

The Old and New Covenants

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Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, Yeshua:

Much has been written about the Old and the New Covenants. Clearly, from scripture, we find the new is a better covenant.ⁱ However, does the Old Covenant still serve a purpose in the life of a Christian today? There are many arguments on both sides; some claim the law has been entirely superseded by the New Covenant—supersessionism—while others within the Messianic Community still follow the Law of Moses, claiming the law is an eternal statute given to the Jewish people.

Several of the 613 written statutes, including the Passoverⁱⁱ, Pentecost,ⁱⁱⁱ Day of Atonement^{iv}, Feast of Tabernacles^v, and the Aaronic priesthood,^{vi} are uniquely called out in scripture as eternal. Yeshua has partially fulfilled these feasts and the priesthood at His first advent. Since Yeshua said: *“One jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled”* (Matthew 5:18, NKJV),^{vii} we can conclude that the law and its veil remain in effect for the unredeemed nation of Israel, until He returns to the earth to establish His kingdom in Jerusalem.^{viii} Once fulfilled, however, they become an eternal memorial to remember what Yeshua has done for us.

But to those in Christ—both Jew and gentile—the veil is removed. We are now under a New Covenant. Think of it as a new legal contract. While the old contract has been nullified, God’s law and His moral standards are eternal and cannot be annulled by Israel’s disobedience to the contract. In other words, God’s law and His agreement with Israel are mutually exclusive since God’s law existed before the contract was made. The old contract essentially bound Israel to God’s preexisting laws, but the new contract binds us to Yeshua, who fulfilled these laws.

This is how Yeshua can be the mediator of the New Covenant. Since God said He would write His laws on our hearts,^{ix} I believe the Mosaic Law still serves a purpose in the life of a Christian. We read: *“For by the law is the knowledge of sin”* (Romans 3:20); *“I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, ‘You shall not covet’”* (Romans 7:7). Please note this teaching deals primarily with God’s moral law, and no other areas of the Mosaic Law, such as circumcision, dietary laws, the feasts of the Lord, or the Sabbath.

A critical task of the Holy Spirit is to convict the world of sin.^x If the law is the knowledge of sin, and through the Holy Spirit is the conviction of sin, these operate together. For how can the Spirit convict if there is no knowledge? And therefore, by what standard are we judged? Oh, you

might say we are now free from condemnation. This is true. However, we are not free from God's chastisement and discipline,^{xi} *"For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?" (1 Peter 4:17).*

So, how exactly are we to approach the Mosaic Law? We certainly cannot come back under the bondage of the Old Covenant, for with it came punishment and even death. With the law also came the curses; still, Yeshua took away the curse of the law by fulfilling the law of sin and death,^{xii} and He became our curse by dying on the cross. Therefore, we can now approach God's law with grace rather than condemnation. When we fail, God's mercy prevails because the blood of Yeshua has already covered us. And still, His mercy and grace are not a license to sin.^{xiii}

Paul says: *"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16).* Now that we are saved by faith in Christ, we can still use the law as a means of instruction on how to live a righteous life. Again, we are no longer under the law but can learn and understand its wisdom to receive and give instruction.

For example, Paul quotes the 5th commandment in his epistle to the Ephesian Church, *"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER,' which is the first commandment with promise: 'THAT IT MAY BE WELL WITH YOU AND YOU MAY LIVE LONG ON THE EARTH'" (Ephesians 6:1-3).*

Paul's ministry was primarily to the Gentiles, so why would he quote the Ten Commandments in his letter to the Ephesians? The council in Jerusalem had already instructed the gentiles on requirements for salvation without referencing the Mosaic Law.^{xiv} Notice, however, that the Church in Jerusalem did place legal provisions on the Gentiles, so the Gentiles are not lawless.

The early church fathers also recognized the benefits of Jewish law in their combat against paganism—such great names as Justin Martyr, Clement, Origen, Eusebius, Ephraem Syrus, Epiphanius, Jerome, Augustine, Chrysostom, Cyril, Eusebius, and Ambrose. Several of these men are even mentioned in the Talmud and Mishna (the narrative of the Oral law) and held close relations with the Jewish sages. Their interest was to use the Mosaic Law to establish a moral foundation for Christianity.^{xv} We see that foundation laid out today; in this nation and its laws, our work weeks, and to a diminishing degree, even within our culture.

God's law is good—it is perfect^{xvi}—but the Holy Spirit is much better. For what the law could not achieve through the flesh, the Spirit can accomplish and will complete through our new creation in Christ and through our soul, which is being renewed and sanctified daily.^{xvii} The soul is in our mind, and the battle that rages in our mind is the carnal nature resisting the Spirit of God.^{xviii}

So how is the New Covenant better than the old? The obvious answer is that Christ is the mediator of a new, not a renewed covenant that has made the first obsolete. The Hebrew word is *Brit Chadash* (new), not *Brit Chadasha* (meaning renewed).^{xix} We are now free from the

bondage and curses of the Mosaic Law that brought condemnation, ending with death. If one part of the law was violated, it was treated as if the whole was broken.^{xx} The New Covenant has brought life.^{xxi} But it also came with a new commandment.

Yeshua gave a new commandment when He made the New Covenant on the evening of the Passover. He said: *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another"* (John 13:34). And then, Yeshua defined the standard of this commandment when He said, *"He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him"* (John 14:21). *"Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends"* (John 15:13).

The Old Covenant required us to love our neighbor as ourselves.^{xxii} The golden rule. This was difficult, although not impossible. Just as we love ourselves unconditionally, we must love our neighbor unconditionally. However, the new commandment requires us to love our neighbor more than ourselves, not just the same.

I will demonstrate this with a story. You and a friend venture on a journey through the wilderness, but you only bring one jar of water. Surrounding you for miles in every direction are parched hills—no trees or shade, no water, only hot scorching sun. Your map shows a well halfway to your destination. However, when you arrive, the well is dry. If you drink the water, you will live, and your friend will die. If you give the water to your friend, he will live, and you will die. If you share the water equally, you will both die.

The *Talmud* tells us that since you hold the water in your hand—which is life—it is yours to drink so that you might live. However, if Yeshua were on this journey with you, He would give you His water so that you would live, and he would die. That is the standard that Christ set for us in the giving of the New Covenant, and it is a higher standard than the old. Therefore, why would we cling to the old when given the new?

Yes, the New Covenant is better than the Old. Still, it is also more difficult, *"Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it"* (Matthew 7:14). It can only be through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit that we can achieve Christ's new standard. The Spirit is willing to sacrifice itself, but the flesh wants to be preserved.^{xxiii} *"He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it"* (Matthew 10:39). My prayer for us is that we all become like Yeshua, fully transformed into His image, living sacrifices that would lay down our lives to save our friends.

Amen!

ⁱ Hebrews 8:6.

ⁱⁱ Exodus 12:24.

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- iii Leviticus 23:21.
 - iv Leviticus 16:29-31.
 - v Leviticus 23:41.
 - vi Exodus 28:43.
 - vii All Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Bible (NKJV) unless otherwise noted, Thomas Nelson Inc., 1982.
 - viii 2 Corinthians 3:15-16.
 - ix Jeremiah 31:31.
 - x John 16:7-8.
 - xi Hebrews 12:5-6.
 - xii Galatians 3:13.
 - xiii Romans 6:1.
 - xiv Acts 21:25.
 - xv Howell, Crawford & Krauss, Samuel. *Church Fathers*. Jewish Encyclopedia.
 - xvi Psalm 19:7.
 - xvii Ephesians 4:23.
 - xviii Romans 8:7.
 - xix Jeremiah 31:31.
 - xx James 2:10.
 - xxi John 3:63, 2 Corinthians 3:6.
 - xxii Leviticus 19:18.
 - xxiii Ephesians 5:29.