

[IN GOD'S IMAGE 18 – COVENANT FAILURE]

Last time we looked at the story of Moses and the exodus.

- ◆ They arrived at Mt. Sinai where God takes another important step in his plan of redemption, to restore the relationship with mankind.
- ◆ He establishes a covenant with the children of Israel to guide them into becoming His special people.
- ◆ The main purpose of the covenant was outlined in Exodus 6.
- ◆ ***Exodus 6:6-8 "Therefore, say to the Israelites: 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. ⁷ I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God.***
- ◆ So outlined once again is God's determination to prepare a holy people within whom He can come and dwell.
- ◆ God started the process of reconciliation with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but now expands the relationship to include a nation.

So let's take a closer look at the conditions of the Mosaic covenant in the same way we looked at the earlier covenants.

- ◆ Not going to spend a lot of time going through the chart as you can check the scripture references yourself to verify the conclusions.

Covenant between God and Israel. (See chart below).

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Covenants Between God and Man

	Noah Gen 9:8-17	Abraham Gen 12:1-3 Gen 17:1-22	Moses Ex 19:3-8, Deut 4:1-14, Deut 5:1-32	Jesus Jer 31:31-34, Luke 22:19-20, 1 Cor 11:23- 26, 2 Cor 3:1-17, Heb 1-10
Parties to Covenant	God/Noah, descendants, every living creature (Gen 9:8-10)	God/Abraham and his descendants (Gen 17:7)	God/Moses and the Nation of Israel (Ex 19:3-6)	
Type of Covenant Conditional/ Unconditional	Unconditional – Man didn't have to do anything	Conditional - on Faith (Gen 15:6, Rom 4, Gal 3:6-9)	Conditional - on Obedience (Ex 19:5-8, Deut 4:13, 5:32)	
Type of Blessing (Promise) Temporal/Eternal	Temporal – no more floods (Gen 9:11)	Temporal and Eternal – “Great Nation” and “All nations blessed through you” – referring to Jesus (Gen 12:1-3)	Temporal – “Blessed in the city, blessed in the country” etc. (Lev 26, Deut 28)	
Entry into Covenant	No Condition	Faith (Gen 15:6)	Circumcision (Ex 12:43-51, Lev 12:1-3)	
Signs of Covenant	Rainbow (Gen 9:12-16)	Circumcision (Gen 17:11)	Sabbath (Ex 31:12-17, Ez 20:12, 20)	
Status of Covenant Still in effect or terminated	In Effect	In Effect (Gen 17:7)	Terminated – even though it was an everlasting covenant, it was terminated because Israel did not keep their side of the covenant (Jer 31:31-33, Ez 20:1-49, Matt 27:51, John 19:30, Heb 7:11, 18-19, 8:6-13)	
Dietary Changes	All food – no restrictions (Gen 9:3)	No change	“Clean” Foods only (Lev 11)	
Additional Comments		Foreshadowed the New Covenant (Gal 3:29)	Ineffective against sin (Heb 7:18) External regulations - standards written on stone (2 Cor 3, Heb 9:9-10) Motivation based on “blessing and curses” (Lev 26, Deut 28) Human effort (Gal 2:16, 21) Shadow (Col 2:16) Relationship through priesthood and law (Heb 9:1-10) Available to Israel only (Eph 2:11-22)	

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However, we can't leave this covenant without looking a little more closely at a couple of aspects that have led to some unfortunate misunderstandings about the Old and New Covenants.

- ◆ These misunderstandings revolve around two aspects, first, the term “everlasting” used in reference to the Mosaic Covenant, and second, the role of the Ten Commandments in the age of the New Covenant.

Let's look at the term “everlasting.”

- ◆ Sabbatarian's claim that the reason they observe the seventh day Sabbath and not Sunday is because the Mosaic Covenant was still in effect because it was to be an “everlasting covenant.”
- ◆ **Exodus 31:16 The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant.**
- ◆ But was it an everlasting covenant?
- ◆ As part of the Mosaic Covenant agreement, both parties promised to abide by certain conditions.
- ◆ **Exodus 19:3-8 Then Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain and said, “This is what you are to say to the descendants of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: 4 ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. 5 Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, 6 you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.”**
- ◆ From God's side he promised He would make them his treasured possession and bless them.
- ◆ But the agreement was conditional on the people's obedience from their side.
- ◆ **V.7-8 So Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people and set before them all the words the Lord had commanded him to speak. 8 The people all responded together, “We will do everything the Lord has said.” So Moses brought their answer back to the Lord.**
- ◆ The Israelites for their part promised to abide by the terms of the agreement. In other words, the covenant was conditional on both parties upholding their side of the agreement.
- ◆ We all know what happened don't we. Israel didn't do any better than Adam and Eve.
- ◆ Let's use the example of a marriage covenant.
- ◆ A couple promises to stay together “until death do us part.” As such it is supposed to be an everlasting covenant.
- ◆ But what happens to that covenant promise if one person decides not to honour it?
- ◆ What was ordained to be everlasting is reduced to a broken promise.
- ◆ It is no different with God's covenant with Israel.
- ◆ If one side failed to keep their obligations to the covenant, it, like any legal document, was terminated.
- ◆ God, over centuries, pleaded with the Israelites to obey him, but eventually He discarded that covenant and replaced it with one where He would do for them what they could not do for themselves.
- ◆ **Hebrews 8:6-9 But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises. 7 For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second.8 Because finding fault with them, He says: “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—9 “not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them, says the Lord.**
- ◆ Notice though, even though God terminated the covenant, He continued to remain faithful to His side of the agreement.
- ◆ You could say God still regarded the covenant as everlasting from His side in the sense He was going to achieve His goal of creating a holy people for Himself even if He had to do it for them through the institution of the New Covenant.
- ◆ He set up a new agreement that would apply not only to Israel but also to the whole world.
- ◆ Once we understand the Mosaic covenant was terminated because of the Israelites disobedience, the “everlasting” aspect becomes redundant.
- ◆ So the whole agreement, including the priesthood, sacrifices, temple regulations, holy days, the dietary restrictions and the Ten Commandments including the command concerning the Sabbath day was terminated.

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- ◆ Christians are not required to observe the conditions of the discarded Mosaic Covenant.
 - ◆ However, I hasten to add, Christians are required to observe the conditions of the New Covenant.
- So understanding that, let's now go back to the issue of the signs of the covenants.**
- ◆ The sign of the Mosaic Covenant was the Sabbath.
 - ◆ **Exodus 31:16-17** *The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant. ¹⁷ It will be a sign between me and the Israelites forever, for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed."*
 - ◆ Earlier we saw how God gave Adam and Eve a test commandment, "Don't eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil."
 - ◆ This scenario was much more than just a moral issue about fruit; it was a test of their allegiance.
 - ◆ We saw the failure of Adam and Eve, representing humanity failing in this test (Romans 5:12,18).
 - ◆ Now we see God testing the allegiance of the nation of Israel to Him. Would they trust Him as their God?
 - ◆ Again, this is much more than a moral issue about a day; it was a test of their allegiance.
 - ◆ This, by the way, is not the only prohibition given as part of the Mosaic Covenant. Others include clean and unclean foods, circumcision, the holy places, even mixing different types of threads.
 - ◆ All of these things were given to remind a stiff-necked and rebellious people on a daily basis they were God's special people, not to mention the fact they had the constant reminder of the pillar of fire and cloud hovering over them.
 - ◆ The Sabbath command was a test of obedience for the nation.
 - ◆ And we know from subsequent history beginning with those who went out to gather manna on the Sabbath day that this was one of the major issues of disobedience on the part of the Israelites (Exodus 16:27-30).
 - ◆ In much the same way we saw the failure of individuals (represented by Adam and Eve) to obey God, now we see the failure of nations (represented by Israel) to obey God.
 - ◆ In both cases, the respective parties had an ongoing relationship with God yet failed in their obligations of being faithful to their God.
 - ◆ So once again we see mankind's unwillingness to surrender their will to God.
- But there is another important aspect to the Sabbath being given to the Israelites as a sign.**
- ◆ The signs associated with the various covenants, were just that, signs that pointed to something greater or more significant.
 - ◆ When we see a sign on the roadside pointing to our destination, we don't stand there admiring the sign, we head off to that destination.
 - ◆ In Noah's Covenant, the rainbow sign pointed to the more significant promise God made never to flood the earth again.
 - ◆ With the Abrahamic Covenant, the circumcision sign pointed to the future fulfilment when God would circumcise the heart through faith (Romans 3:29-30).
 - ◆ This is one of the archetypes that had its later fulfilment in the New Covenant.
 - ◆ We need to look at the sign of the Mosaic Covenant in the same light, as it was a sign that pointed backwards as well as forwards.
 - ◆ The Sabbath day sign although a test of allegiance for the children of Israel pointed to something much more significant.
 - ◆ It was never God's intention for the sign to become the object of worship; rather it was to direct people's worship to what the sign pointed to.
 - ◆ Unfortunately, down through the centuries, whether a church worshiped on a Saturday or a Sunday, the sign at times took on a more significant focus than what it pointed to (Matthew 23:1-4, 16-22).
 - ◆ Rules and regulations were imposed on what was allowed and not allowed on the day so that it became both a burden for worshippers and a standard of "righteousness."
 - ◆ Rather than focusing on the day, our attention should be focused on what the day was pointing to.
 - ◆ So let's look at what the sign pointed to.
 - ◆ **Exodus 20:8-11** *"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is*

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within your gates.11 For in six days THE LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.

- ◆ The first thing we notice is the focus of the day was to remind them to remember God their Creator (v.11)
- ◆ One day each week was set aside as a day of worship to their Creator and the God who had created the functional world in which they lived (Genesis 1).
- ◆ Second, He was the One who had redeemed them from Egyptian slavery where they worked seven days a week without rest (Exodus 20:1, 9-10)
- ◆ So this signpost pointed the people backwards to God's handiwork of creation and His redeeming work of delivering people from the oppression of slavery.
- ◆ The sign was not the object of worship; it was the God to whom it pointed, their Creator and Redeemer.
- ◆ Even in many Christian circles today, the emphasis placed on the fourth commandment revolves around what is permissible on the day and misses the more significant command to "remember the Lord who made the heavens and the earth", and the One who delivers them from the oppression of slavery.
- ◆ The fourth commandment is a command to worship God, not a day.

But the Sabbath sign had a future significance as well and it revolved around four key words also found in this section of scripture.

- ◆ They are, "holy", "remember", "work" and "rested"