

# COVENANT RENEWAL

Genesis 1:26-28

Matthew 28:18-20

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## THE MOSAIC COVENANT

by Ray R. Sutton

Covenants do not occur in a vacuum. They can't because they are always *restorative* in nature. They connect to previous covenants, building on what goes before and attempting to bring about what a prior covenant arrangement failed to do.

The Mosaic covenant is a resurrection of the *Abrahamic* covenant, just as the Abrahamic had been to the Noahic, and the Noahic had been to the Adamic. The Mosaic covenant was a *new* Adamic covenant, pulling through the Abrahamic covenant and not around the covenant with Moses' forefathers. As such, it was a covenant of *grace* and not of works because the covenant with Abraham (And I believe all of the covenants) was based on God's gracious acts. How do we know that the Mosaic covenant was a renewed Abrahamic covenant?

### The Renewed Abrahamic Covenant

Some scholars have viewed the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants as two entirely different covenants.<sup>1</sup> If these two can be distanced from one another, a case can be built for how Christ in the New Covenant could restore the Abrahamic and not the Mosaic covenant. Although the Abrahamic covenant was not without law, the presumption of a lawless Abrahamic covenant could be proposed. The New Covenant would effectively be emptied of the Mosaic themes, which consist of the clearest statements of the ethical nature of a Biblical covenant.

On the other hand, if these covenants have a symbiotic relationship, then the modern day antinomians are trapped. The Mosaic is the renewed Abrahamic. The Mosaic arrangement not only flows out of the Abrahamic covenant but is the renewed Abrahamic covenant.

In the conversation between God and Moses we read:

God spoke further to Moses and said to him, "I am the Lord; and I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God Almighty, but by My name, Lord, I did not make Myself known to them. And I also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they sojourned. And furthermore I have heard the groaning of the sons of Israel, because the Egyptians are holding them in bondage; and I have remembered My covenant. Say, therefore to the sons of Israel, 'I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage. I will also redeem you with an out-

stretched arm and with great judgments. Then I will take you for My people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. And I will bring you to the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you for a possession; I am the Lord.'" (Exodus 6:2-8).

God nowhere infers that a new covenant separate from the Abrahamic is about to be instituted. In fact, He indicates continuity between Abraham and Moses, when He calls for Moses to *fulfill* the Abrahamic. He doesn't want a change. He wants the Abrahamic covenant to extend forward and He raises up Moses to do it.

William Dumbrell, former dean at Regent's in Vancouver, has made the same point in a significant way. When he describes the covenant that was made at Sinai (Exodus 19:3-6), he says the following:

What kind of covenant is in mind? Nothing definitely covenantal has been advanced in the book [Exodus] so far. Indeed, to this point the notion of a covenant has been associated only with the Abrahamic covenant in Exod. 6:1-8. Most suggest the reference to covenant in verse 5 is prospective and looks forward to the Sinaitic covenant, which is about to be concluded. What argues against this, however, is the fact that the phrase "keep my covenant" (relative to a human response to a divine covenant) is used in the Hebrew Bible only where obedience to a prior divine commitment is being restated (compare the fairly exact parallels incorporating the use of *berit* and *samar* in Gen. 17:9-10; 1 Kgs. 11:11; Ezek. 17:14; Ps. 78:10; 103:18; 132:12). This and other factors that will emerge make it probable that the covenant referred to is something preexisting [emphasis mine]. This can, of course, only be the patriarchal covenant [emphasis mine] with which continuity had been carefully forged by Moses' call in Exod. 3:13-15.<sup>2</sup>

To summarize Dumbrell's observation: When God tells anyone to "keep My covenant," the presumption is that one already exists, or else God would say, "Enter My covenant." Since God tells Israel to keep covenant in Exodus 19, an antecedent covenant stands in force. It has to be the Abrahamic, or what Dumbrell calls the "patriarchal covenant."

Notice the similarity between Abraham's and Moses' ministries. Both were called to enter the Promised Land from the outside and to take possession of the covenant promises; both led an exodus; Abraham even went down to Egypt and was driven out and back to the Promised Land on different occasions. Both were called upon to circum-

1. Dennis J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant: A Study in Form in the Ancient Oriental Documents and the O. T.*, An Bib 21 (Rome, 1963). McCarthy believed the commandments to be part of the covenant at Sinai but he is not convinced that law is an element of the treaty formula. Thus, he can speak of the establishment of a covenant without law, which paves the way for a New covenant without law. This is utter nonsense as any cursory reading of Christ's statement, "I did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it" (Matthew 5:19).

2. William J. Dumbrell, "The Prospect of Unconditionality," *Israel's Apostasy and Restoration: Essays in Honor of R.K. Harrison*, Ed. Avraham Gileadi (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), pp. 144-145.

also their seed as a sign of the covenant (Exodus 4:24), judging by God's anger at Moses for not applying the covenant sanctions and thereby further establishing the continuity between the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants. Finally, both died before possession of the land was secured. Thus, the Mosaic covenant is a resurrection of the Abrahamic.

Dumbrell, however, presses with further proof of a continuity between the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants. He says,

The separation of Israel from her broad cultural environment [The Exodus], her invitation to obey a covenant already existing, her call to be a light to lighten the Gentiles – the model for the world that her role would provide – all of this is confessedly Abrahamic in its tenor. As the continuity of the exodus narratives suggests (compare Exod. 3:13-15; 6:1-8), the Sinai covenant was in fact a particularization of Gen. 12:1-3 in the experience of Israel. Like Abraham, Israel was called outside of the land that would be hers. Like Abram, Israel would be a great nation (**goy**), occupying a “promised land.” Like Abram, the world would find its source of blessing in this Israel.<sup>3</sup>

These strong parallels are obvious to Dumbrell and the unbiased reader of Exodus. Moses was a new Abraham. Mr. Dumbrell supports this by even speaking of the Mosaic covenant as unconditional in the same sense as the Abrahamic covenant. He says,

At once, then, a further factor emerges that endorses more than just a **limited** concept of **unconditionality**. The strand of covenant theology that began with Abram continues with Sinai. It will add kingship to its ambit with 2 Samuel 7. Its direct unconditionality, because it is divinely imposed and sustained, will emerge in Jer. 31:31-34. On two counts, therefore – the remnant on the human side and divine design on the other – a worshipping community among whom God would dwell was bound to emerge. They will be priests and kings.<sup>4</sup>

Dumbrell's conclusion concerns worship. As God's covenant with Abraham established a worshipping community, so did His covenant with Moses. We should consider some differences between the two covenants.

#### The Difference Between the Two Covenants

The primary difference between the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants, what I call an advancement or improvement, is that Moses was born of the priestly line, the tribe of Levi (Exodus 2:1-2). Moses, being of the priestly line, is called to transform the Abrahamic Covenant into a **priestly** one. Indeed, he is called to change the nature of the kingdom. He was to make Israel into a nation of **priests** (Exodus 19:6), creating a *priesthood of believers*.

Therefore, the Mosaic covenant has an extensive discussion of **law**. It does not have this emphasis to indicate in any way that the *basis* of the covenant is **works**. Moses called Israel to be “circumcised of *heart*” (Deuteronomy 10:10), which are the very statements quoted by Jesus and referred to by the Apostle Paul as the true test of a true Jew (Romans 2:25-29). The **law** emphasis of Moses presumes salvation by grace. It is simply for the priesthood to know God's standard of **holiness**, and how to be a *distinct people from the Gentiles*, the non-priesthood. The law of the Mosaic Covenant was never intended to be understood as a **works system**; the apostate leaders of Israel turned it into this just as apostate **leaders** of the modern Church do the same to the New Covenant, the

greatest grace covenant in the history of man.

Yet, it should be understood that when the priesthood changes, as Hebrews says, the law will change (Hebrews 7:12). The law of the Mosaic Covenant changed because the priesthood changed. The Jews are no longer the *priests of God*. There is **law** in the New Covenant, called new **commandments** that are nothing less than *renewed* and *transfigured* old commandments (cf. Leviticus 19:18 and I John 2:4-8). Thus, law is not graceless nor is grace lawless and the Mosaic covenant is neither graceless nor lawless. This we will discuss at length when we consider the Mosaic covenant as it is fulfilled in the Church. First, however, we should discuss the Mosaic covenant as a renewed Abrahamic covenant in all of its own uniqueness.

#### Transcendence: New Mediator (Exodus 1-5)

The Mosaic Covenant fulfills all the covenants that have gone before and anticipates in the fulfillment of each one the coming of Christ.

First, the Mosaic Covenant is a *new creation* because of the parallel between the first creation of the Adamic Covenant and the birth of Moses. The name Moses means *water-son*. He is drawn out of the water as a new *creation*. Yet, he is a son who emerges from the water to lead his nation just as Jesus later walks out of the Jordan waters to lead his people.

Second, Moses is a new *Noah*. From the description of the vessel in which he floated on the Nile (Exodus 2:3), he is saved by a miniature ark from the waters. Except, he has no family. He is a baby saved by an ark, anticipating the coming of Christ who will rest in his own manger-ark.

Third, Moses is a new *Abraham*. As Abraham entered conflict with Egypt and saw plagues fall on the Egyptians (Genesis 12:17), so Moses did the same. Abraham was called to ratify his covenant by circumcision. Moses was commanded to do the same (4:25ff.). In so doing, he was a type of Christ. As Moses opposed Pharaoh, so Christ battled the new Pharaoh, Herod, a man who slaughtered the innocent babies just as Pharaoh had done (Exodus 1:15-22), and who circumcised His new nation with the circumcision of baptism, the replacement of circumcision (Colossians 2:11-12). Thus, the birth of Moses dramatically shows us that he is the beginning of a new covenant.

#### Deliverer Themes

The early chapters of Exodus present the *mediator* or *deliverer* themes, often characteristic of the beginning of a new covenant. Moses is presented as a *priest* who will *deliver* His people. First, as a *priest*, he is specifically said to be of the tribe of Levi. He is raised up out of the Nile river, symbolizing his purity and cleanness, particular characteristics that will be demanded of the new nations of priests whom he will help to raise up.

Second, Moses appears as a *guardian* of the covenant, the primary function of the priests throughout Scripture, beginning with Genesis (Genesis 2:15). Almost immediately after his birth, he is seen attempting to protect (guard) a Hebrew from being killed (Exodus 2:11-15). He was right to kill the Egyptian because the original text says that the Egyptian was attempting to *kill* the Hebrew, which is unfortunately translated “beat” by most texts (Exodus 2:11). This act in itself is part of the carrying out of the Abrahamic Covenant which says that God will bless those who bless and curse those who curse *Israel*. Moses was blessing Israel which is a specific priestly, and later Aaronic, function.

Third, Moses fled from Israel because Israel did not want to be blessed by *being* protected from the Egyptians. They cared more for the Egyptians' blood than the salvation of the people of God. So, they lost their deliverer. Moses was led by God to apprentice in the priesthood un-

3. *Ibid.*, p. 153.

4. *Idem*.

der the priest of Midian, Jethro, a Melchizzadekel priest (Exodus 3:1). He received from the land of this other priesthood, new water, a bride, training in shepherding, and the voice of God in the form of a new calling, all necessary requirements for being an effective priest.

### Presence and Promise

The emphases of presence and promise occur just as they did with the Abrahamic covenant. With reference to promise, the promise is reiterated to Moses at his call. Like Abraham, he is called outside the land to lead the people back to the land. In the same way Abimelech, King of Egypt, was nearly cursed for cursing Abraham, the Pharaoh is destroyed for cursing Israel. As God's promise says, "I will curse those who curse you and bless those who bless you" (Genesis 12:3).

The promise is confirmed with God's special presence, which is specially manifested to Moses on Mount Sinai with glory. Before the great leader can initiate the exodus, the Lord reveals Himself. Moses' face shines from His glory, a word which begins to appear quite often in the Mosaic period. The dramatic appearance of the glory of the Lord is distinctively Mosaic in emphasis.

### Hierarchy: A New Kingdom (Exodus 6-18)

Moses was called to lead Israel out of Egypt, Goshen the old garden, while fighting a battle to establish God's kingdom. What he did was hierarchical in nature. He fought a battle over worship. All he wanted from Pharaoh was to go into the desert and worship God. For this request, he drew antagonism from Pharaoh, who would allow a pluralistic society that tolerated the worship of any god except the true God, explaining why one man has ceiled pluralism, "equal time for Satan." Consequently, Moses defeated the gods of Egypt by means of the plagues. He did not leave, however, until he and his new kingdom received food for the journey, the Passover. He learned one of the fundamental lessons of kingdom building: it can't be done on an empty stomach; food must be provided for the long walk ahead, one of the fundamental lessons of spiritual food in the Word and the Sacrament of Holy Communion, both of which are necessary for the journey during the week. Finally, Moses was asked to leave the kingdom of darkness and he was financed to build the new kingdom.

Moses continued his establishment of a new kingdom by separating the waters of blood, the Red Sea (Exodus 14, a symbolic birth which involves the breaking of water and the shedding of blood. He separated the waters to walk on dry land just as God had separated the waters on the second day of creation to raise up dry land, a kingdom.

Moses was still only just beginning. He faced the countless problems of the people of Israel. He learned that he could not run the new kingdom by the old system. He was given counsel by Jethro, his old master discipler (Exodus 18). Eventually, he arrives at Sinai where he hears the voice of God.

### Ethical Stipulations: The Law (Exodus 19-23)

The terms of faithfulness, the Law of God, are given to Moses. They are written at a time of the giving of the Holy Spirit, Pentecost (Exodus 19:1). Exodus 19:1 tells us that Israel arrived "on the third new moon" (literally) from the month they left Egypt. They had departed on the 15th day of the first month, so that they arrived at Sinai at the beginning of the seventh week, almost 50 days after 15th. On the 4th day after arriving Moses told the people to prepare to receive what God would provide 2 days later, the 6th day (Exodus 19:2-8). Thus, a careful study of the chronology of the Exodus shows us that the Law was given at

the time when the Spirit would later be given in fullness. Can the point be any more obvious? Law and Spirit should not be held in conflict. Law is always to be based on grace and redemption, apparent from a simple overview of the laws of the Mosaic Covenant.

The Ten Commandments are a *manifesto of freedom*. They teach what the Apostle Paul says about freedom through obedience to Christ or slavery to sin through disobedience (Romans 6). Freedom is not the freedom to disobey or do anything that one wants, as the pagans believe. Freedom is the freedom to obey God, as our forefathers came to this land to do. So the first commandment, and all the commandments for that matter, are based on redemption from the land of Egypt (Exodus 20:2-3). Israel was freed from the tyranny of the political polytheism of Egypt. They were enslaved by the pluralistic false gods of Pharaoh. The first commandment is true freedom of religion, the belief in The, One true God.

The second commandment is freedom to worship God without superstition (20:4-6), perhaps the greatest slavery of all. Superstition is belief that God indwells nature and can be manipulated by man.

The third commandment is freedom to speak for God not against Him (20:7). This commandment delivers man from the slavery of profanity and narrow vocabulary.

The fourth commandment guarantees the freedom from too much work as well as the freedom to work (20:8-11).

The fifth commandment calls for obedience to parents and promises freedom of inheritance (20:12). Only free societies that obey God's authorities are not taxed on inheritance. This society did not even have an Income Tax law until the beginning of the century.

The sixth commandment protects freedom from hate, if covenant man does not murder, the correct translation of the Hebrew (20:13). This commandment is the context of Jesus' statement about hate being the same as murdering your brother (Matthew 5).

The seventh commandment calls for obedience in marriage (20:14), creating freedom from lust on the basis of what Jesus says when He equates lust and adultery (Matthew 5).

The eighth commandment tells man to work and gives him the freedom to earn money (20:15).

The ninth commandment protects the witness stand by commanding truth to guard man from the tyranny of lies (20:16).

The tenth commandment orders man to be content by not coveting or envying (20:17). This is the freedom from dissatisfaction.

After the giving of the Ten Commandments, these laws are applied to the civil realm through case laws, which is not the same as precedent law. Case law is based on an absolute standard, the Ten Commandments.

In Leviticus, God records what He also gave while Israel was gathered at Mt. Sinai. These seventy laws have to do with boundary and blood (sacrifices), peculiarly symbolized through the rite of circumcision, an act of creating a physical boundary between Jew and Gentile by the shedding of blood on the man's body; this explains why these laws were no longer required when the sign of the covenant was changed to baptism. The ceremonial laws call for clean and unclean laws that were to keep Israel distinct from the Gentiles. These boundary laws relating to food and other practices (mostly relating to shedding of blood) all find their origin the curses of Genesis 3. For example, anything having to do with the dust of the ground, which was cursed by God, is unclean. Anything conveying the image of death, such as the shedding of blood at birth and the menstrual cycle of the woman, was unclean because death came through sin. Thus, all of these ceremonial laws

were pedagogical in nature, designed to re-enforce the teachings of holiness.

#### Oath: Ratification at Sinai (Exodus 24 and Numbers)

The covenant was actually entered by confession of faith, clarifying why the historic Christian Faith has been written down in creeds that are said at worship to renew the initial covenant. The covenant entrance also involved the *sprinkling* of blood from sacrifices offered, because blood from above symbolized salvation by grace (literally from above) and not from works. This is why the historic method of baptism is by sprinkling since the water symbolizes Christ's work from above (cf. Acts 1:5 with 2:3). Interestingly, the original Greek for Jesus' command to Nicodemus to be born *again* is literally born from *above*, which of course is the same as a second birth in contrast to the first birth from *below*.

After the ratification ceremony, a blueprint for the tabernacle is given (25-31). The place of worship is to be primarily a place of covenant renewal. This tabernacle is a replica of the Glory Cloud in heaven where God dwells and is also duplicated on the priests clothing. It is ordered space around the throne of God, reminding the people of God what their worship is supposed to reproduce.

Following the blueprint for worship, Israel apostatizes and ironically enters into idolatry. While God literally drew up the plans for the new building, the people of God broke the covenant. Sanctions occur in a New Covenant way. The people are made to drink (ingest) the covenant (Exodus 32:20), after the waters have been *sprinkled* with the covenant: eating follows sprinkling. Probably, this ingestion was a form of the ordeal of jealousy required of a woman suspected of adultery (Numbers 5). As a result, however, thousands of Israelites were slain by the Levites, analogous to the death brought by the unworthy eating of the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11).

After this period of covenant judgment, the people are given the law again, including the completion of the blueprints for the tabernacle.

#### Wandering and Rejection (Numbers)

Israel will not obey the covenant stipulations and enter the land. Judgment must occur in the form of death. The people of the first generation die, because of their rebellion. They are tested with a series of conflicts and disputes, always the preparation for greater victories. But their death is not enough. The mediator of the covenant, Moses, must die before entering the Promised Land. The old must pass away before the new can come.

Moses faces rejection more than any other individual prior to him. This is one of the great tests of one's oath before God. Moses faced rebellion over eleven times. He

did quite well during these insurrections. He even interceded a number of times to prevent God's wrath. But in the end, he succumbed to the temptation to destroy Israel. He became angry and was not permitted to enter the Promised Land.

#### Succession: Deuteronomy

Shortly before Moses' death, he appointed an heir through the laying on of hands, communed with the heir, and gave final discourses just as Jesus did all of the same before His death: the delivery of His Upper Room sermons before He died. Specifically, however, the **succession** of the Mosaic covenant introduces three major successional ideas that are latent prior to this.

Moses charges Joshua to possess the land, what amounts to a "license to kill." The successor is the one who will go. Only Caleb and Joshua were ready to take what belonged to God. Only these two of the original twelve were allowed to enter. And, only Joshua is selected to be the actual successor. This commissioning concept is quite dramatic in the Mosaic covenant.

The patriarchs had similarly commissioned. In **fact**, Moses places curses and blessings on the eons of Jacob just as Jacob himself had done. But **Moses** goes further. No other had been so bold as to say to Joshua **exactly** what **Moses** did.

A second successional theme that appears in the Mosaic covenant is rest. 'Wound up with this notion of the promised land, ideally occupied, is, as we well know from the Book of Deuteronomy, the biblical concept of rest.'<sup>5</sup> The idea seems to be that entrance into the Promised Land brings rest. The one who finds rest is the one who inherits and becomes the heir.

Finally, the Book of Deuteronomy repeats the **Abrahamic** promises. The last chapter of Deuteronomy reports the last comment made by Moses, "This is the land which I swear unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, saying, 'I will give it unto thy seed: I have caused thee to see it with thine eyes, but thou shalt not go over thither'" (Deuteronomy 34:4). The point being made to Joshua and all future readers is that just before succession, the promise is repeated! This repetition of promises becomes one of the Mosaic features of issuing a statement of succession. The heir is repeatedly told the promises so that he might keep them.

In conclusion, the Mosaic covenant has followed the covenant pattern with its own unique distinctive. In our next study, we shall consider how the Mosaic covenant is fulfilled in Christ and the Church.

5. Dumbrell, "The Prospect of Unconditionality," p. 150.