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**C0623 – June 7, 2006 – Ex 18:25-19:1 – Introduction To The Mosaic Covenant**

**3. The Wisdom of Jethro (18:19-19:1)**

<sup>19</sup> "Now listen to me: I will give you counsel, and God be with you. You be the people's representative before God, and you bring the disputes to God,

<sup>20</sup> then teach them the statutes and the laws, and make known to them the way in which they are to walk and the work they are to do.

<sup>21</sup> "Furthermore, you shall select out of all the people able men who fear God, men of truth, those who hate dishonest gain; and you shall place *these* over them as leaders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens.

<sup>22</sup> "Let them judge the people at all times; and let it be that every major dispute they will bring to you, but every minor dispute they themselves will judge. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear *the burden* with you.

<sup>23</sup> "If you do this thing and God *so* commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all these people also will go to their place in peace."

<sup>24</sup> So Moses listened to his father-in-law and did all that he had said.

<sup>25</sup> Moses chose able men out of all Israel and made them heads over the people, leaders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens.

<sup>26</sup> They judged the people at all times; the difficult dispute they would bring to Moses, but every minor dispute they themselves would judge.

<sup>27</sup> Then Moses bade his father-in-law farewell, and he went his way into his own land.

Jethro's wise advice probably comes from his personal experience which we see, in verse 23 is to be followed only if **God commands** it. I know this advice comes from Jethro's experience because the first thing he tells Moses is to **be the people's representative before God**. Now, that is the role of a priest and Jethro was priest of Midian. So, Jethro is instructing Moses to be priest of Israel. With the position of priest comes five wise

counsels: 1) teach the people, 2) select men of integrity, 3) place men in positions of authority, 4) delegate authority to these men, and 5) preside over difficult court cases.

First, teach all the people the **statutes and laws**. This will ensure that every man has a general idea of what the law is. Second, select God-fearing men of ability and truth who hate dishonest gain. So, these men cannot fear men, they must **fear God** alone or else it will affect their judgment. They must also be **men of truth** or else it will affect their judgment. They must also **hate dishonest gain**, if not they will judge in favor of the party who could benefit them in some way. Third, place the men over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. That is, install them in some place of authority. Fourth, let them judge the minor disputes. That is, delegate authority to them and do not infringe upon their domain unnecessarily. Fifth, you judge the major disputes. You Moses will be responsible for presiding over and deciding the difficult cases. So, this is the establishment of the judicial branch of the government of Israel. The legislative branch is filled by God Almighty who has given them the body of law.

Notice that in verse 23 Jethro's advice is contingent upon whether **God commands** Moses to follow it or not. All advice stemming from experience must always be taken to God before implemented. Apparently, Jethro's advice was the command of God because in Deut 1:12-18 "we learn that Moses carried out the plan in the same spirit in which it was proposed. The election of the judges was made by the people themselves, and their appointment was guided, as well as their work directed, by the fear and the love of the Lord" (Edersheim, 127). This advice went a long way in avoiding many pitfalls.

### **Lessons we can learn from God's provision of wisdom through Jethro**

*First*, Moses taught the people all the statutes and laws. It is vital in the Church for the teachers to teach the whole counsel of God. This operation works from the top down. *First*, who disciples the pastor-teacher? Able men. They could be seminary professors or wise elders who have spent years in the word of God. *Second*, who disciples the congregation corporately? The pastor-teacher. *Third*, who disciples the elders personally? The pastor-teacher. *Fourth*, who do the teaching elders disciple? The congregation corporately or in small groups. This takes some of the burden off of the pastor-teacher. *Fifth*, who disciples the children? The congregation and parents. So, everyone should be involved in discipling at some level and it's important that the teaching is always in accordance with what's being taught on the highest level of this discipleship chain. Are you involved in discipling?

*Second*, Moses selected God-fearing men of ability and truth who hated dishonest gain. Similar requirements are set forth for elders and deacons in the Church in 1 Tim 3. Are you a God-fearing man or do you fear men who hold positions of authority? Are you able to defend Bible doctrine and gently correct those in opposition? Are you a man of truth, hopelessly devoted to it and drawn to it? Or are you a man of myth, enamored with every new doctrine and still harboring doubt about the Christian faith? Do you hate dishonest gain? Or do you cater to men who hold positions of authority or have great wealth? If you are not a God-fearing man of ability and truth who hates dishonest gain then it will affect your judgment. The key to becoming this kind of man is having the fear of God burned into you. And you're never going to fear God unless you know Him. So, you've got to study Bible doctrine and see God's works and hear God's words. That will build the fear of God into you. So, the offices of elder and deacon are not people-pleasing positions. They are God-pleasing positions.

*Third*, Moses placed men over thousands and hundreds and fifties and tens. That is, he delegated authority. If you are in a position of leadership do you delegate authority? This applied to me in the local church. First there have to be men who meet the previous requirements. If they do then I have to have the wisdom to delegate, to let go of some things and entrust them to these men. If I don't it will show a lack of wisdom and will lead to burn-out and the accompanying frustrations of stress and disorder.

*Fourth*, Moses let these men judge the minor disputes. They had what it took. There was no need for Moses to intervene. Moses didn't have to get his hand in every decision. He didn't need to micromanage. I have to be the same way. I have to trust that my fellow elders and those with delegated authority can handle the minor disputes. I do not need to get my hand in every dispute.

*Fifth*, Moses judged the major disputes. In the local church I should be the key player in making the judgment. That's because major disputes must be handled with the most accurate understanding of God and His word. So, the difficult things I have to judge.

*Sixth*, the hierarchy of leadership under Moses served to preserve Moses and the people from burn-out and the accompanying frustrations of stress and disorder. This was in accordance with divine wisdom. And thus, I think this is one of the reasons the Lord Jesus Christ set up Church Government with a plurality of elders and deacons. It spreads out the responsibilities so that one man doesn't have to bear the whole burden, burn-out and cause the frustrations of stress and chaos for everyone else. This is why the Bible **says everything must be done in order.**

## I. INTRODUCTION TO THE MOSAIC COVENANT

Now, in the shift from Exod 18:25 to 19:1 we have some introductory issues before getting into the Mosaic Law. First, a dispensational shift occurs. The whole Bible from Genesis to Revelation can be organized under seven periods of history called “dispensations”. Whether you’ve been a believer for 50 years or 50 days knowing the dispensations is a good way to get a handle on God’s word and the flow of history. What is a dispensation? A dispensation is “a distinct arrangement between God and man in history”. In other words, the world is like a household being managed by God in accordance with His will and in various stages over time, much like a parent would manage his household. Parents have a distinct arrangement with their children, certain rules in the house that must be followed. Now, these rules may change over time as the child matures and when that happens that’s like a dispensational shift. So, throughout the passage of time God reveals a set of rules which when followed by man results in God’s blessing. So, of course, these are not ways of salvation, there is only one way of salvation but there are seven dispensations, seven distinct arrangements between God and man.

In our study of Exodus we have been under the dispensation of promise which began in Gen 12:1 with the Call of Abraham. Now, although the promises of God made to Abraham remains in effect, even today, the Mosaic Law became the dominant rule of life beginning in Exod 19:1 and it remained the dominant rule of life until the death of Christ. So, practically speaking, the dispensation of Law covers all the books from Exodus 19:1 through Acts 1:26.

The Mosaic Law forms the heart of the first division of the Hebrew OT known as the *Torah* or Law and consists of the first five books of the OT (Genesis-Deuteronomy). “Torah” means “instruction” and the first five books are essentially instructive. The second division of the Hebrew OT is the *Nabi-im* or Prophets. Their function was to teach the people the Torah, remind the people where they had failed, and call them to repentance. The third division of the Hebrew OT was the *Kethubim* or Writings which apply the teachings of the Torah to every area of life. Together these three divisions are known by the acronym Ta-na-kh. Now, you may not think this is important but this was the division Jesus followed as Luke 24:44 shows, so if Jesus followed these divisions then it’s only appropriate that we know and follow them as well. So, the Torah (1<sup>st</sup> five books) is the foundation of the OT and the Mosaic Law is at the heart of the Torah. One more note, when I say Mosaic Law I’m talking about the terms of the Mosaic Covenant.

When I say Mosaic Covenant I'm talking about the legal contract itself which includes these terms.

### **A. Definition of "Covenant"**

Before any true understanding of the Mosaic Covenant can be grasped the term "covenant" must be stripped of "religious baggage". A "covenant" is a promise of God in the form of a legal contract. Such contracts are founded upon a sacrifice in the presence of two or more parties who sign the contract. The purpose of a contract is to measure the behavior of the parties. Through contracts God demonstrates His everlasting faithfulness to the terms outlined in the contract (i.e. what He promises He will do) and man typically demonstrates his unfaithfulness to His obligations (i.e. what he promises he will do). In addition to this, covenants/contracts can be conditional or unconditional (unilateral). In other words, it could be that one party promises to do something if the other party does something or it could be that one party promises to do something regardless of what the other party does. To determine the conditionality of a covenant you merely look at the kind of language employed in the terms of the contract. It always goes back to language. For example, unconditional covenants always use the language "I will..." For example, the Abrahamic Covenant.

**Genesis 12:1-3** Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you; <sup>2</sup> And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; <sup>3</sup> And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."

So, you've got to keep in mind the fact that "covenants" are promises of God in the form of legal contracts with the purpose of measuring behavior. If you keep this in mind you will become a better theologian because it will protect you from falling prey to the idea that God's contracts with Israel are fulfilled to the Church. Contracts are strict legal documents and they can only be fulfilled to the party they were originally made with. So, to say that God's contracts with Israel are fulfilled to the Church would require that the Church replace Israel, that the Church = Israel, so that when we read the Bible and we read Israel we just replace it with Church. Now, that's the only way to get the Church in these contracts and a lot of theologians and pastors have no problem doing this. But what they've done is completely violate the normal interpretation of legal contracts. How are legal contracts supposed to be interpreted? Literally. Some of us would like to interpret

them allegorically and say, “Oh, that’s not my name on the contract, I’m so and so” but that won’t fly of course! So, contracts are designed to be interpreted literally so that we have an objective basis for measuring behavior. Now, some people don’t like it that the Bible is an objective legal document (we call them Old and New Testaments). How dry, how boring. I’m sorry if the Bible is not what you thought it was. I can’t make it what you want it to be and some Christians spend their whole lives refusing to accept the Bible for what it really is (consciously, subconsciously or unconsciously). But notice something; although it is a legal document, what does it measure? “Behavior”, that is, it measures the moral, ethical and spiritual spheres of life. What do you think all the OT stories are about anyway? They are given to show the faithfulness of God and the unfaithfulness or faithfulness of man as measured against that standard. The word of God is a “canon” a collection of God’s revelation recorded by human authors under the guidance of the Holy Spirit which serves as a measuring stick against which to judge all things. And some Christians say we shouldn’t judge and I say when we judge we are only enforcing the standard of Scripture. Now, 1 Cor 5-6 says we don’t judge unbelievers but rather believers and that in the future we will judge angels and so now we’re in training and I know most Christians don’t want to judge things according to the standard which is just another way of saying “I won’t hold up the standard of Scripture”. Now, I know there are requirements that need to be met in order for a believer to judge another believer but the idea that a believer can’t judge other believers is just another way of saying a believer can’t hold up the standard of the word of God! Now, if God is faithful to His promises then He must fulfill His covenants to the original parties of the covenant. Otherwise He is unfaithful. So, the entire doctrine of God hinges on His faithfulness to the terms of the contract.

## **B. The Mosaic Covenant**

If unconditional covenants are written in “I will…” language then conditional covenants can be detected by “if…then” language. For example, the Mosaic Covenant.

**Exodus 19:5-6** ‘Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; <sup>6</sup> and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’

If Israel obeyed the laws of the Mosaic Covenant then they would be blessed (Lev 26:1-14). However, if they disobeyed the laws of the Mosaic Covenant then they would be cursed (Lev 26:15ff). It is crucial to recognize that obedience was necessary for blessing.

### **C. The Mosaic Covenant did not Invalidate the Abrahamic Covenant**

**Galatians 3:17-18** What I am saying is this: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise. <sup>18</sup> For if the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise; but God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise.

What Paul is saying is that the promises contained in the Abrahamic Covenant were unconditional and that the Law, which came 430 years later does not in any way cancel out the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant. That covenant was already ratified by God (Gen 15:7ff). So, if the Mosaic Covenant was not added to cancel out the Abrahamic Covenant then why was it added?

### **D. The Mosaic Covenant Added for Five Reasons**

#### **1. To Curb Israel's Sin**

**Galatians 3:19** Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions,

Paul is a master of the OT and is drawing this answer from

**Exodus 20:20** Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid; for God has come in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may remain with you, so that you may not sin."

The people had been sinning in the three months between the Exodus from Egypt and when they reached Mt Sinai. They tested God over and over (Exod 14:11-12; 16:3; 17:3). So, God gave them the Law to curb their sin.

#### **2. To Become God's Possession**

**Exodus 19:5** 'Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine;

If they would obey the Mosaic Law they would become God's possession. However, their sinful hearts were not able to obey the Mosaic Law (Dt 5:29) and so they did not become God's own possession. Yet God, in His wisdom, promised a new covenant which

included the promise that He would give them a new heart so they would be able to follow all His law (Jer 31:31-34). This covenant will be fulfilled when Israel accepts Jesus as Messiah. At that moment Jesus will return as King and will set up His Kingdom (Matt 23:39; Acts 3:19-21).

### **3. To Be a Kingdom of Priests**

If they would obey the Mosaic Law they would be a kingdom of priests.

**Exodus 19:6a** and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests

This does not come automatically because God entered into a covenant of fellowship with them. This is conditional upon obedience to the Mosaic Law. Only then would they become “a kingdom of priests”. A priest mediates between God and man and so if Israel obeyed she would mediate the knowledge of God and salvation to the Gentile nations. Since she did not have a heart to obey this was not fulfilled and thus, God promised a new covenant, which when fulfilled will provide a heart that is able to obey. Thus they will be a “kingdom of priests” for it will be fulfilled under the King in the Millennium.

### **4. To Be a Holy Nation**

If they would obey the Mosaic Law they would be a holy nation.

**Exodus 19:6a** you shall be to Me...a holy nation.'

The Mosaic Law was to press on the people that purity and holiness should characterize their lives as the chosen people of God. Again, to be a holy nation they must have new hearts promised in the new covenant. So, again, this will not be fulfilled until the Kingdom. But, it was God's purpose in the law that His people that carried His name would live pure and holy lives.

### **5. To Serve as a Tutor that Leads to Faith in Christ**

**Galatians 3:24** Therefore the Law has become our tutor *to lead us* to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith.

The Law was not an end in itself but a means to an end. The scribes and Pharisees made the Law a means to earn righteousness with God. However, this was not God's intended



means. God intended the Law to serve as a teaching tool to lead the Israelites to resort to faith in Christ. When someone reads the true spirit of the Law they should quickly realize that they have failed to keep it, they have sinned and therefore they must have faith in the promised Messiah. So, the scribes and Pharisees externalized the Law and distorted the Law so they could keep it. They thought they could be justified by the Law. But justification is always by grace through faith and no one will ever be justified by the Law. Now, how does the Law lead a person to Christ? It does so by giving us knowledge of sin. Turn to Rom 7:7

**Romans 7:7** What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, "YOU SHALL NOT COVET."

**Romans 7:12-13** So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. <sup>13</sup> Therefore did that which is good become *a cause of death* for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful.

So, here we are back at the objective standard. When the Law is interpreted normally the true spirit of the Law acts as a mirror and when we look into the mirror we see our sinfulness and how we have fallen short of the righteous requirement of God. Now, this realization is to cause us to turn away from self-righteousness and seek Christ's righteousness which is imputed by faith. So, the Law, when used lawfully, serves as a tutor to help people see their need for Christ. Now, to see this turn over to 1 Tim 1:8. Now, Christians, particularly dispensational Christians, tend to think of the Law as a bad thing and they like to stress that we're under grace and the Law is done away with and has no use. Now, that's an overstatement. We have to correct that and come in line with Paul's teaching on the Law.

**1 Timothy 1:8-10** But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully, <sup>9</sup> realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous person, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers <sup>10</sup> and immoral men and homosexuals and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching,

Now, there are three things Paul is teaching here. *First*, the Law isn't bad; it's good, even today it's good, if one uses it lawfully, that is, in the spirit of its true purpose. *Second*, it is not for righteous people, that is, those who are already justified by faith. *Third*, it is for those who are unrighteous, not justified by faith. And can you guess why the Law is good when applied to unbelievers? Because it serves a good purpose! It serves to show them they are sinners. And that stimulates the need for Christ. Now, I don't think the sins here listed by Paul are arbitrary. Anyone know where this list is rooted? It's rooted in the Ten Commandments of Exod 20. So, Paul is explaining that the law is righteous and holy and good because it can serve to lead a person to faith in Christ. We shouldn't shun the Law, even though it is not written *to* us it is *for* us to use with our unbelieving friends to show they have not met the righteous requirements of God. This brings us to the Law itself. What was the Law?

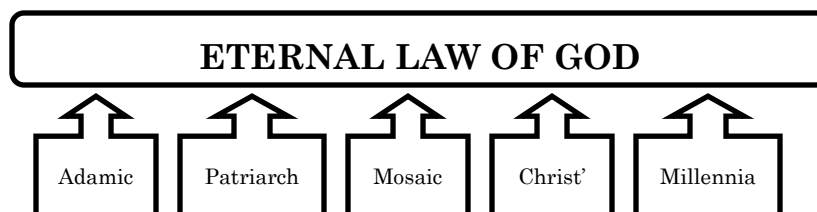
## **E. What the Law was**

### **1. 613 Commandments**

The Mosaic Law is not just the 10 commandments. Rather it contains 613 Laws that governed the details of the individual and national life of Israel. As such they are the express will of God for the nation.

### **2. An Expression of the Will of God**

God very clearly delineated His will for the nation of Israel. The 613 laws were taken from an infinite corpus of principles that issue forth from God's character. See, God is eternal and so God's laws are also eternal. But, God has every right to put some laws in effect during one period of history and others into effect at another time in history. God has done this repeatedly in history. For example, the Mosaic Law was put into effect in 1445BC at Mt Sinai and fulfilled by Christ on the cross in 33AD. So, that set of laws ceased at that moment. None of the 613 Mosaic Laws are for the Church. I emphasize this because some people want to bring over the Ten Commandments. Now, Christ is the end of the Law for all who believe (Rom 10:4). That means the entire corpus of Mosaic Law was set aside at the moment of belief. That doesn't mean we can't use it to show unbelievers their sin (1 Tim 1:8-9). But it is not for believers to follow at all.



After Christ died on the cross God put in force a new set of laws called “the law of Christ” and it is in effect and binding on all believers (1 Cor 9:21; Gal 6:2). Now, some of the law of Christ is the same as the Law of Moses (e.g. 9 of the 10 Commandments) but that should be expected because both sets of law come from the same source: God who is the same yesterday, today and forever. But the important thing to remember is that the entire Law of Moses was set aside and an entirely new law of Christ was put in effect. This is crucial because some people like to enforce ‘parts’ of the Law of Moses due to the idea that the Church has replaced Israel.

### **3. A Single Unit or Body (Js 2:10)**

It is popular to divide the Law into three kinds of laws; moral, civil, and ceremonial. Now, that’s fine for a systematic study of the Mosaic Law but the Bible never divides the laws up this way. Many today make this division and then say that the moral and civil laws are for the Church but not the ceremonial since they require animal sacrifices and Christ was sacrificed once for all. But, you can’t divide the Law like this and then carry some of it over to the Church. For one thing, the whole Law of Moses was fulfilled by Christ (Rom 10:4), not just the ceremonial laws. Thus, Christ set aside the whole thing and then gave us a new set of laws called the law of Christ. Now, it’s not me who came up with the idea of the Mosaic Law is to be viewed as a single unit, it comes from the Bible.

**James 2:10-11** For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one *point*, he has become guilty of all.

In other words, even if a person follows 612 of the 613 laws he is guilty of breaking them all. Why, verse 11 explains, “For He who said, "DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY," also said, "DO NOT COMMIT MURDER.” So, breaking any single law is rebellion against the Lawgiver. Thus, one stands guilty of all. This shows that the Mosaic Law was a unit and can’t be divided up. To point this out to unbelievers would of course, press home the intention of the Mosaic Law, which was to show people their sin so they will turn to Christ.

## **II. CONCLUSION**

The Mosaic Covenant marks the beginning of a new dispensation, a new set of rules which God used to govern His redeemed people Israel. This covenant is composed of God's promises in the form of a legal contract designed to measure the behavior of Himself and Israel. It is a conditional contract using "if...then" language. If Israel obeyed they would be blessed. If they disobeyed they would be cursed. It did not invalidate the Abrahamic Covenant which had been ratified 430 years before and was unconditional. Instead, the Law was given for five purposes; *first*, to curb Israel's sin, *second* so they could become God's possession, *third*, so they would become a kingdom of priests, *fourth*, so they would be a holy nation, and *fifth*, to serve as a tutor by showing them their sin and causing them to turn to faith in Christ. This body of Law consists of 613 commandments that express the will of God for the individual and the nation. It is a single unit or body of Law written to Israel. The breaking of one of these Laws consisted in rebellion against God, the Lawgiver. As such, that person stood condemned before God. Since sinful hearts were unable to fulfill the Law, Jesus Christ was sent into the world, born under Law (Gal 4:4), to fulfill the Mosaic Law and generate the space-time righteousness which is imputed to all who have faith in Christ. At the point of His death the entire Mosaic Law was put aside. Christ is the end of the law for all who believe (Rom 10:4). However, just because Christ fulfilled the Law does not mean that it serves no purpose today. Paul taught that the Law is good and holy and righteous when used lawfully. In fact, it was important in his own personal conversion. So, the Christian is to be well-schooled in the Law because it is useful for showing unbelievers their sin which is supposed to lead to faith in Christ. At that point, the point of faith, in our dispensation, a person is given a new body of law to follow, "the law of Christ". Yet we should never confuse any body of Law with the way of justification. Justification is always by faith alone in Christ alone. Sanctification is by faithful obedience to God's commandments.

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