

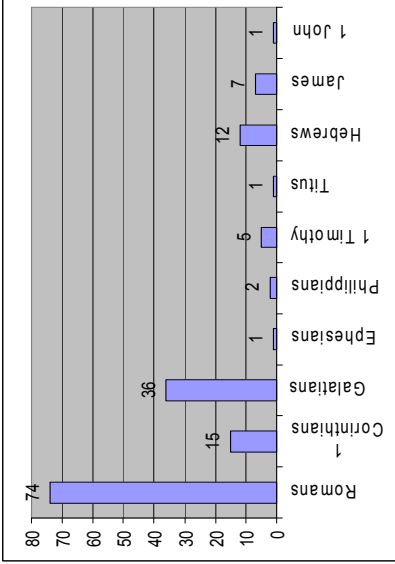
## The Law of Moses in the New Testament

Rick L. McNally

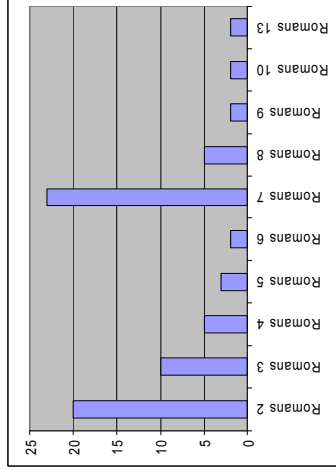
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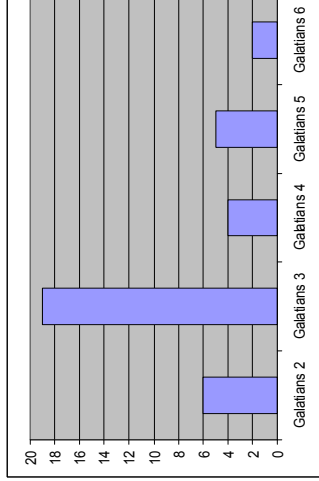
### Usages of “Law” in New Testament Epistles



### Distribution of “Law” in Romans



### Distribution of “Law” in Galatians



**Fulfill** (*Matthew 5:17, Luke 24:44, Romans 13:8, 10, Galatians 6:2*) — This Greek word **pleroo** means “to make full, fill up, to render full or complete, or to consummate, to carry through to an end.” Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment for the Law. Such was Jesus’ teaching of the Law and the other New Testament writers agree and expand upon this.

**Until** (*Matthew 11:13, Luke 16:16, Galatians 3:23*) — This conjunction is used several times to discuss the temporal completion of the Law.

**Die or Died** (*Romans 7:1-6, Galatians 2:19*) — This word is death which means “to separate,” and here it means that we have been separated (or made dead) from the Law so that we might be married to Christ.

**The End** (*Romans 10:4*) — This Greek word is **telos** and it means “end, a termination, a limit at which a thing ceases to be.”

“**redeemed us from the Law**” (*Galatians 3:13, 4:5*) — Exagorazo means “to redeem, to make a payment to recover from the power of another, to provide ransom.” Here we have been redeemed from the Law to serve Christ.

“**no longer under the supervision of the Law**” (*Galatians 3:25*) — this simple adverb means “no longer, no more, no further.”

**Abolished and Destroyed** (*Ephesians 2:14,15*) — The first word is the Greek **katargeo** which means “to render idle, unem-ployed, inactive, inoperative, to deprive of force, influence and power.” The second word is **luo**, “to loose any person being tied or fastened, to unbind, to release from bonds, to set free.”

**Shadow** (*Hebrews 10:1, Colossians 2:17*) — The imagery here is that Jesus’ shadow was cast into the Old Testament and that this shadow was the Law. It foretold of Christ, but was merely that testimony and had no real substance.

When the reality came the shadow had served its purpose.

**Canceled, Taken out of the way, nailed** (*Colossians 2:14*) — This first word is strong and it means “to blot out, to anoint or wipe away.” Jesus was the sacrifice and his blood anointed and wiped away the Law. The second means to “carry it away and lift it up” which is a definite illusion to the crucifixion. The third is “nailed” and is another illu-sion to the fact that Jesus work was nailing the Law (and thus the wrath of God) to the cross, killing it.

“**Not under the Law**” (*Romans 6:14-15; 1 Corinthians 9:20-21; Galatians 2:25; Galatians 5:18*) — Christ has freed us from the Law completely.



## The Law of Moses in the New Testament

### Introduction

Why study this topic? Simple. If we misunderstand the purpose of the Law, we will inevitably misunderstand the Gospel. So on we go!

## — Part One — The Law as One of the Old Testament Covenants

In the Old Testament there are three major covenants, and some smaller ones. The three major ones were;

- The Abrahamic Covenant
- The Mosaic Covenant
- The Davidic Covenant

These were covenants that were made between God and people. The first, the **Abrahamic Covenant** was an unconditional, one sided, covenant, that God made with Abraham that was not dependent upon Abram to fulfill. God never said “if” or put any conditions upon this covenant. The covenant was as follows;

<sup>1</sup>The Lord had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. <sup>2</sup>"I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup>I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." **Genesis 12:1-3 (NIV)**

This was further enumerated in the fifteenth chapter;

<sup>1</sup>After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward."<sup>2</sup>But Abram said, "O Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?"<sup>3</sup>And Abram said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir."<sup>4</sup>Then the word of the Lord came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir."<sup>5</sup>He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."<sup>6</sup>Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.<sup>7</sup>He also said to him, "I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it."<sup>8</sup>But Abram said, "O Sovereign Lord, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?"<sup>9</sup>So the Lord said to him, "Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon."<sup>10</sup>Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half.<sup>11</sup>Then birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away.<sup>12</sup>As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him.<sup>13</sup>Then the Lord said to him, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years.<sup>14</sup>But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions.<sup>15</sup>You, however, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age.<sup>16</sup>In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."<sup>17</sup>When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces.<sup>18</sup>On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates—<sup>19</sup>the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, <sup>20</sup>Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, <sup>21</sup>Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites."

to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, <sup>20</sup>for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. <sup>21</sup>Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you. <sup>22</sup>Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. <sup>23</sup>Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror <sup>24</sup>and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. <sup>25</sup>But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does. **James 1:19-25 (NIV)**

This next paragraph echoes what Paul stated that through love we can fulfill the Law. The Law, in this instance, is seen in a very positive light as the means of our freedom because of the Spirit within us. He is speaking of our obedience to God through the mercy of Christ.

<sup>8</sup>If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right. <sup>9</sup>But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. <sup>10</sup>For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. <sup>11</sup>For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker. <sup>12</sup>Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, <sup>13</sup>because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment! **James 2:8-13 (NIV)**

This statement is James' way of encouraging believers not to slander and judge one another. God is the Law and the judge and not ourselves.

<sup>11</sup>Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. <sup>12</sup>There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor? **James 4:11-12 (NIV)**

### **Glossary of Words That Describe the Temporal Purpose of the Law**

<sup>18</sup>The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless <sup>19</sup>(for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God. **Hebrews 7:18-19 (NIV)**

The Law is seen by the author of Hebrews as a shadow that foretold the coming of Jesus and his work, and not a reality to itself. It has no substance outside of bringing people to Christ. As a shadow it could not accomplish freedom and salvation as Christ himself did. This terminology echoes Paul's terms when he told the Colossians not to allow people

<sup>1</sup>The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. <sup>2</sup>If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. **Hebrews 10:1-2 (NIV)**

### The Law in the Book of James

The Germanic reformer Martin Luther called this letter an “epistle of straw.” He went to the point of questioning the canonization of this book as scripture. He did so primarily because he was reactionary against the doctrines of the Catholic Church and was trying to hold on desperately to his position “*sola fide*,” in other words *faith alone*.

Looking closely at James we find that the message is the same, but James’ point is that a person that is saved will produce good works—which is the same as Paul’s message.

In this first passage I doubt that James is referring to the Law only (he is not singling out those documents that would become the Word of the Church). He sees these documents as a mirror by which we can go away from it and change our appearance.

<sup>19</sup>My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick

### Genesis 15:1-21 (NIV)

**Question 1**—What Made Abraham right with God according to the Passage above?

As you can see, the covenant was not dependent upon any action Abraham had to take but rather it was fully dependent upon God. Jesus Christ was the ultimate fulfillment of this promise—he was personally the blessing to all the nations.

The **third** covenant is the **Davidic Covenant** (and we intentionally have skipped the second for later discussion). The Davidic covenant was God’s covenant with David. It too was unconditional and dependent upon God alone, and not David’s faithfulness.

<sup>9</sup>I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you. Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men of the earth. <sup>10</sup>And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked people will not oppress them anymore, as they did at the beginning <sup>11</sup>and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders over my people Israel. I will also give you rest from all your enemies. “The Lord declares to you that the Lord himself will establish a house for you: <sup>12</sup>When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. <sup>13</sup>He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. <sup>14</sup>I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men. <sup>15</sup>But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. <sup>16</sup>Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.” **2 Samuel 7:9-16 (NIV)**

As you can see, this covenant was simply a promise

from God to David regarding David's throne or kingly reign. This promise would be fulfilled by Christ as well.

The **second** covenant, the **Mosaic Covenant**, is the one we will be focusing on in this brief study.

Unlike the other two, the Mosaic Covenant is by God's own decision a conditional covenant. There are strings attached and those strings are enumerated clearly in Exodus 19 and elsewhere.

<sup>1</sup>In the third month after the Israelites left Egypt—on the very day—they came to the Desert of Sinai. <sup>2</sup>After they set out from Rephidim, they entered the Desert of Sinai, and Israel camped there in the desert in front of the mountain. <sup>3</sup>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 house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: <sup>4</sup>You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. <sup>5</sup>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, <sup>6</sup>you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites." <sup>7</sup>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. <sup>8</sup>The people all responded together, "We will do everything the Lord has said." So Moses brought their answer back to the Lord. **Exodus 19:1-8 (NIV)**

**Question 2**—What was the condition God gave Israel in Exodus 19?

Describe it in your own words.

Please notice that here, unlike the other two, there is a dependency clause. God said "I will do this "if" you do that. This promise was never fully met until Christ

righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, <sup>10</sup>for adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine <sup>11</sup>that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me. **1 Timothy 1:3-11 (NIV)**

In **Titus**, Paul only mentions the Law once, and his advice there is to avoid foolish controversies over the Law that waste time and hinder unity.

<sup>9</sup>But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless. <sup>10</sup>Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him. <sup>11</sup>You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned. **Titus 3:9-11 (NIV)**

### The Law in the Book of Hebrews

This epistle argues the superiority of Christ over all aspects of Judaism. The author argues that Jesus is superior to the Angels, Moses (and thus the Law), Aaron (the sacrificial system).

Jesus is superior to these things because He is the "exact representation" of God, and not a mere shadow (as he later argues).

<sup>1</sup>In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, <sup>2</sup>but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. <sup>3</sup>The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. **Hebrews 1:1-3 (NIV)**

As he makes is arguments for the superiority of Christ the author of Hebrews tells us clearly that the Law was set aside because it was weak and useless to make us right with God—Jesus was a "better hope."

needed to be “abolished” (the Greek word actually means to “untie or unbound”) so that the two might possibly become one. It is essential for the life and future of the church that they should become truly one.

In **Philippians** the point that righteousness does not come from the Law, but rather through faith in Christ, is made very strongly.

<sup>7</sup>But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. <sup>8</sup>What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup>and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. <sup>10</sup>I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, <sup>11</sup>and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. **Philippians 3:7-11 (NIV)**

Prior to this passage Paul calls the men who are pushing for mandatory Law keeping (particularly concerning the issue of male circumcision) for those Gentiles who believe in Christ “mutilators” of the flesh—Paul used very strong language because he was very concerned about the purity of the Gospel.

In **1 Timothy** Paul warns the younger Timothy about men who come and try to put people under the Law. These are false teachers who need to be boldly confronted. Paul then states that the Law is useful if used for the right purposes—not for the sanctification of believers but for the evangelism of the lost.

<sup>3</sup>As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer <sup>4</sup>nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. These promote controversies rather than God’s work—which is by faith. <sup>5</sup>The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. <sup>6</sup>Some have wandered away from these and turned to meaningless talk. <sup>7</sup>They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm. <sup>8</sup>We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. <sup>9</sup>We also know that law is made not for the

came and sent his Holy Spirit. (Compare this passage above with 1 Peter 2:9-10).

Now, I don’t want to personally separate the Law, for the New Testament never makes distinctions between pieces of the Law as some have, separating ceremonial law, dietary law, governmental law, and moral law. Of course, there are these distinctions, but the Old Testament Law was a unity, and as stated above it must be obeyed completely and without fault.

Let’s take a moment and look at the preamble of the Law, in what we call the Ten Commandments, which the OT itself refers to as “ten words.” Following these ten “words” God continues to give Law.

<sup>2</sup>“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. <sup>3</sup>“You shall have no other gods before me.

<sup>4</sup>“You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.

<sup>5</sup>You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, <sup>6</sup>but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

<sup>7</sup>“You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.

<sup>8</sup>“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. <sup>9</sup>Six days you shall labor and do all your work, <sup>10</sup>but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates.

<sup>11</sup>For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

<sup>12</sup>“Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you. <sup>13</sup>“You shall not murder. <sup>14</sup>“You shall not commit adultery. <sup>15</sup>“You shall not steal. <sup>16</sup>“You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

<sup>17</sup>“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.” **Exodus 20:2-17 (NIV)**

Let's think for a moment. If God intended this to be the means by which we are made right with God, and we needed to live up to these "fully," (Exodus 19:5) how are we doing? Let's list our own accomplishments shall we. If this were our way to God and you needed to keep each commandment fully, and never break any commandment.

Now, we must remember at this point what the New

	FULLY	Partially	BROKE
No other God's before God			
Make No Idols			
Not Misuse God's Name			
Keep Sabbath Holy			
Honor Father and Mother			
You shall not murder			
You shall not commit adultery			
You shall not steal			
You shall not give false testimony			
You shall not covet			

Testament writer James points out;

<sup>10</sup>For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. **James 2:10 (NIV)**

And so, we all find ourselves in the same particular boat, guilty before God and condemned. But that is not where the story ends, thankfully.

What is very clear is that the Law was given to Israel not for the purpose of making people right with God, but to show Israel their sin, God's holiness, and bring people in humility to God.

Perhaps it is time to briefly spell out all the purposes of the Law in summary form and then enumerate on them in the following pages. (See pages 14 & 15)

—Part Two —

<sup>13</sup>When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, <sup>14</sup>having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. <sup>15</sup>And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. **Colossians 2:13-15 (NIV)**

Here, Paul tells these Christians that Jesus' death on the cross cancelled the written code that opposed us and that he has made them a public spectacle.

In **Ephesians** there is a significant passage that sheds light of the events that occurred during the early days of the Church, recorded in the Book of Acts. As the Church was being born Gentiles and Jews were being brought together for the first time under Christ. The elders in Jerusalem wrestled with the question of whether the Gentiles should be made to become obedient (or under) the Law. Their decision was not to yoke them with this burden (Acts 15). In Ephesians Paul takes us behind this event and looks at it in theological terms.

<sup>11</sup>Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (that done in the body by the hands of men)—<sup>12</sup>remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. <sup>13</sup>But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. <sup>14</sup>For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, <sup>15</sup>by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, <sup>16</sup>and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. <sup>17</sup>He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. <sup>18</sup>For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. **Ephesians 2:11-18 (NIV)**

The Law was a barrier between the Jews and the Gentiles, and kept them hopelessly apart. The barrier

that God established through Abraham 430 years prior, the covenant that came prior to the covenant he made with Moses. Remember, that the Abraham covenant was a promise that was wholly unconditional. The Abraham covenant was a covenant of grace. The Law was given because of sin until Christ had come. This is why we have read elsewhere that it was proclaimed “until John” and the initial coming of the Messiah.

Paul summarizes this section with the powerful statement below;

<sup>23</sup>Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. <sup>24</sup>So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. <sup>25</sup>Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law. **Galatians 3:23-25 (NIV)**

Here the Law is pictured as a tutor—or a person who would guide children to the true teacher. We understand that the Law’s supervision is no longer necessary because the true teacher has come, and it is Christ. We now exist under his supervision and need no tutor.

Unless the Galatians miss the point, Paul explains what it is like to try to obey the Law—they must obey the whole Law to the nines (or, perhaps, tens), and if they try they will alienate themselves from Christ and fall away from Grace (Galatians 5:1-6). This is a serious issue not to be taken lightly.

Again, as in Romans 7 & 8 Paul explains that life in the Spirit is life out from under the Law. There is no law against the fruit the Spirit produces in a person’s life (Galatians 5:16-26).

### **The Law in the Other Pauline Epistles**

Although the Law is not a primary theme of the other Pauline and non-Pauline epistles, it surfaces here and there.

In Colossians Paul makes the following statements;

## **The Law and the New Testament**

### **The Law in the Gospels**

First on our list are Jesus’ words from the gospel of Matthew. Jesus understands that his actions might be construed to mean that he is destroying the Law. Look at the reaction of people who blame the disciples in the years to come in the book of Acts and the Epistles. Jesus might be misunderstood as if he was abolishing (the Greek word means *put down* or *invalidate*) the Law. Instead he makes it clear that his actions do not invalidate the Law, but bring them to their completion and fulfillment. As Jesus himself says “not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. It was meant to be “accomplished”—not by us but it was to point to Christ.

<sup>17</sup>“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. <sup>18</sup>I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. <sup>19</sup>Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>20</sup>For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. **Matthew 5:17-20 (NIV)**

Verses nineteen and twenty are more difficult to interpret. For if the word “these” refers to the Law it seems incongruent with his own statements in the Gospel and the Word in the epistles. If Jesus meant this to be the Law, then why does he himself in the Gospels reduce the dietary laws to ash? (Mark 17:19ff, He then through his disobedience would be made the least in

the Kingdom of heaven).

So it probably means that Jesus is pointing to the commandments he is about to utter as he expands the Law in chapter seven of Matthew's gospel.

The witness of the Law was temporal and such is not my opinion but rather the consistent, ubiquitous testimony of the entire New Testament. It seems that according to the Gospel writers that both the Law and the Prophets "proclaimed" or "prophesied" of Jesus until the time of John.

<sup>16</sup>The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time, the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it. <sup>17</sup>It is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for the least stroke of a pen to drop out of the Law. <sup>18</sup>"Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery. **Luke 16:16-18 (NIV)**

<sup>13</sup>For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. **Matthew 11:13 (NIV)**

One thing is very clear, that the Law can be summed up by understanding Jesus teaching on what is commonly understood to be the Golden Rule. The Epistle writers take this idea and help us understand this in more detail later in our study.

<sup>34</sup>Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. <sup>35</sup>One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: <sup>36</sup>"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" <sup>37</sup>Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' <sup>38</sup>This is the first and greatest commandment. <sup>39</sup>And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' <sup>40</sup>All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." **Matthew 22:34-40 (NIV)**

<sup>12</sup>So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets. **Matthew 7:12 (NIV)**

## The Law in the Book of Acts

<sup>6</sup>I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— <sup>7</sup>which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. <sup>8</sup>But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! <sup>9</sup>As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned! **Galatians 1:6-9 (NIV)**

By attempting to throw Christians back under the authority of the Law these particular people were perverting the gospel and presenting a "new" one, which was in Paul's words "no gospel at all." This was not good news. He describes these "false teachers" in very vivid language;

<sup>1</sup>Fourteen years later I went up again to Jerusalem, this time with Barnabas. I took Titus along also. <sup>2</sup>I went in response to a revelation and set before them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. But I did this privately to those who seemed to be leaders, for fear that I was running or had run my race in vain. <sup>3</sup>Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek. <sup>4</sup>This matter arose because some false brothers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves. <sup>5</sup>We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you. **Galatians 2:1-5 (NIV)**

In the second chapter Paul argues; (1) that the purpose of the Law was never to justify (or save) us but rather through faith, (2) that through the Law he died to the Law so that he might live for God, and (3) if a person could be made righteous through the Law then Christ died for nothing (Galatians 2:15-21).

His third chapter is harsher still. He scolds them for being allowed to be deceived (Galatians 3:1-5). He also describes the Law as a curse from which a person needs to be freed by Christ (Galatians 3:10-14).

A very salient point follows as Paul discusses the Abrahamic Covenant in relationship to the Law, or Mosaic Covenant. The Law does not set aside the covenant

earlier in this epistle.

In the fourteenth chapter of Romans is a lengthy discussion on Christian freedom and relating to each other in the Body of Christ—which is the Church. The discussion revolves around people who's faith in "weak" and people whose faith is strong. The strong brother is one who can, in good conscience, eat "everything" (since they realize they are no longer under the Law) or who considers every day alike.

There is nothing wrong with keeping a special diet (such as in the keeping of the Mosaic dietary laws), yet there is a problem if a person who is keeping such concerns "looks down" (v.3-4) for not keeping such a diet. The same goes for people who desire to keep the Sabbath. Paul says don't look down on those who do not, who are strong enough in their faith to recognize their freedom in Christ, who through is death and resurrection fulfilled the Law. There is nothing wrong with trying to keep the Law of Moses, if, according to the Apostles, you do not (1) think that keeping the commandments can save you, (2) think that keeping the commandments shows your superiority to those who do not keep the Law, and (3) if you do not pick and choose your commandments to which you put yourselves under. If you are going to keep the Law, you must, keep the whole of the Law.

I think the writers of Scripture saw the wisdom in this last comment because as long as we keep it profoundly difficult we can see that Christ alone kept it, and through loving each other—simply loving each other—we accomplish the intent of the Law.

### **The Law in Galatians**

This book was specifically written to a region that was plagued by false teachers who were pushing the Christians in that area back under the suffrage of the Law. This was a serious issue in Paul's mind and he hit it head on.

The topic of the Law first raises itself in Acts during the stoning of Stephen. First, Stephen acknowledges that the Jews—all of them—were unable to keep the Law. He was specifically speaking to the Sanhedrin.

<sup>53</sup>you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it." **Acts 7:53 (NIV)**

Possibly the most intriguing event in Acts is the birth of the Church. It began—or was conceived, if you will—by the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, but it was probably born when the Gentiles also received the Spirit, and for the first time Israel and believing Gentiles became one spiritually through Christ's death (Ephesians 2). Not that they understood this at this time, but in these pangs of early childhood and adolescence some tough decisions had to be made.

It was Peter who first witnessed God giving his Holy Spirit to believing Gentiles, and although Paul would become known as the Apostle to the Gentiles it was Peter who made the first Jew/Gentile connection. God prepared him in advance for this through a vision he experienced on a rooftop.

<sup>9</sup>About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. <sup>10</sup>He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. <sup>11</sup>He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. <sup>12</sup>It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air. <sup>13</sup>Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat." <sup>14</sup>"Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean." <sup>15</sup>The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." <sup>16</sup>This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven. **Acts 10:9-16 (NIV)**

Although the Law expressly forbid Israel to eat certain animals (*Lev 11:41-44; 20:25; Deut 14:3-20*) the voice of this vision tells Peter that God has now cleansed these foods and that they are now fit to eat.

There was more to this vision than just dietary consequences, for this was primarily symbolic of God through Christ cleansing the Gentiles as well.

After his vision Peter was called to visit Cornelius, and while there he shared the Gospel with them. As Peter was preaching those who heard the message received the Holy Spirit just as Jesus' Jewish disciples had in the upper room.

The disciples first were very excited and a little dumbfounded at this news—Gentiles believing in their Messiah! (Acts 11:18) Later they thought through all the ramifications and found a difficulty. Should these Gentiles be made to become Jews—should they be circumcised (Acts 15:1) and follow all the Jewish customs prescribed in the Law? Are these things necessary for salvation?

To settle this thorny dispute Paul and Barnabas met with the Elders in Jerusalem.

<sup>6</sup>The apostles and elders met to consider this question. <sup>7</sup>After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: "Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. <sup>8</sup>God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. <sup>9</sup>He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. <sup>10</sup>Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? <sup>11</sup>No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are." **Acts 15:6-11 (NIV)**

Here we see that Gentiles were not under the Law and that believing Christians should not be saddled with the Law—for Peter rightly states that it was an unbearable yoke that no-one (save Christ Jesus) could bear. God showed his acceptance of the Gentiles when they simply believed by giving them the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Faith alone (and Jesus' holy life and death on the cross) made the gentiles right with God.

It is important to point out at this juncture that the

to the Law and can be promised to Christ. We have been released so that we can serve in the "new way" of the Spirit and not under the shackles of the "written code" (Romans 7:1-6).

Is then the Law sin? No. Paul argues that the Law is holy and right, but its purpose was never to reconcile people to God, but rather to expose their sin as a bright light exposes dust and dirt in our home. The Law is a wonderful document that Paul desired to follow himself, but he found that his sin nature was even more powerful than his desire to follow God's Law (Romans 8:5-25).

At this point Paul, again, comes to the point of a wonderful summary;

<sup>1</sup>Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, <sup>2</sup>because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. <sup>3</sup>For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, <sup>4</sup>in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit. **Romans 8:1-4 (NIV)**

The Law could not rescue Paul because of that other law that was at work in us (the law of sin and death). The Law was powerless. But Jesus rescued us from the law of sin and death, and the righteous requirements of the Law are to be met in us through faith and life in the Spirit.

Later in this epistle Paul brings up the Law again in a practical lifestyle lesson. He states the following;

<sup>8</sup>Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. <sup>9</sup>The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." <sup>10</sup>Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. **Romans 13:8-10 (NIV)**

Thus, through life in the Spirit, we are upholding the Law through love one to another, just as Paul explained

*(Continued from page 13)*

this damning one, and it shines like glittering gold.

<sup>21</sup>But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. <sup>22</sup>This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, <sup>23</sup>for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup>and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. <sup>25</sup>God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— <sup>26</sup>he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. **Romans 3:21-26 (NIV)**

Though God revealed his righteousness in the Law, the Law alone could not save us. In Jesus we see God's righteousness on display, lived out before all. Jesus was truly in all ways the embodiment and fulfillment of the Law (Matthew 5:17). Through faith in Jesus we do not nullify the Law but rather uphold it—since its very purpose was to show us our sinfulness and our need for a righteous redeemer (Romans 3:30).

Paul then reminds his Jewish readers that Abraham existed and was declared righteous prior to the Law's existence. It was God's promise to Abram that sparked Abram's faith, not Abram's obedience to the Law (Romans 4).

In the sixth chapter of Romans Paul discusses sin and the believer, clarifying the following positions.

<sup>14</sup>For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace. <sup>15</sup>What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! **Romans 6:14-15 (NIV)**

The Christian is not under the Law, but that does not make him a person who does whatever he wants? His own answer: by no means!

Paul's next argument regarding the Law derives from the illusion of marriage—his point here is that we have “died” to the Law and are no longer linked (or married)

Law stood between Jews and Gentiles, and that barrier needed to be removed in order to bring unity to the church (Ephesians 2:14-18).

### **The Law in the Book of Romans**

The Greek word for Law is used some 74 times in the Book of Romans alone—making it a definite top-self theme of the book. The concepts of faith and righteousness, two other themes, together add up to 77 (43+34, respectively) occurrences.

Paul first uses the idea of Law to level the playing-field between Jews and Gentiles. He emphatically states that it is not the ones who hear the Law that are declared righteous but the ones who do the Law, fully and completely. (Romans 3:13). He also tells his listeners that even though the Gentiles are not under the Law or possess the Law they are a law unto themselves, their consciences bearing witness to that salient fact (Romans 3:15). He then makes sure the Jews have no self righteous attitudes toward their supposed keeping of the Law in Romans 2:17-29.

A great summary statement is made at this point by Paul;

<sup>19</sup>Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. <sup>20</sup>Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. **Romans 3:19-20 (NIV)**

This clarifies for us one of the purposes of the Law, to bring us to the point of our pitiful condition before a Holy and Just God. Here we are fully at God's mercy, and far from saving us, this Mosaic Covenant brings us to the point where we see our sin clearly and see our helplessness before this God.

A second summary statement follows on the heels of

*(Continued on page 16)*

## The Purpose of the Law

1. The Law was **never** intended to be the means by which people are “made right” or “saved.” (*Acts 13:39, Romans 2:17-29*) What makes us right is faith in God apart from the Law (*Romans 4:13-17; Romans 8:1-8; Romans 9:31, Galatians 2:15-21, Galatians 3:1-14, Galatians 3:15-25, Philippians 3:9, Hebrews 7:19*)
2. The Law was given specifically to the nation of Israel as their governmental law and constitution and was not intended to be the law of the Church [God’s combining of both Jews and Gentiles into one body]. (*Acts 15:5ff; Romans 3:21-31; 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, Galatians 5:18*)
3. The Christian is not under Law but grace. (*Romans 6:14*) Another way Paul puts this is that we do not serve the Law but rather the Spirit (*Romans 7:1-6*). Paul says that we fulfill the law ourselves through belief in Jesus and life in the Spirit (*Romans 8:1-5, Romans 13:8-10*).
4. The Law revealed God’s holiness and man’s sinfulness. (*Romans 3:19,20, Acts 17:53, Romans 7:7-25, 1 Timothy 1:8-11*).
5. The Law pointed people toward Jesus Christ, of whom the Law spoke. (*Matthew 5:17; Acts 28:23, Romans 3:21-31, Galatians 3:24, Hebrews 9:16-28, Hebrew 10:1*) Jesus’ righteous life and death “canceled” the written code that kept us estranged from God (*Colossians 2:13-15*).

## Other Aspects of the Law

1. Although the Gentiles are not under the Law, they too are guilty of breaking the law because their consciences are a law unto them. (*Romans 2:12-15*)
2. The Law does not bring salvation but rather God’s wrath. (*Romans 4:15*).
3. The Law was meant serve a temporary purpose, a purpose fulfilled completely by Christ (*Matthew 5:17; Luke 16:16-18; Romans 10:4; Galatians 2:19; Galatians 3:19, Galatians 3:23-25, Galatians 5:18, Ephesians 2:14-22, Hebrews 10:1*)
4. If one seeks to be made right by the law, they must be faithful to the whole of the law without fault, in other words the Law was given as a unit and is much more than the ten commandments (*Galatians 5:3-4; James 2:10*).
5. As Christians we are not to waste our time squabbling about nuances of the Law (*Titus 3:9*).
6. Specific aspects of the Law that the Apostles dealt with;
  - **Circumcision**—The distinction between physical circumcision and circumcision of the heart is made. We are to be set apart by the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. (*Romans 2:25-29; 1 Corinthians 7:19, Galatians 5:6; Galatians 6:15, Philippians 2:3-4, Colossians 2:11*).
  - **Sabbath**—Colossians 2:16-19, the Sabbath has been fulfilled in Christ. The Church does not keep an Old Testament Sabbath. The New Testament does not prescribe any particular day to be holy for worship, although the early Church chose to meet on Sunday to celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus. Demanding that people keep a Sabbath is against the New Testament and shows that a person has lost their connection to Christ the Head. The early disciples met on the Sabbath to worship God and to share with their Jewish brothers the freedom from the Law in Christ (*Acts 13:44, 16:13, 17:2, 18:14*)
  - **Diet**—God made all food and all is for our consumption (*Acts 10*). A person who has convictions should not push those convictions on another man or condemn them for eating certain foods (*Romans 14, Colossians 2:16-19*). If you no a brothers convictions try to honor them through respect (*Romans 14, 1 Corinthians 10:31-33*).