

May 2nd, 2021

# A Dual Covenant: Moses, the Covenant of Law

Exodus 20:1-21

## **The candles of redemptive history**

Perhaps you heard that analogy of redemptive history to that of a dark room. After the fall of mankind, darkness prevailed. But then God began making covenants. Upon doing so, God, as it were, lights a candle and all of the sudden there is hope. In that dark room you can begin to see very obscurely the objects in the room as the light flickers their shadows against the wall. Every time God makes a covenant, that is, every time He amends the one Covenant of Grace, He lights another candle bringing more light. He makes more promises, reveals more truth, and makes that room—representing Redemptive History—more discernible. Consider the candles God has lit thus far. In the first period—the fall to the flood—God promised a Redeemer who would destroy the serpent who has enslaved mankind to sin and death (**Gen. 3:15**). In the second period—from the flood to Abraham—God promised to preserve the Earth until that Redeemer comes (**Gen. 8:20-22**). In the third period—from Abraham to Moses—God formally set apart the very community through which the Redeemer would come (**Gen. 12:1-3**). This morning we are entering into the fourth period—from Moses to David—when God establishes His good law for that community turned nation, namely Israel, thus protecting it from the corruption of the world.

☆The World Before Moses

☆The Covenant God Made with Moses

☆The Dual Nature of the Mosaic Covenant

## I. The World Before Moses

### Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob

So what happened after God made His covenant with Abraham? Well Abraham and his family didn't yet receive the land that God had promised. In fact, God prophesied in **Genesis 15:13-16** that Abraham and his family would land in Egypt and be afflicted for four hundred years. The promised land was not ready for them for the sins of the Amorites was not yet complete. So what follows is that God re-affirms the covenant that He made with Abraham with each of His succeeding posterity. **First**, He reaffirms the covenant with Isaac. Turn to **Genesis 26:3-4** At the end of v.3 God tells him: "...I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father. I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed." **Second**, after Isaac dies, God reaffirms the same covenant with Jacob in **Genesis 28:13-15** "I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring. Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." God does the same thing in **Genesis 35:9-12**.<sup>1</sup>

### Joseph

Enter Joseph. He was one of Jacob's sons, one of the twelve patriarchs, sold into slavery by his brothers. But God was in it. **Psalm 105:16-17**<sup>2</sup> tells us that "[God] summoned a famine on the land and broke all supply of bread, [but]

---

<sup>1</sup> In fact the very blessing that Isaac unknowingly gave to Jacob was essentially a recapitulation of the covenant God promised Abraham, cf. Genesis 27:29

<sup>2</sup> In fact, Psalm 105 is essentially worship song that covers God's carefully performing his covenant from Abraham to Moses.

He had sent a man ahead of them, Joseph, who was sold as a slave.” Why did God send a Joseph to Egypt? So that Israel would be saved from the famine. God had given Joseph the wisdom he needed to ensure the nations wouldn’t perish from the global famine. In fact this is how Joseph interprets the entire account. His brothers come to Him deathly afraid that Joseph will use his power to kill them for their great sin. But he tells them in **Genesis 50:20** “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.” Who were the *many people* kept alive? Not doubt many heathens and pagans and idolators. But God’s chief concern was Abraham’s family. Joseph interprets the entire narrative in terms of God’s faithfulness to His covenant with Abraham to keep the family alive through which the Christ would come.

## Judah

This is how the book of Genesis closes. When Jacob (Joseph’s father) was about to die, he blesses all his sons. When he comes to Judah, he tells him that the Redeemer that was promised to Adam and Eve (**Genesis 3:15**), that was promised to his great grandfather Abraham (**Genesis 22:17-18**) would come through his tribe. In **Genesis 49:8-10** Jacob promises Judah that all of Israel shall praise His tribe, for from Him comes the lion of the tribe of Judah, the true King who would harvest the obedience of all peoples. This will be relevant when we get to the covenant with David.

## The book of Exodus

Enter the book of Exodus. Look at **1:8** “Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. And he said to his people, “Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and, if war breaks out, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land.” So this Pharaoh abuses the Israelites making them slaves and then with the utmost cruelty commands that every son born to the Hebrew be thrown into the Nile (**v.21**). Now what does that sound

like? **Genesis 3:15** - enmity between the offspring of the woman and the offspring of the serpent. Now we discover another crisis for the ancient Church. Just as almost the Church was exterminated before the flood (**Genesis 6**), and under Babylon (**Genesis 11**), so the Church is in danger of extinction again.<sup>3</sup> Not only were they in grave physical danger through Pharaoh's cruelty. But they were in grave spiritual danger because of Egyptian idolatry. Remember they were in Egypt for over 400 years. That is longer than America has been a nation. What was happening to them during this time? Well we don't have to guess. **Ezekiel 23:8** tells us that Israel was whoring after the gods of the Egyptians (also cf. **Ezekiel 20:6-8**). They were mixing with the world.<sup>4</sup> However there was still a remnant. **Hebrews 11:23** tells us that "By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden of three months by his parents...and they were not afraid of the king's edict. There was still a remnant by faith. And that remnant was under incredible suffering and they began to cry out to the Lord. What 'prompted' God to act (if I can say it like that)? Covenant. Look at **Exodus 2:23-25** "During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and *God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob*. God saw the people of Israel—and God knew" Isn't that amazing? The whole set up to the war between Yahweh and Egypt's God's is God remembering His covenant with Abraham.

---

<sup>3</sup> "This now was the third time that God's church was almost swallowed up and carried away with the wickedness of the world; once before the flood; the other time before the calling of Abraham; and now, the third time in Egypt. But yet God did not suffer his church to be quite overwhelmed: he still saved it, like the ark in the flood, and as he saved Moses in the midst of the waters in an ark of burushes, where he was in the utmost danger of being swallowed up." Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards Vol. 1*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), pg. 546

<sup>4</sup> This is what Nebuchadnezzar was trying to do with the Hebrew boys in Daniel 1.

## II. The Covenant God Made with Moses

### A covenant rescue

What happens next? Well let's turn to **Psalm 105** and allow it summarize God's rescue. Beginning in v.26

- [God] sent Moses, his servant,  
and Aaron, whom he had chosen.  
27 They performed his signs among them  
and miracles in the land of Ham.  
28 He sent darkness, and made the land dark;  
they did not rebel against his words.  
29 He turned their waters into blood  
and caused their fish to die.  
30 Their land swarmed with frogs,  
even in the chambers of their kings.  
31 He spoke, and there came swarms of flies,  
and gnats throughout their country.  
32 He gave them hail for rain,  
and fiery lightning bolts through their land.  
33 He struck down their vines and fig trees,  
and shattered the trees of their country.  
34 He spoke, and the locusts came,  
young locusts without number,  
35 which devoured all the vegetation in their land  
and ate up the fruit of their ground.  
36 He struck down all the firstborn in their land,  
the firstfruits of all their strength.  
37 Then he brought out Israel with silver and gold,  
and there was none among his tribes who stumbled.  
38 Egypt was glad when they departed,

for dread of them had fallen upon it.

Why did God do all this? Look at v.42 “For *he remembered his holy promise, and Abraham, his servant.*”

### Suzerain Treaty

Every major event in Scripture is bookended with covenant. God rescued Israel out of Egypt because of covenant, and then immediately God makes a covenant with them. After Israel left Egypt via the Red Sea in Exodus 14, God gathers them to Mount Sinai in Exodus 19. Then in Exodus 20, God gives Israel the covenant, namely the Ten Commandments. Please turn there. Before we introduce the covenant, something needs to be said about **suzerain treaties**. In the 1950’s there was a massive discovery made regarding ancient Hittite treaties. These were called suzerain treaties. The Suzerain was simply the greater king, and he entered into a treaty with a lesser nation—they would be called his vassals or servants. Now what is significant about these ancient Near East treaties is that Israel also structured their treaties in a similar fashion. Dr. Meredith Kline sheds light on the structure of these suzerain treaties:

“These Suzerain/Vassal treaties open with two sections: 1) The identification of the Suzerain by his name and titles; 2) The historical survey of the Suzerain's dealings with the vassal. The purpose is to illustrate to the vassal how much the Suzerain has done to protect and establish the vassal who therefore owes submission and allegiance to the Suzerain. These two sections are referred to as the “Preamble.”<sup>5</sup>

So in the Preamble of these suzerain treaties, the Hittite king would say something like this “I, Hammurabi, king of all the Hittites, the one who reigns

---

<sup>5</sup> Source: <https://www.fivesolas.com/suzerain.htm> Accessed April 30, 2021

supreme over all the vassals in this realm.”<sup>6</sup> Now look at the Preamble to the Ten Commandments. God introduces Himself giving His name and titles v.2 “I am the LORD [Yahweh] your God.” *Your* God meaning that this is “...a legal relationship defined...by a personal relationship.”<sup>7</sup> It is the Immanuel Principle, God is Israel’s God and they are His people. But notice also that Yahweh provides a historical survey proclaiming what He has done and how He has protected His vassals—that is Israel. Continuing in v.2 “I am the LORD your God, *who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.*” This is why Israel owes Yahweh submission and allegiance, not in order for God to rescue them—God already has rescued them. They don’t earn their redemption from Egypt, God already redeemed them and now He is showing them what a life of gratitude looks like.

Kline then turns to the next section of the suzerain treaty:

“The next section of these [suzerain] treaties list the “stipulations.” What the vassal is required to do is spelled out in principal and detail. This section is often concluded with the requirement that the vassal deposit his copy of the treaty in his temple, where he is to occasionally read and study it to refresh his memory<sup>8</sup> concerning his duties.”<sup>9</sup>

So the ancient Hittite kings would require their vassals to pay taxes or supply their army soldiers, or food for the royal court or whatever the Suzerain required. Here the stipulations for Israel are the Ten Commandments themselves. The Ten Words showed that what was required of Israel was

---

<sup>6</sup> R.C. Sproul, *Truths We Confess: A Systematic Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith*, (Orlando, FL.: Reformation Trust, 2019), pg. 174

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>8</sup> The kings of Israel and Judah were required to write a copy of the law themselves in order that they would keep all the words of His law — Deuteronomy 17:18-20

<sup>9</sup> Source: <https://www.fivesolas.com/suzerain.htm> Accessed April 30, 2021

worship of Yahweh in every part of life. The Ten leaves no part of life—public or private—that is not to be offered up in worship to God.<sup>10</sup> Just like the vassals were given a copy of the covenant, so it was with Israel. Moses said in **Deuteronomy 4:13** “[God] declared to you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, that is, the Ten Commandments, and he wrote them on two tablets of stone.” **1 Kings 8:9** tells us these were placed in the ark of the covenant.<sup>11</sup>

Kline turns to the last section of the suzerain treaty:

“The last section of these treaties contains the blessings and curses of the Suzerain. If the stipulations are met by the vassal, he will receive the Suzerain's blessings, which are listed. If the vassal fails to meet the stipulations, he will receive the Suzerain's curses, which are also listed.”<sup>12</sup>

If the vassals obeyed the stipulations, the Hittite kings would protect them against thieves, marauders, and invaders.<sup>13</sup> But if they disobeyed, the great king would attack and bring violence against the city.<sup>14</sup> Likewise look at the blessing and curses of the Ten.

---

<sup>10</sup> They were to worship God alone (1st) in all truth—without images (2nd) in all spirit—without hypocrisy (3rd) with all their time (4th) with all the authorities He establishes (5th) with every human life (6th) in their marriages and sex life (7th) with their property (8th) with their speech (9th) and with their desires (10th).

<sup>11</sup> Just like in the covenant-cutting ceremony that we saw in Genesis 15, so these suzerain treaties had the same ceremony. Kline says “The Suzerain would keep one copy of the treaty and the vassal would keep one copy of the treaty. A number of ratifying ceremonies were used depending upon the era and culture. But the most widely used rite was that of cutting the bodies of animals in halves and placing them in two rows with enough space between for the two parties of the treaty to walk side by side. As they walked between the pieces, they were vowing to each other, “May what has happened to these animals, happen to me if I break this covenant with you.” Source: <https://www.fivesolas.com/suzerain.htm> Accessed April 30, 2021

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>13</sup> Sproul, pg. 175

<sup>14</sup> cf. 2 Chronicles 36:11ff



**Curse:** (end of v.5) For breaking His covenant, God would "...visit the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me."

**Blessing:** (v.6) But He would "...show steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments."

**Curse:** (end of v.7) "...the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain."

**Blessing:** (end of v.12) For keeping His covenant He promises "...that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you."

Now what's really interesting regarding these suzerain treaties is that they essentially had all the same component parts of God's covenant, including the covenant-cutting ceremony with the animals.

### **The sign of the Mosaic Covenant**

One final thing before we look at our last section. The Mosaic Covenant also included a sacrament. Please note, it's not circumcision. Circumcision was the sign of the Abrahamic covenant. The sacrament here was the Sabbath. Turn quickly to **Exodus 31:13-14** "And the Lord said to Moses, "You are to speak to the people of Israel and say, 'Above all you shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the Lord, sanctify you. You shall keep the Sabbath, because it is holy for you.'"<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> Interestingly the length of time that the Israelites were subjected to exile for their breaking the covenant was determined by their Sabbath breaking. Leviticus 26:34-35, 43; 2 Chronicles 36:20-21 in conjunction with violating the Sabbath year - cf. Leviticus 25:1-7 cf. O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, (Phillipsburg, NJ.; P & R Publishing, 1980)

### III. The Dual Nature of the Mosaic Covenant

#### Is the Mosaic covenant an administration of the Covenant of Grace?

Now here's the vital question: is the Mosaic Covenant identical with the Covenant of Grace? Not all Reformed Theologians answer that question the same. It is clear that there are some important differences between the Mosaic Covenant and the New Covenant. In fact these two covenants are expressly contrasted with each other in places like Jeremiah 31 and Hebrews 8. There were things that belonged to the Mosaic Covenant that don't *strictly* belong to later administrations of the Covenant of Grace, namely the ceremonial laws and judicial laws of Israel.<sup>16</sup> But there are other differences as well. Let's consider three vital differences.

#### 1. The *who* of the Mosaic Covenant

First let's consider *the who* of this covenant? Who *precisely* was the Mosaic covenant made with? The nation of Israel—as a corporate body. Look with me at **Exodus 19**. This is when the Lord called Moses up to the mountain. Look what is said. Starting in v.3

“Moses went up to God. The Lord called to him out of the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to *the house of Jacob*, and *tell the people of Israel*: ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession

---

<sup>16</sup> It's true that the ceremonial law was fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and in that sense it very much is a vital part of the Covenant of Grace. Likewise the general principles behind the judicial law certainly apply today. My point here, is that there is not a strict line for line carry over into the New Covenant. I think the WCF lays it out most clearly. 19.3-4 3. Beside this law, commonly called moral, God was pleased to give to the people of Israel, as a church under age, ceremonial laws, containing several typical ordinances, partly of worship, prefiguring Christ, his graces, actions, sufferings, and benefits; and partly, holding forth divers instructions of moral duties. All which ceremonial laws are now abrogated, under the new testament...To them also, as a body politic, he gave sundry judicial laws, which expired together with the State of that people; not obliging any other now, further than the general equity thereof may require.

among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.”

God covenanted with the nation of Israel *corporately*. In other words, this is a national covenant with a specific ethnic people. In this sense we find a contrast with the Covenant of Grace. The Covenant of Grace deals with elect individuals—both Jew and Gentile—everyone who the Lord will call to Himself. It’s not limited to one nation. So there is a discontinuity between the Mosaic covenant on this point.

## 2. The *quality* of this covenant

Secondly, consider that this national covenant was *conditional*. Meaning it could be broken. Look with me **Deuteronomy 8:11-20**

“Take care lest you forget the Lord your God by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes, which I command you today, lest, when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied, then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, who led you through the great and terrifying wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water, who brought you water out of the flinty rock, who fed you in the wilderness with manna that your fathers did not know, that he might humble you and test you, to do you good in the end. Beware lest you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.’ You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm *his covenant* that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day. And if you forget the Lord your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I solemnly warn you today that

you shall surely perish. Like the nations that the Lord makes to perish before you, so shall you perish, because you would not obey the voice of the Lord your God.”<sup>17</sup>

Now we know this solemn warning was not listened to. The whole of Israel and Judah after her were taken into exile for breaking the covenant. In contrast to this, the Covenant of Grace is unconditional. Yes it's true that we must truly believe the gospel, however God in His grace "...promises to give unto all those that are ordained unto eternal life his Holy Spirit, to make them willing, and able to believe.”<sup>18</sup> **Acts 13:48** says "...as many as were appointed to eternal life believed." Furthermore, not one of God's elect can break the Covenant of Grace. God will discipline us for our sin, but even in the case of discipline unto death, it is a discipline that still results in salvation. **1 Corinthians 11:32** "But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.”<sup>19</sup>

### 3. The *scope* of this covenant

Thirdly, consider the *scope* of this covenant. The national covenant that God made with Israel dealt primarily with their *temporal life*. That is why you see all the blessings that are promised in **Deuteronomy 28:1-14** "If you faithfully obey the voice of the LORD your God...[then] all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you...Blessed shall you be in the city...and... in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground etc...The LORD will make you abound in prosperity...[giving] rain to your land in its season and...[blessing] all the work of your hands...And the LORD will make you the head and not the tail..." etc. On the other hand it was terrible temporal

---

<sup>17</sup> also see Deuteronomy 4:25-31; 7:1-4; 29:24-28; 31:16-18, 20

<sup>18</sup> WCF 7.3

<sup>19</sup> This is clearly seen even within Israel herself. When Israel *as a whole* broke the national covenant there was still a remnant that God preserved *via* the Covenant of Grace - cf. Jeremiah 24; 29:7-11; 2 Peter 2:9.

curses that followed if they disobeyed in **v.15-68**. “But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD your God...then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you. Cursed shall you be in the city, and...in the field...Cursed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground...etc...The LORD will make the pestilence stick to you...the LORD will strike you with wasting disease...The LORD will make the rain of your land powder...The LORD will cause you to be defeated before your enemies...” etc. In essence, the blessings and curses essentially focused on temporal things. In contrast, the great promise of the Covenant of Grace is not temporal blessings but eternal ones. Jesus said in **John 16:33** “In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

### **The discontinuity of the covenant**

In summary we see the discontinuity in three ways. 1) The covenant of grace is only for the elect dealing with individuals *whereas* this national covenant is for all humanity and deals with societies. 2) The covenant of grace is unconditional, *whereas* this national covenant is conditional. 3) The covenant of grace deals with our eternal life *whereas* this national covenant deals with this present life only.

### **The continuity of this covenant**

However there is also great continuity. The reason why we still affirm that we would still affirm that the Mosaic Covenant is an administration or chapter in the one Covenant of Grace is because at the heart of it—God’s moral law—the Ten Commandments are still a vital part of the life of God’s people. Over and over again in the NT the Ten Commandments are presented by Jesus and the apostles as God’s good, holy and righteous law. Yes it’s true that we are not under the condemnation of the Law. That is because the True and Better Moses came down from the mountain—the Lord Jesus Christ. And He fulfilled every part of the Law. And now that same law that was given to the people of Israel serves the people of God teaching us how to love the Lord our God with

all our heart, soul, mind and strength; and how to love our neighbor as ourselves.

<b>The Continuity and Discontinuity of the Mosaic Covenant</b>	<b>Israel's National Covenant found in the Mosaic Covenant</b>	<b>The Covenant of Grace</b>	<b>The Mosaic Covenant for all believers (Ten Commandments)</b>
<b>The <i>who</i> of this covenant</b>	Israel as a corporate nation—as a society	The elect—both Jew and Gentile	The elect—both Jew and Gentile
<b>The <i>quality</i> of this covenant</b>	<b>Conditional.</b> Israel broke the covenant and were exiled (2 Kings 17:6-18)	<b>Unconditional.</b> The elect cannot break this covenant (Acts 13:48; 1 Corinthians 11:32)	Redeemed man is bound to the obedience of the law <b>unconditionally</b> but is freed from it's punishment because Jesus fulfilled all its <b>conditions</b>
<b>The <i>scope</i> of this covenant</b>	Israel's temporal life	The elect's eternal life	The elect's temporal life and eternal life