Israelite High Priest had to offer the blood of a ram and a goat to God in order that the sins of the people of Israel could be forgiven. His anger against their sins could be removed and they could be reconciled to Him (see Leviticus 16:1-34). The blood of the sacrifice on the Day of Atonement was placed by the High Priest on the Atonement Cover of the Ark (see Leviticus 16:14-16).

Various things found in the Mosaic Law – the Tabernacle, the exclusion of all people except the High Priest from the Holy of Holies, the features of the Ark, the cherubim, the location of the two copies of the Ten Commandments and the one copy of the Law, the bronze altar, the yearly Day of Atonement with its death of a substitute and the pouring of its blood on the Atonement Cover, the appointment of a High Priest by God and the willingness of the High Priest to perform His God-appointed duties for people who deserved punishment – were a continual preaching of the Gospel in seed form. The only thing lacking was an understanding these things would relate to Jesus Christ and His future death.

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6 Harris, Archer and Waltke, page 453.
The Mosaic Covenant stressed God’s love for His people

In the Mosaic Covenant, God declares how much He loves His people (see Deuteronomy 4:37, 7:8, 10:15, 23:5 and 33:3). In Deuteronomy 7:6, 14:2 and 26:18, God describes His people as His treasured possession. In Deuteronomy 32:10, He says His people are the apple of His eye. In Deuteronomy 10:18, God states He also loves strangers – non-Israelites.

The Holy Spirit graciously inclining Old Covenant believers’ hearts

The Old Testament refers to people inclining their hearts to God (see Joshua 24:23) and His Words (see Psalm 119:112, Proverbs 4:20, Jeremiah 7:24, 11:8, 17:23, 34:14, 35:15 and 44:5). In each of these verses, the emphasis is on the person(s) deciding by an act of will to incline his heart to God and His commands.

But in 1 Kings 8:58 and Psalm 119:36, we see that in Old Testament times some believers trusted God by His grace to incline their hearts to Him. In 1 Kings 8:57-58, Solomon prayed: “May the Lord our God be with us, as He was with our fathers. May He not leave us nor forsake us, that He may incline our hearts to Himself, to walk in all His ways, and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgements, which He commanded our fathers.” Solomon had God’s wisdom to understand that God’s people could only obey His commands, statutes and judgements through the gracious assistance of His Holy Spirit.

In Psalm 119:33-38, the Psalm-writer asked God to do the following things by His grace: “Teach me, O Lord, the way of Your statutes, and I will keep it to the end. Give me understanding, and I shall observe it with my whole heart. Make me walk in the path of Your commandments, for I delight in it. Incline my heart to Your testimonies and not to covetousness. Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things, and revive me in Your way. Establish Your word to Your servant, who is devoted to fearing You.” Here we see that in Mosaic Covenant times, some believers trusted God to work on their hearts by His Spirit in empowering them to do His will.

The Mosaic Covenant and the Holy Spirit’s help

In Mosaic Covenant times, only the prophets, some of the kings and certain selected individuals had the Holy Spirit (see 1 Peter 1:10-11, Numbers 11:16-29, 1 Samuel 10:6, 16:13 and Exodus 31:1-5). But even these did not have the Holy Spirit in the full measure which born-again believers in New Covenant times do (see John 7:37-39 and 16:7). Colossians 1:26-27 shows that Jesus Christ by His Spirit did not live in permanent spiritual union with believers until New Covenant times: “the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

But because of the above truths, a wrong view has developed. This is the idea that most believers in Mosaic Covenant times did not have the Holy Spirit’s assistance and power to enable them to do God’s will. The Word of the Lord given through the prophet Haggai to the governor, high priest and Jews in general show how wrong this view is. Haggai 2:4-5 records:
“Yet now be strong, Zerubbabel,” says the Lord; ‘and be strong, Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; and be strong, all you people of the land,’ says the Lord, ‘and work; for I am with you,’ says the Lord of hosts. ‘According to the word that I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt, so My Spirit remains among you; do not fear.’” Here we see the Mosaic Covenant did promise a certain measure of the Holy Spirit’s help. In Numbers 35:34, God promised to live among the Israelites.

In context, Haggai 2:4-5 refers to Jews who had not perfectly obeyed the Lord (see Haggai 1:3-11, 2:14 and 2:15-17). So Haggai here is not teaching that God’s Spirit’s power and help is only available on the condition of perfect obedience.

Leviticus 26:12 promises the Israelites: “I will walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people” on the condition of perfect obedience to all the commands and statutes of the Mosaic Law (see Leviticus 26:3). But obviously no Israelite except Christ has fulfilled all these commands and statutes perfectly. So only He can claim the promise of Leviticus 26:12 above as a totally deserved reward.

All other Israelites had to receive the promise of the Lord living among them by His Spirit and being their God on the basis of undeserved grace. Exodus 29:38-46 promised that God would dwell among the Israelites because of the ministry of the Levitical priesthood and the substitutionary animal sacrifices. These sacrifices were only effective because of Jesus’ future death (see Hebrews 10:1-22). Exodus 29:45-46 is a promise of God based on His undeserved grace and mercy: “I will dwell among the children of Israel and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the Lord their God, who brought them up out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell among them. I am the Lord their God.”

Faith and the Mosaic Covenant

On the basis of a simplistic false reading of Galatians 3:12, 23 and 25, many Christians have concluded that the Mosaic Covenant did not instruct people to have trusting faith in God. Galatians 3:12 says: “Yet the law is not faith, but ‘The man who does them shall live by them.'” Galatians 3:23-24 states: “But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.”

On the surface, such verses seem to suggest the Mosaic Law did not relate at all to faith in God. But we must be very careful of our interpretation of these verses because in Matthew 23:23, Jesus stated: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.” Here Christ says faith in God is one of the main features or weightier matters of the Law. Observe also in Matthew 23:23, Jesus challenged the Pharisees for using the Law wrongly.

Note there are six verses in the Law of Moses which relate to trusting or believing in God. The Hebrew word “aman” which in English means “believe” is used in Deuteronomy 1:32, 9:23, Numbers 12:7, 14:11 and 20:12. The same word “aman” is used in Genesis 15:6, a key Old Testament verse revealing Abraham was justified by faith: “And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.” Deuteronomy 9:23 states: “…and you did not believe Him nor obey His voice.”
Deuteronomy 32:20 uses the word “faith” or the Hebrew “emuwn”: “And He said: ‘I will hide My face from them, I will see what their end will be, for they are a perverse generation, children in whom is no faith.’” The Hebrew word “emuwn” is closely linked to the word “emunah” used in Habakkuk 2:4. Habakkuk 2:4 is quoted by Paul in Romans 1:17. Romans 1:17 says: “For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’”

Some may argue, “The fact there is only six verses in the Mosaic Law which use any of the Hebrew words for faith in God, shows the Mosaic Covenant is not based on faith.” But note that the Abrahamic Covenant is mentioned in the New Testament as being a covenant related to faith (see Galatians 3:6-29). But note in its original context in Genesis 12:2-3, 13:14-17, 15:1-5 and 17:1-21, the Abrahamic Covenant does not mention the Hebrew words for faith once and Abraham’s faith response to this covenant is only recorded in Genesis 15:6.

The concept of faith and reliance is implied in both the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants when God promised to be the Shield of those living under these covenants (see Genesis 15:1 and Deuteronomy 33:29).

Note all the promises of God found in the Mosaic Covenant in relation to forgiveness of sin associated with the sin offerings (see Leviticus 4:1-34), trespass offerings (see Leviticus 5:1-19) and the Day of Atonement (see Leviticus 16:1-34), not working on the Sabbath while believing God would provide for their material needs for this day and allowing the land to have a rest from production every seventh year while believing God would provide enough produce on the sixth year for the seventh year (see Leviticus 25:1-7 and 18-22) required strong faith in God. These are implied references in the Mosaic Covenant to faith in the Lord.

In Galatians 2:16, 3:11 and 3:17-18, Paul teaches that even under the Old Covenant, people were saved by faith and not by works of Law. Therefore, we must be very careful how we interpret Galatians 3:12, 23 and 25. There are a number of possible solutions to this interpretation dilemma:

a) The first is that in Galatians 3:12, 23 and 25, Paul is opposing the wrong use of the Mosaic Covenant and Law common among the Pharisees and those Pharisaic believers who had introduced a false gospel to the Galatian church (see Galatians 1:6-10 and 5:10-12). It is evident from Matthew 23:23 and Luke 11:42 that at Christ’s time, many or all of the Pharisees were trying to obey the Law of Moses without a strong emphasis on trusting dependant faith and love for God. Many or all of the Pharisees encouraged self-reliant self-righteous attempts to obey the Law (see Luke 16:15 and 18:9-12). Also, as Matthew 23:23-28 and Luke 11:39-40 show, many or all of the Pharisees changed true faith and godliness into a mere outward religious show which had little real inward reality. (It is possible that prior to Christ’s time, the Pharisees had been a more Scriptural, more godly group.) Many or all of the Pharisees believed they were under the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants by God’s unmerited grace through their Jewish ancestry but they treated obedience to the Law of Moses as a means of meriting the continuation of their righteous standing before God. Also they rejected God’s grace and mercy through Jesus Christ and as a result remained under a divine sentence of eternal condemnation. Galatians 5:3-4 refers to Pharisaic churchgoers at Galatia falling into a similar type of error: “And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by
law; you have fallen from grace.” In this sense, the Law was being used opposite to faith in Jesus Christ.

Compare the Pharisees to King David. David had a right attitude to God’s Law. He aimed to obey it but did not try to achieve self-righteousness through self-effort-inspired works of Law. David was a man of great faith in God. His Psalms are full of mentions of trusting God. ⁷ Romans 4:5-8 reveals David understood humans are justified by God’s grace through faith.

David committed adultery and murder, so he was obviously not justified by perfect obedience to works of Law. David was a classic example of a justified person living under the Mosaic Covenant using the Law correctly in relation to true faith in God.

b) Another possible view is that in Galatians 3:12, 23 and 25, Paul is teaching that under the New Covenant, an enormously increased revelation of Christ and resulting faith in Him was given compared with what believers had under the Old Covenant.

c) Another similar interpretation is that just as grace was a part of the Mosaic Covenant but a lesser feature than under the New Covenant, so too was faith an included but lesser characteristic of the Mosaic Covenant.

d) The fourth possible view involves a combination of the above three views.

Jesus fulfilled the Mosaic Law in two main ways

In Matthew 5:17-18, Jesus said He was going to fulfil the Law of Moses: “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfil. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.” Jesus fulfilled the Law in two main ways:

e) He perfectly obeyed the Ten Commandments and other commands found in the Mosaic Law.

f) His death was a perfect fulfilment of all the substitutionary sacrificial offerings, atonement, propitiation, redemption, ransom and passover lamb aspects of the ceremonial features of the Law (see Hebrews 10:1-10). (The meanings of the words “substitution”, “atonement”, “propitiation” and so on listed here will be given in other chapters).

One or more?

Some authors suggest the Books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy contain more than one covenant. For example, Coccejus taught God established two covenants at Mount Sinai through Moses. He argued wrongly the first was a national covenant of grace summarised in the Ten Commandments and the second was a supposed covenant of legalistic ceremonial service to God.

But all such attempts to split the Mosaic Covenant into two or more covenants are man-made inventions. The truth is, however, that God established one covenant through Moses, but this covenant has a number of different main features, and was renewed and expanded upon in Deuteronomy 29:1-30:20.

**The earthly blessings and curses promised in the Mosaic Covenant**

There are many verses in the Mosaic Covenant which link earthly natural blessings to obedience to its moral, civil and/or ceremonial laws. These are Leviticus 18:26, 20:22, 25:18, 26:1-13, Deuteronomy 4:40, 5:16, 6:2-3, 6:24-25, 11:8-9, 15:4-5, 26:15-19, 28:1-14, 30:15-20 and 32:46-47. The moral laws included the Ten Commandments and commands about similar matters. Deuteronomy 30:15-20 shows this obedience must be linked to a real loving of God.

The types of earthly blessings promised in the Mosaic Law are healing, abundance of crops and food, victory in war, increase in herds and flocks, plenty of rain and so on (see Deuteronomy 28:1-14 and Exodus 15:26).

There are numerous passages in the Law of Moses which say disobediences to the Mosaic Law will be punished by sickness, other tragedies and physical death. These are Leviticus 26:14-29, Deuteronomy 8:10-20, 27:26 and 28:15-68. These verses do not specifically mention spiritual death as being one of the punishments for sin. (We may argue that the Hebrew wholistic view of humans would see death as both spiritual and physical. But this is debatable though.)

Note also James 2:10 shows even one disobedience to the Law of Moses was similar in God’s estimation to disobeying all its commands.

People living under the Mosaic Covenant were saved by undeserved grace. But they received earthly rewards for obedience to God’s moral, civil and ceremonial laws. In one sense, these rewards were deserved. But in another sense, they were not deserved. All Mosaic Covenant believers were undeserving sinners who needed forgiveness from God. Obviously, the only thing they fully deserved from God was punishment. But God as their loving Father gave them rewards to train them and encourage their obedience to Him.

**Bible Study Questions**

1. When Hebrews 8:7 and 9:1 speak of the “first covenant”, which covenant do they mean?
2. Is the Old Covenant the same as the Mosaic Covenant?
3. List the main features of the Mosaic Covenant.
4. Describe what was the relationship between the Mosaic Law and the Mosaic Covenant.
5. What is the broader Law of God, which is written on human conscience, summarised in?
6. Which aspects of the Mosaic Covenant had none of God’s grace or mercy expressed in them?
7. Which verses in the Mosaic Covenant were expressions of God’s grace and mercy?
8. Why were the Ten Commandments both:
   a) an expression of condemnation and death
   b) and a manifestation of God’s grace and mercy?
9. On what did Solomon understand a proper relationship to God under the Mosaic Covenant involved?

10. Roughly how many usages of Hebrew words which relate to God’s grace and mercy are found in the Mosaic Law?

11. What do Exodus 34:6-7, Numbers 14:18-19 and Psalm 119:64 reveal about the character of God expressed during the Mosaic Covenant period?

12. Did God require the Israelites to obey the Mosaic Law as a means of them earning the right to enter into a covenantal relationship with Him? Give Biblical proof for your answer.

13. Explain what Deuteronomy 14:1-2 and 14:21 show is the reason the people of Israel were to obey the various laws of the Mosaic Covenant.

14. Which verses reveal that the second generation of Israelites whom God had delivered from Egypt and who had entered into a covenant relationship with God through being born into the Israelite nation, experienced a God-given renewal of their Mosaic Covenant relationship to Him?

15. Did God give the Law of Moses as a foundation for a religion of self-righteousness, self-effort and self-reliance?

16. What does Romans 3:21-22 reveal about the Law and the Prophets?

17. Explain how the Gospel was expressed in various features of the Tabernacle.

18. What do 1 Kings 8:57-58 and Psalm 119:33-36 reveal about God’s gracious work on believers’ hearts during the Old Covenant period?

19. Did all believers during Mosaic Covenant times have the Holy Spirit living in them?

20. What does Haggai 2:4-5 reveal about the work of the Holy Spirit among His people under the Mosaic Covenant?

21. Why is it wrong to say that the Mosaic Covenant did not instruct people to have trusting faith in God?

22. In what two main ways did Jesus fulfil the Law of Moses?

23. Which verses in the Mosaic Covenant linked receiving earthly natural blessings to obedience to its moral, civil and/or ceremonial laws?