

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF MORMONISM



Edited by
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*The History, Scripture, Doctrine, and Procedure
of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*

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have a law given; and there are many kingdoms; for there is no space in which there is no kingdom; and there is no kingdom in which there is no space, either a greater or a lesser kingdom. And unto every kingdom is given a law; and unto every law there are certain bounds also and conditions” (D&C 88:36–38).

The above references apparently pertain to descriptive law—that is, the divine law that operates directly upon or through physical and biological orders (*see* NATURE, LAW OF).

Other laws of God are prescriptive. They address the free will of man, setting forth standards and rules of behavior necessary for salvation and for social harmony. Latter-day Saints embrace such prescriptive commands of God as found in the TEN COMMANDMENTS and the SERMON ON THE MOUNT. Latter-day revelation also confirms that blessings and salvation come through compliance with divine laws: “There is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world, upon which all blessings are predicated—and when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated” (D&C 130:20–21). “And they who are not sanctified through the law which I have given unto you, even the law of Christ, must inherit another kingdom, even that of a terrestrial kingdom, or that of a telestial kingdom” (D&C 88:21).

Of these prescriptive laws or commandments of God, LDS teachings tend to emphasize the following characteristics: (1) the extent of the divine laws revealed to mankind may vary from dispensation to dispensation, according to the needs and conditions of mankind as God decrees; (2) they are given through and interpreted by his prophets; (3) they are relatively concise, but “gentle” or benevolent, given to promote the happiness he has designed for his children (*TPJS*, pp. 256–57); and (4) they are efficacious for mankind as God’s harmony with eternal law was, and is, efficacious for him, and will bring to pass the exaltation of his righteous children.

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LAW OF ADOPTION

The house of Israel in a spiritual and eternal perspective will finally include all who are the true followers of Jesus Christ. Although those of the direct blood lineage of the house of ISRAEL are genealogically the sheep of God’s fold, they must fulfill all the spiritual conditions of discipleship. Those not of the blood of Israel can become Israel through adoption (cf. Rom. 8:14; Gal. 3:7, 29; 4:5–7; Matt. 3:9; JST Luke 3:8; Abr. 2:10), through the principles and the ordinances of the gospel: faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; repentance of sins; baptism by water and reception of the HOLY GHOST; and enduring to the end.

In a larger sense, everyone must be adopted into the family of God in order to enjoy the fulness of his blessings in the world to come. As the Only Begotten of the Father in the flesh, Jesus is the only natural HEIR and therefore the only one whose birthright is the kingdom of his Father. If others are to qualify as joint-heirs with Christ in his Father’s kingdom, they must be fully adopted by God.

The adoption process is, in the Prophet Joseph SMITH’s words, “a new creation by the Holy Ghost” (*TPJS*, p. 150). As summarized in the Doctrine and Covenants, individuals who enter into the COVENANT and “magnify their calling” are “sanctified by the Spirit unto the renewing of their bodies. They become the sons of Moses and of Aaron and the seed of Abraham, and the church and kingdom, and the elect of God” (D&C 84:33–34).

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LAW OF MOSES

Distinctive views concerning the law of Moses and its relationship to Christ and to the attainment of individual salvation are set forth in the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints teaches that this law was given by God to MOSES, that it formed part of a peculiar COVENANT of obedience

and favor between God and his people, that it symbolized and foreshadowed things to come, and that it was fulfilled in the ATONEMENT OF JESUS CHRIST.

The law of Moses is best understood in a broad sense. It consists of “judgments,” “statutes,” “ordinances,” and “commandments.” The Book of Mormon refers to its also including various “performances,” “sacrifices,” and “burnt offerings.” Nowhere in scripture is its full breadth, depth, diversity, and definition made explicit. On such matters, information can be drawn from the Pentateuch itself (the Torah) and from biblical scholarship, but one can only conjecture as to what these terms meant to Book of Mormon writers.

A narrow definition would confine the law of Moses to a body of prohibitions and commands set forth in separate, unrelated literary units within the first five books of the Bible. This view makes it difficult to speak of “biblical law,” since these provisions are not drawn together as a unity by the Torah itself. The scattered codes and series include the Covenant Code (Ex. 20:23–23:19), Deuteronomic Law (Deut. 12–26), the Holiness Code (Lev. 17–26), purity laws (Lev. 11–15), festival rituals (Deut. 16), regulations pertaining to sacrifices (Num. 28–29), and the TEN COMMANDMENTS (Ex. 20:2–17; Deut. 5:6–21). While some biblical scholars conclude that “these were once independent units, subsisting in their own right, each having its own purpose and sphere of validity, and having been transmitted individually for its own sake in the first place” (Noth, p. 7), Latter-day Saints generally accept at face value statements in the Bible that attribute authorship to Moses, but the Church has taken no official stand concerning the collection and transmission of these legal texts in the Pentateuch. Scribes and copyists evidently made a few changes after the time of Moses (e.g., compare Moses 1–5 with Gen. 1–6).

Compounding the question of what was meant by the term “law of Moses” in the Book of Mormon is the fact that the “five books of Moses” that the Nephites possessed predated Ezra’s redaction and canonization of the Pentateuch (444 B.C.). Quoted passages (e.g., Mosiah 13:12–24), however, indicate that the Nephite laws were substantially similar to the biblical texts that Jews and Christians have today.

As early as the third century A.D., the Jewish view held that the commandments numbered 613. Rabbi Simlai reportedly stated that “613 com-

mandments were revealed to Moses at Sinai, 365 being prohibitions equal in number to the solar days, and 248 being mandates corresponding in number to the limbs [sic] of the human body” (*Encyclopedia Judaica* 5:760, quoting Talmud Bavli, *Makkot* 23b). About a third of these commandments have long been obsolete, such as those relating to the tabernacle and the conquest of Canaan. Others were directed to special classes, such as the Nazarites, judges, the king, or the high priest, or to circumstances that would rarely occur. Excluding these, about a hundred apply to the whole people and range from the spiritually sublime to the mundane. Examples of eternally relevant commandments of the law of Moses are the Ten Commandments and those relating to loving God, worshiping God, loving one’s neighbor, loving the stranger, giving charity to the poor, dealing honestly, not seeking revenge, and not bearing a grudge. Other commandments cover a kaleidoscope of daily matters, including valuing houses and fields, laws of inheritance, paying wages, agriculture, animal husbandry, and forbidden foods. Jewish scholars classify these as commandments vis-à-vis God and commandments vis-à-vis fellow human beings (*Mishnah Yoma* 8:9).

Two other definitions should be mentioned. One identifies the law of Moses as coextensive with the Pentateuch. Around the time of Christ, New Testament writers sometimes called the Pentateuch “the law” (Luke 24:44; Gal. 4:21), even though the word “torah” has broader meaning (i.e., “teachings”) and the Pentateuch contains poetry and narratives in addition to commandments, and some passages speak to all persons and nations (Gen. 9:1–7). The other defines the law as theologically synonymous with the doctrinal belief, whether mistaken or not, that salvation is dependent upon the keeping of commandments, thus distinguishing the law from grace, which for many Christians eliminates the task of sorting out which Mosaic laws are still in force.

Agreeing in some respects and departing in others from traditional Jewish or Christian views, the main lines of LDS belief about the law of Moses are as follows:

1. Jesus Christ was JEHOVAH, the God of the Old Testament who gave the law to Moses (3 Ne. 15:5; *TPJS*, p. 276). Jesus, speaking after his atonement and resurrection, stated, “The law is fulfilled that was given unto Moses. Behold, I am he that gave

the law, and I am he who covenanted with my people Israel” (3 Ne. 15:4–9).

2. The entire law was in several senses fulfilled, completed, superseded, and enlivened by Jesus Christ. Jesus said, “In me it hath *all* been fulfilled” (3 Ne. 12:17–18). Its “great and eternal gospel truths” (*MD*, p. 398) are applicable through Jesus Christ in all dispensations as he continues to reveal his will to prophets “like unto Moses” (2 Ne. 3: 9–11).

3. Latter-day Saints believe that the law of Moses was issued to the Israelites as a preparatory gospel to be a schoolmaster to bring them to Christ and the fulness of his gospel (Gal. 3:24; cf. Jacob 4:5; Alma 34:14). The authority to act in the name of God is embodied in two priesthoods, the Melchizedek or higher, which embraces all divinely delegated authority and extends to the fulness of the law of the gospel, and Aaronic or lesser, which extends only to lesser things, such as the law of carnal commandments and baptism (D&C 84:26–27). While Moses and his predecessors had the higher PRIESTHOOD and the fulness of the gospel of Christ, both of which were to be given to the children of Israel, “they hardened their hearts and could not endure [God’s] presence; therefore, the Lord in his wrath . . . took Moses out of their midst, and the Holy Priesthood also; and the lesser priesthood continued” (D&C 84:23–24; see Heb. 3:16–19; Mosiah 3:14; *TPJS*, p. 60).

4. Book of Mormon people brought the law of Moses with them from Jerusalem. Even though they endeavored to observe it strictly until the coming of Christ (e.g., 2 Ne. 5:10; Alma 30:3), they believed in Christ and knew that salvation did not come by the law alone but by Christ (2 Ne. 25:23–24), and understood that the law would be superseded by the Messiah (Mosiah 13:27–28; 2 Ne. 25:23–25).

5. For Latter-day Saints, all things are given of God to man as types and shadows of the redeeming and atoning acts of Christ (2 Ne. 11:4; Mosiah 13:31). Thus, the law of Moses typified various aspects of the atonement of Christ.

6. Covenant making, promises, and obedience to commandments are part of the fulness of the gospel of Christ: “Through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel” (A of F 3). Both for Latter-day Saints and regarding Jewish observ-

ance of the law of Moses, GRACE, FAITH, and WORKS are all essential to salvation: “It is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do” (2 Ne. 25:23). No mortal’s obedience to law will ever be perfect. By law alone, no one will be saved. The grace of God makes up the deficit. The Church does not subscribe to a doctrine of free-standing grace unrelated to instructions and expectations required of man. It does have commandments relating to diet (see WORD OF WISDOM), MODESTY, and CHASTITY, as well as many ORDINANCES, such as BAPTISM, LAYING ON OF HANDS, and WASHING AND ANOINTING. If man were perfect, salvation could come on that account; walking in the way of the Lord would be perfectly observed. Since man is mortal and imperfect, God in his love makes known the way his children should walk, and extends grace “after all they can do.”

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LAWSUITS

Church members are usually inclined to avoid litigation and to find less contentious ways of resolving differences that may arise. This inclination is based primarily upon teachings in the New Testament and the Doctrine and Covenants. The early experience of the Church added powerful reinforcements to scriptural condemnations of litigation. In the 1840s the Prophet Joseph SMITH and other early leaders were obliged to defend themselves repeatedly against false charges. So oppressive were those charges that the Prophet at one time even said that he looked forward to the next life, where people would be reunited with their loved ones and where there “will be no fear of mobs, persecutions, or malicious lawsuits” (*TPJS*, p. 360).