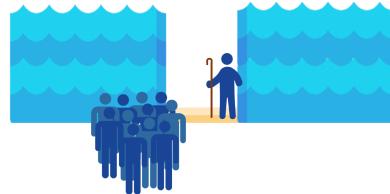


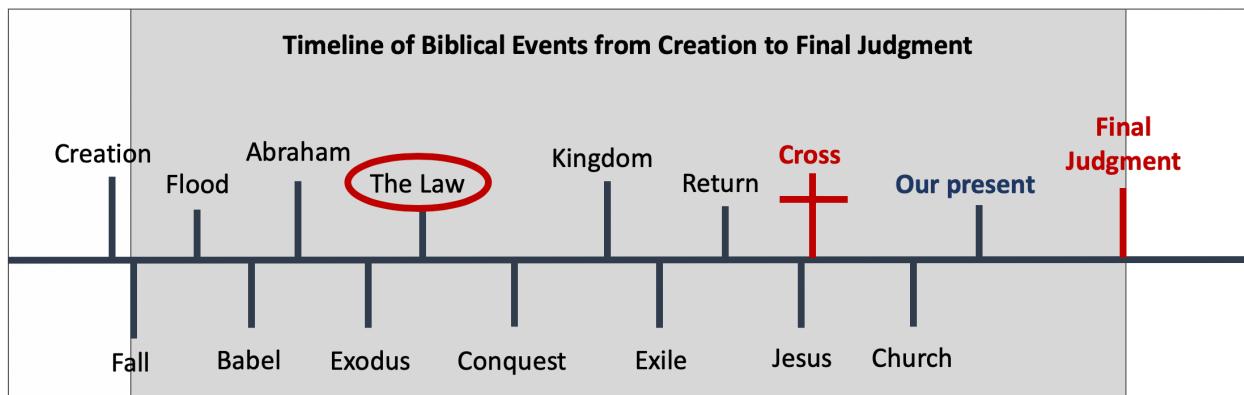
Lesson 13: Mount Sinai—The Law

Previously...

Over the previous year, the Israelites had experienced extraordinary miracles that God did over and over again from the first plague to the last. Then God miraculously saved them and led them out of Egypt through the supernatural parting of the waters of the Red Sea.



Now that He saved them, Yahweh was about to begin a new relationship with Israel. And He was going to bring them into a new season in their lives: nation building.

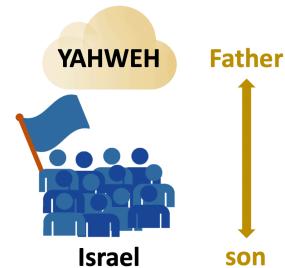


Israel, God's Son

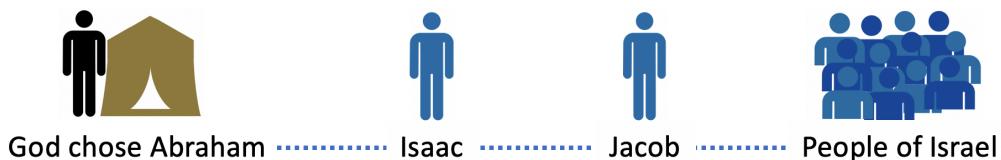
While they were still slaves in Egypt, God had said that His relationship to the entire nation of Israel was that of Father and son.

Hosea 11:1

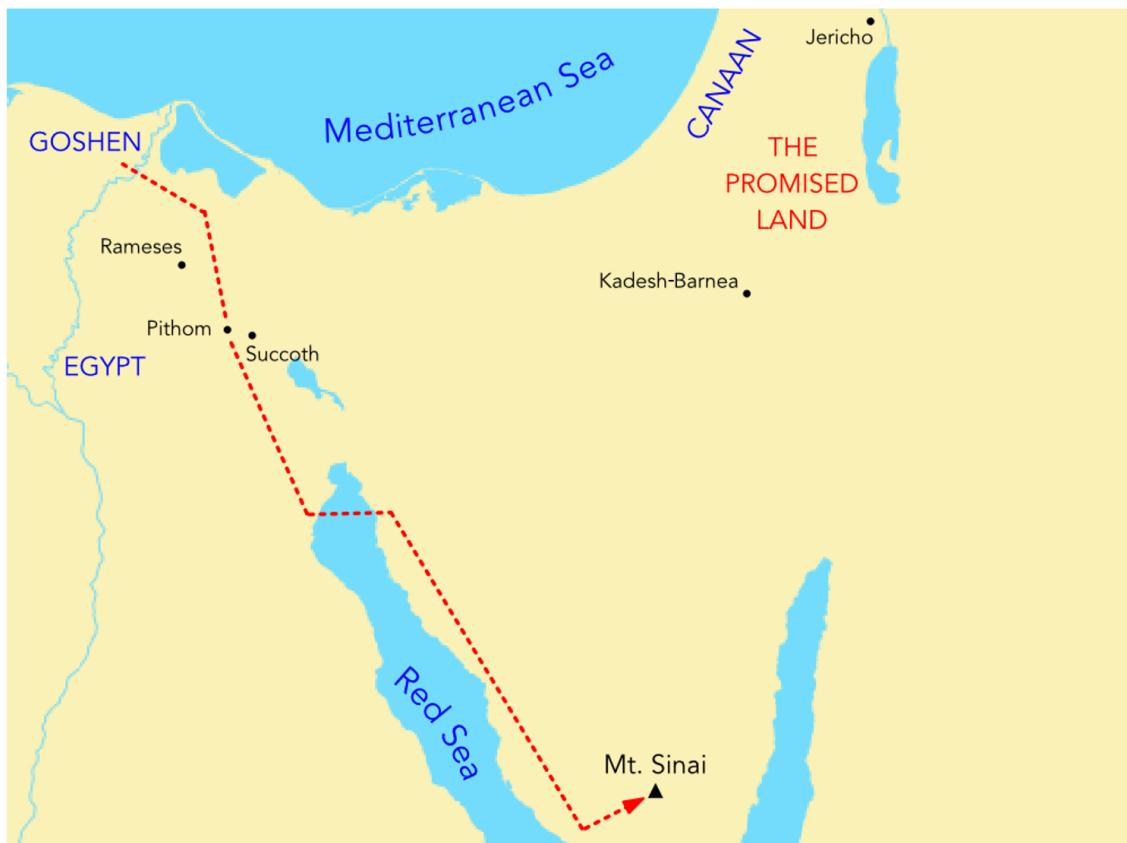
"When Israel was a child, I loved him,
and I called my son out of Egypt."



But how did Israel become God's son? It was through God's sovereign election. God chose Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and then the nation of Israel to be His people.



After the Exodus, God brought the people to Mount Sinai.

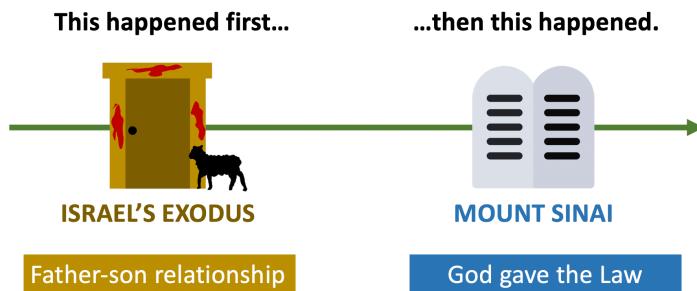


There, He taught them more about the Father-son relationship that they were to enjoy.

He did this by giving them His Law.

Pagan Kingdom of Man	Kingdom of God
Based on WORKS Man would save himself through his own ideas	Based on GRACE God would save man
 Babel	Election  God chose Abraham
 Egypt	 God saved Israel
	God built Israel: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Law ▪ National anthem ▪ Temple worship ▪ Feasts & festivals

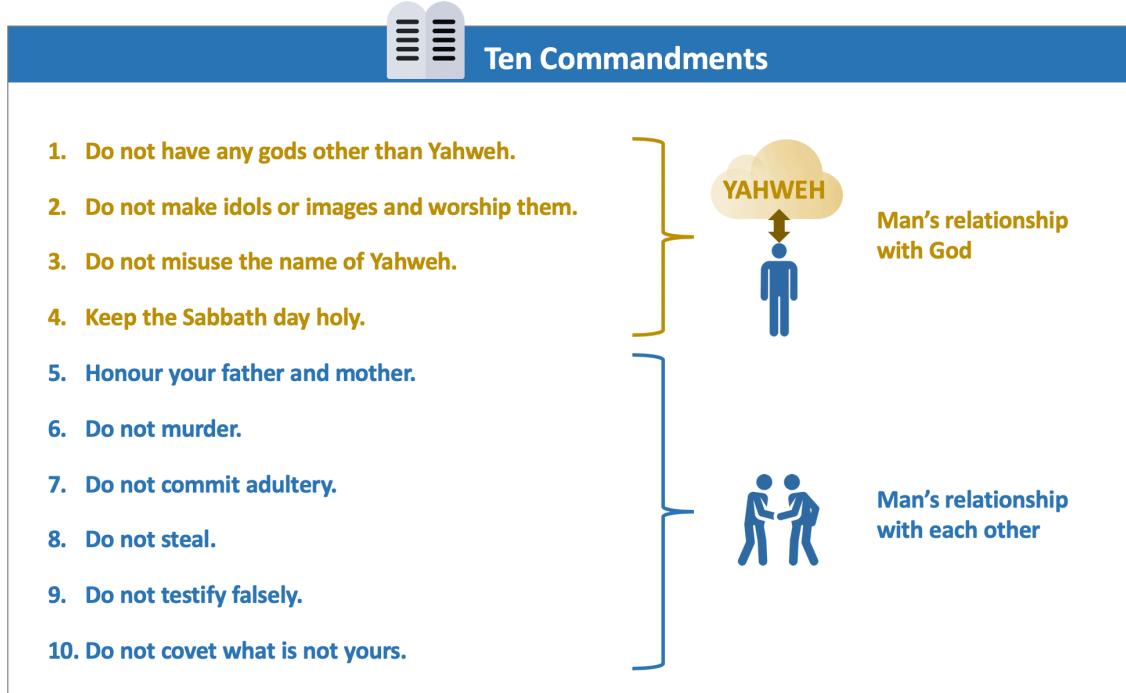
It is important for us to understand the sequence of this: God made Israel His son first before He gave them His Law.



God gave the Israelites 613 laws that covered all areas of life. In it, God established their national religious calendar, national holidays and gave instructions for worship. These laws can be found in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

The Ten Commandments are a summary of the 613 laws.

- The first four are about man's relationship with God.
- The next six are about man's relationship with each other.



With the giving of these laws, God made another covenant with the people. Previously, God had made the Noatic and Abrahamic covenants. Those covenants were unconditional, meaning God alone would fulfil the terms of the contract. This time, however, the Mosaic (or Sinaitic) Covenant was conditional: His people had a responsibility to fulfil.

Here is an overview:

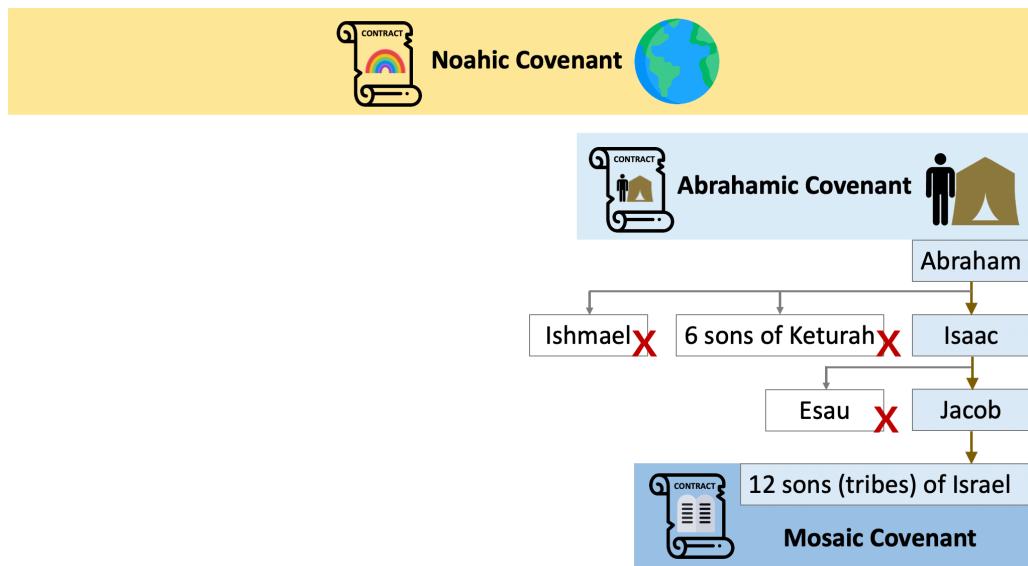
	 Noahic Covenant	 Abrahamic Covenant	 Mosaic Covenant
 Parties	God, mankind, animals	God, Abraham and descendants	God and the 12 tribes of Israel (sons of Jacob)
 Promises	No future global floods	Land, descendants, worldwide blessing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Blessings for obeying all the laws Cursings for disobeying the laws
 Signatories	God alone (with the rainbow)	God alone (with the animal halves)	God (with the sign of the Sabbath)
 Founding sacrifice	Genesis 8:20–22	Genesis 15:9–11	Exodus 24:4–8
 Type	Unconditional	Unconditional	Conditional



Parties Involved

Each contract that God made with mankind involved a smaller and more focused group of people.

- God's first covenant, the Noahic Covenant, involved all mankind and nature.
- The next one, the Abrahamic Covenant, involved only Abraham's descendants.
- This Mosaic Covenant narrowed it down to just the sons of Jacob, the 12 tribes of Israel.



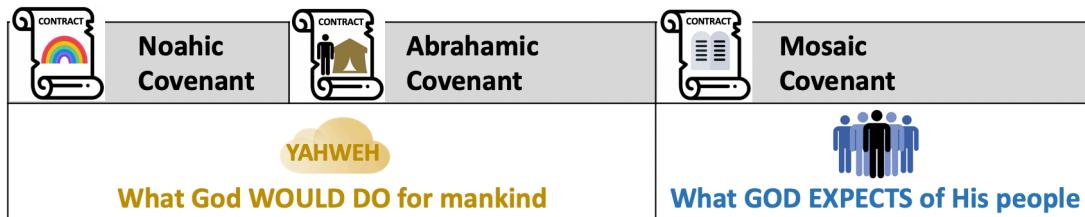


Promises

In the Noahic and Abrahamic covenants, the focus was on God's promises and His sovereign assurance that He would fulfil them.

In the Mosaic Covenant, the focus is on **God's righteous expectations of His people**.

- What does it mean to be God's son?
- Now that they are God's son, what are the "family responsibilities" and "house rules"?
- How are they supposed to relate to God as Father?
- How are they supposed to relate to each other as siblings?



The Law gives a lot of details on what God expects of His people in all these areas. Moses wrote all of God's laws out as God spoke audibly to him. And God Himself wrote a summary of His Laws on two stone tablets.

Moses wrote down



The Book of the Law

God wrote down



The Ten Commandments

In the Noahic and Abrahamic covenants, man did not need to do anything for the promises in the covenants to be fulfilled. Yahweh Himself would do it all.

However, in the Mosaic Covenant, the Israelites had a very important responsibility. They had to decide how they would treat the covenant.

- If they kept their side of the contract (obey the Law), God would bless them.
- If they broke their side of the contract (disobey the Law), God would curse them.

The blessings and cursings involve economics, pagan nations, climate, disease, nature and supernatural things that man has no control over.

No human king or leader can make such a contract, threaten and then carry out the consequences! Only the sovereign God can.

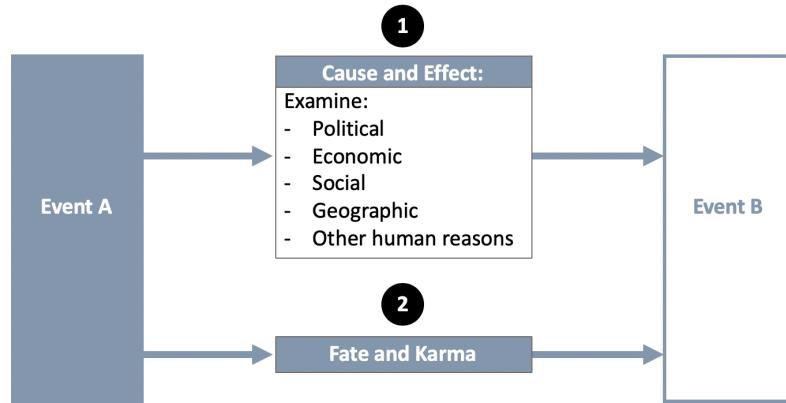
Blessings for keeping the covenant	Cursings for breaking the covenant
Leviticus 26:1–13 (also Deuteronomy 28:1–14)	Leviticus 26:14–46 (also Deuteronomy 28:15–68)
Blessings include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Economic prosperity, good weather and cooperative nature (v4–5) Military success and peace (v6–8) Population growth (v9) God's continued presence with them (v11–12) 	5 Stages of disciplines or cursings: <p>Stage 1: Disease and sickness (physical and psychological), military defeat, economic disaster (v14–17)</p> <p>Stage 2: Famine (v18–20)</p> <p>Stage 3: Death of children and livestock, population decrease (v21–22)</p> <p>Stage 4: Starvation, epidemics, crushing military defeat (v23–26)</p> <p>Stage 5: Cannibalism, death, enemy invasion, exile, terror and psychological problems, God's presence removed from them (v27–39)</p>

Some people claim that history can be explained by human actions. They say that history has no connection to any “god”. Is this true?

Historians often explain history with political, economic, social or geographical reasons. They describe why events happen in terms of cause and effect. For example, because this nation did ‘A’, then ‘B’ happened. Because world leader did ‘C’, this caused ‘D’ to happen.

Others will explain that fate, or karma, controls the flow of history. Most people reject the idea that God sovereignly controls history.

How the pagan world approaches analysing history

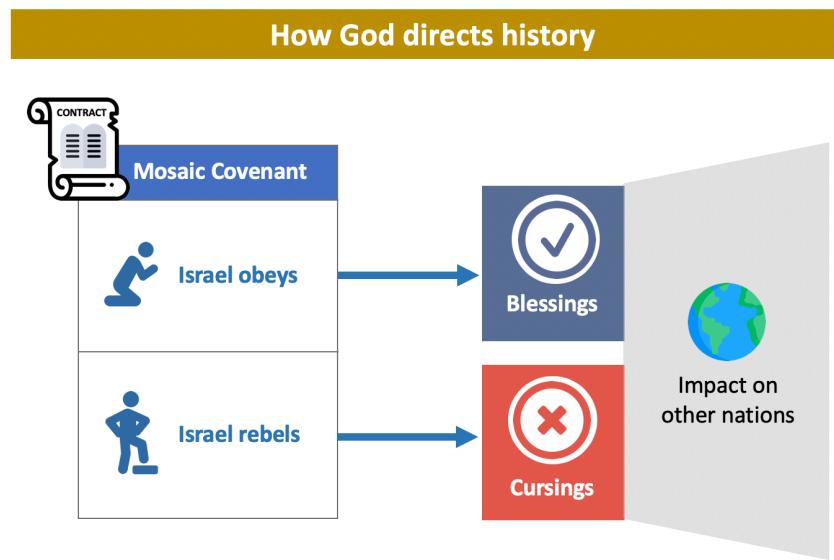

[More...](#)

However, Yahweh tells us He is the sovereign God of all things, including history. He is actively directing the history of the world, and in particular, the history of Israel.

- Why did Israel suffer losses in its wars?
- Why did Israel suffer storms?
- Why did their crops fail?
- Why did so many Israelites get killed by terrible diseases?
- Why did the people of Israel lose their land and get exiled into another land?

The answer: God's enforcement of the Mosaic Covenant with Israel is what shaped history.

When Israel disobeyed Yahweh, stage by stage, all the curses came upon them. However, these curses also involved or impacted other people groups and nations. God directed some of these nations to discipline Israel by attacking them; other people groups suffered the same consequences of the bad weather or diseases.

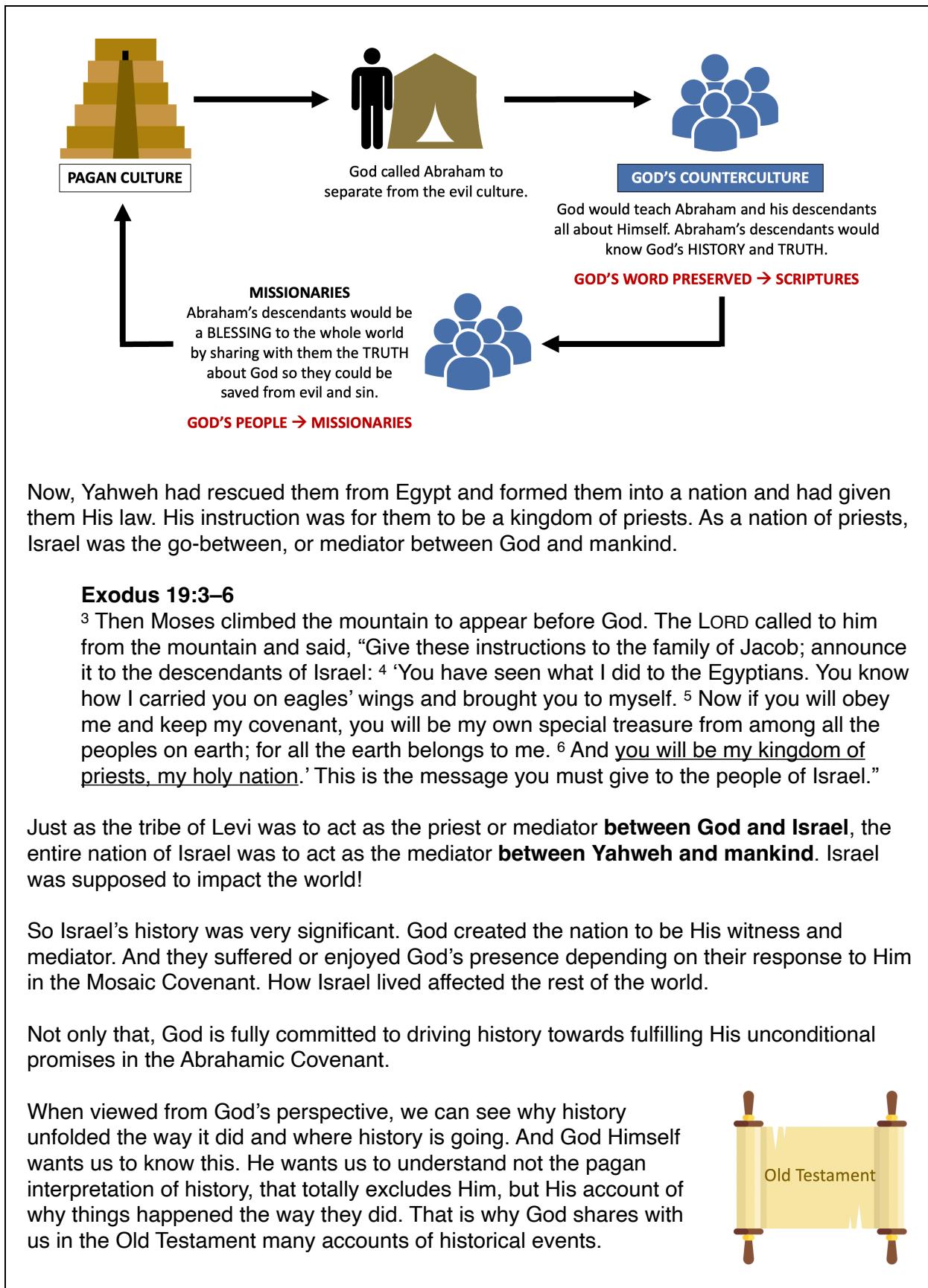


Israel's history and the history of all the other nations are not random at all. God is intimately directing all of it.

Israel is Yahweh's mouthpiece to the world

Recall also how Yahweh's plan was to use Israel as His mouthpiece to the world, showing the world who He is, what He is like and how He plans to save the world.

In an earlier lesson, we saw that God told Abram that his descendants would be the ones to preserve His history and truth, and they had to take His Word to the world. Israel was supposed to be a witness to Yahweh (Isaiah 43:10–12).



And He made the prophets write down very detailed reasons and explanations of why He caused these events to occur.

Amos 3:7

Indeed, the Sovereign LORD never does anything until he reveals his plans to his servants the prophets.

God wants us to know Him and to understand history from His perspective. He is telling us what He, as the sovereign God, did and is doing. If we truly want to understand history, we need to study what the prophets wrote, and not depend on man's limited interpretation and opinion.



Signatories (the ones who sign)

Yahweh signed the Mosaic Covenant. God's "signature" of the rainbow in the Noahic Covenant and the halving of the animals in the Abrahamic Covenant was very visible and visual.

However, His "signature" in this Mosaic Covenant was less "visible". Here, Yahweh's "signature" was the Sabbath.

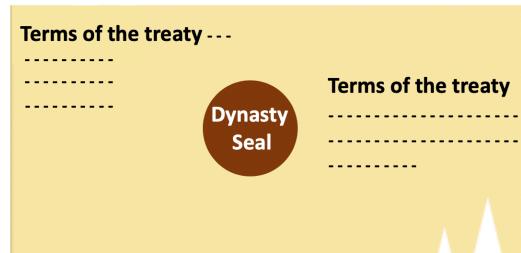
Exodus 31:12–13

¹² The LORD then gave these instructions to Moses: ¹³ "Tell the people of Israel: 'Be careful to keep my Sabbath day, for the Sabbath is a sign of the covenant between me and you from generation to generation. It is given so you may know that I am the LORD, who makes you holy.'

In ancient Near-East international treaties, it was common practice for kings to put their dynasty seal, or signature, in the middle of the treaty document. Here, it appears that God did the same with the Mosaic Covenant, which is essentially a treaty between a king and His people.

In the middle of the Ten Commandments that mainly starts and ends with "You shall not...", God paused to speak about the Sabbath.

Ancient Near-East Treaties



Exodus 20:8–11

⁸ "Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. ⁹ You have six days each week for your ordinary work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the LORD your God. On that day no one in your household may do any work. This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your livestock, and any foreigners living among you. ¹¹ For in six days the LORD made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything in them; but on the seventh day he rested. That is why the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and set it apart as holy.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
You shall have no	You shall not	You shall not	REMEMBER THE SABBATH	Honor your	You shall not				

God said that after six days of creation, He set aside the seventh day, the Sabbath, to be dedicated to Him, as a holy day of rest. The Sabbath therefore is a unique mark of His character because it signifies the completion of His work as Creator-God. No other god established a work week that was six days of work and one day of rest. No other god called for a Sabbath rest. This is unique to Yahweh.



Day 1	2	3	4	5	6	Day 7
work	work	work	work	work	work	 Sabbat REST

At Creation, God made a 24-hour day cycle and the earth reflects that cycle because it takes 24 hours to complete one full rotation on its axis. A year is measured by how long the earth takes to move in its orbit around the sun. However, there is no astrophysical reason why a week has to be seven days aside from the fact that God did it that way.

In this way, the Sabbath is God's signature, a mark of His sovereignty as Creator-God. And when His people observed it, it was a constant reminder that He is their God and He makes them holy.



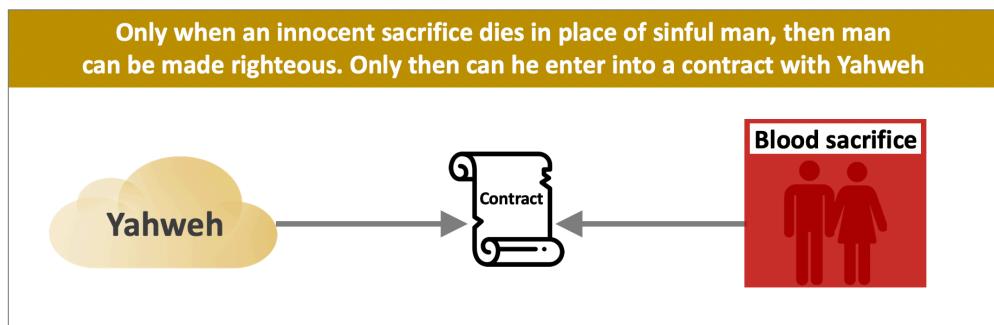
Founding Sacrifice

Holy Yahweh and sinful man cannot enter into any relationship or contract with each other unless there is an atonement covering.

Why? Righteous Yahweh cannot be bound to a convicted sinner whose crimes have not been paid for. His righteousness will not allow it.



So, the blood of an innocent substitute must first cover the sins of man to satisfy God's justice before man and God can have any agreement with each other (Hebrews 9:22).



This is why the Noahic and Abrahamic covenants both had to involve a founding sacrifice.

Covenant	Initiating sacrifice	Scripture Reference
New World (or Noahic) 	Noah sacrificed groups of clean animals. 	Genesis 8:20–22 20 Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and there he sacrificed as burnt offerings the animals and birds that had been approved for that purpose. 21 And the LORD was pleased with the aroma of the sacrifice and said to himself, “I will never again curse the ground because of the human race, even though everything they think or imagine is bent toward evil from childhood. I will never again destroy all living things. 22 As long as the earth remains, there will be planting and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night.”
Abrahamic 	Abraham sacrificed a heifer, goat, ram, turtledove, and pigeon. (These animals also served as God's signature.) 	Genesis 15:9–10 9 The LORD told him, “Bring me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.” 10 So Abram presented all these to him and killed them. Then he cut each animal down the middle and laid the halves side by side; he did not, however, cut the birds in half.

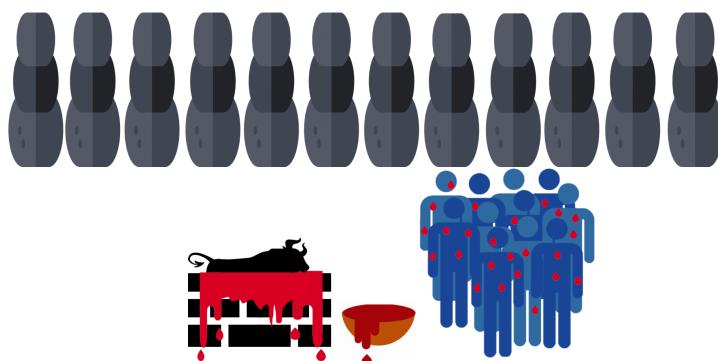
For the Mosaic Covenant, Moses sacrificed bulls and took the blood to sprinkle on the altar and also on the Israelites.

Exodus 24:4–8

⁴ Then Moses carefully wrote down all the LORD's instructions. Early the next morning Moses got up and built an altar at the foot of the mountain. He also set up twelve pillars, one for each of the twelve tribes of Israel. ⁵ Then he sent some of the young Israelite men to present burnt offerings and to sacrifice bulls as peace offerings to the LORD. ⁶ Moses drained half the blood from these animals into basins. The other half he splattered against the altar.

⁷ Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it aloud to the people. Again they all responded, "We will do everything the LORD has commanded. We will obey."

⁸ Then Moses took the blood from the basins and splattered it over the people, declaring, "Look, this blood confirms the covenant the LORD has made with you in giving you these instructions."



Type of Contract

The Mosaic Covenant is the only conditional contract that God made with His people. All other contracts would be unconditional.

	Noahic Covenant	Abrahamic Covenant	Mosaic Covenant
Parties	God, mankind, animals	God, Abraham and descendants	God and the 12 tribes of Israel (sons of Jacob)
Promises	No future global floods	Land, descendants, worldwide blessing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Blessings for obeying all the laws Cursings for disobeying the laws
Signatories	God alone (with the rainbow)	God alone (with the animal halves)	God (with the sign of the Sabbath)
Founding sacrifice	Genesis 8:20–22	Genesis 15:9–11	Exodus 24:4–8
Type	Unconditional	Unconditional	Conditional

The Reason God Gave the Israelites for Obeying the Law: Gratitude

Why should the Israelites bother to obey God's Law? God said the reason they should obey His Law is out of gratitude to Him for rescuing them from slavery.

Because of His covenant with Abraham and His love for the Israelites, when they cried out to Him in their distress, He answered. He did something for them first. Only after that did He give them the Ten Commandments to tell them His expectations of the kind of relationship they should have.

Exodus 20:2–3

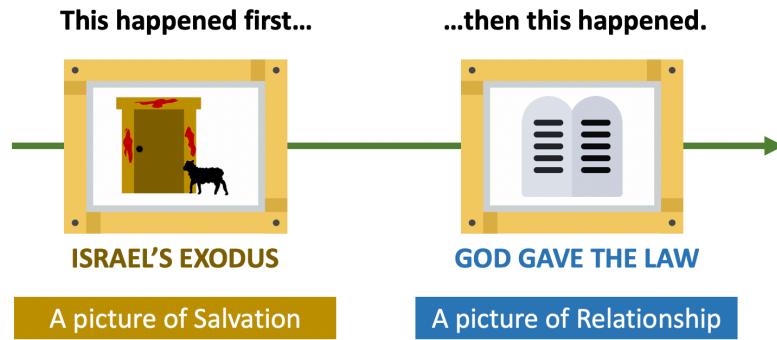
² “I am the LORD your God, who rescued you from the land of Egypt, the place of your slavery. ³ “You must not have any other god but me.”

This is what Moses said about why God expected them to obey His Law.

Deuteronomy 4:37–40 (ESV)

³⁷ And because he loved your fathers and chose their offspring after them and brought you out of Egypt with his own presence, by his great power, ³⁸ driving out before you nations greater and mightier than you, to bring you in, to give you their land for an inheritance, as it is this day, ³⁹ know therefore today, and lay it to your heart, that the LORD is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other.

⁴⁰ Therefore you shall keep his statutes and his commandments, which I command you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may prolong your days in the land that the LORD your God is giving you for all time.”



So the motivation or reason that God wants them to obey is thankfulness and gratefulness.

The Law was given to Israel to teach them how grateful sons should behave. God was telling them to obey the laws for His sake alone. Be obedient for His sake and not for anyone else's. Don't do it for any other motive. Just for Him.

God's Law is Personal

Sometimes when we hear the word “law”, we think of an impersonal list of dos and don’ts. However, the Law that God gave His people was very different.



	Typical understanding of “law”	God’s Law
Format	Impersonal code of rules: “if you do this … then the punishment is …”	Personal address by God to man’s heart and to the heart of the nation
Scope	External only. Something that a policeman or lawyer can observe	Internal (hearts) and external (behaviour)
Reason to obey	Avoid punishment	Gratitude

Why did God give the Israelites the Law? It was to **teach them how a son should relate to the Father and to others**. It was not a cold impersonal law code. In fact, this is what makes God’s Law so very different from others. All the pagan law codes of that time and even today, deal with behaviour and follow a format that can be checked by the police or lawyers. For example, the typical format is “if a person does this, then the punishment is this.” Some of God’s Law does have this format:

Exodus 22:1

If someone steals an ox or sheep and then kills or sells it, the thief must pay back five oxen for each ox stolen, and four sheep for each sheep stolen.

However, God also used a very different format not found in any other law code on earth. Much of God’s Law is addressed to man’s heart.

Deuteronomy 10:12–22

¹² “And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you? He requires only that you fear the LORD your God, and live in a way that pleases him, and love him and serve him with all your heart and soul. ¹³ And you must always obey the LORD’s commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good. ¹⁴ “Look, the highest heavens and the earth and everything in it all belong to the LORD your God. ¹⁵ Yet the LORD chose your ancestors as the objects of his love. And he chose you, their descendants, above all other nations, as is evident today. ¹⁶ Therefore, change your hearts and stop being stubborn.

¹⁷ “For the LORD your God is the God of gods and Lord of lords. He is the great God, the mighty and awesome God, who shows no partiality and cannot be bribed. ¹⁸ He ensures that orphans and widows receive justice. He shows love to the foreigners living among you and gives them food and clothing. ¹⁹ So you, too, must show love to foreigners, for you yourselves were once foreigners in the land of Egypt. ²⁰ You must fear the LORD your God and worship him and cling to him. Your oaths must be in his name alone. ²¹ He alone is your God, the only one who is worthy of your praise, the one who has done these mighty

miracles that you have seen with your own eyes. ²² When your ancestors went down into Egypt, there were only seventy of them. But now the LORD your God has made you as numerous as the stars in the sky!

The language God used here is very different from any law code in the world today! No law code today speaks like this:

- “fear the LORD”
- “love him”
- “serve him with all your heart and soul”
- “for your own good”
- “change your hearts and stop being stubborn”
- and because God shows love to foreigners, “so you, too, must show love”.

God’s Law contains encouragement, care, nurturing persuasion, reassurance and advice. It looks more like a letter from a father to a son. It captures the love and concern in the heart of the father and his desire for the good of his son!

God’s Law is about relationship, intimacy and having a loving bond.



There are many parts of God’s Law that cannot be enforced by any policeman or lawyer. How would a policeman know if a person fears the LORD, loves Him and serves Him with all their heart and soul? No human can read another human’s mind or heart. This is not “practical” for any society’s law because it cannot be checked by another human.

However, God can read a person’s heart. God can read a person’s mind. God knows what people are feeling, thinking and believing in. Yahweh can verify if their heart or mind is in love with Him or not. And this is what is truly important to God. This is where God’s Law is totally different from human law. **God’s Law is very focused and concerned about the heart.**



For example, Yahweh told the prophet Samuel how important the heart is to Him, even in choosing a king.

1 Samuel 16:7

But the LORD said to Samuel, “Don’t judge by his appearance or height, for I have rejected him. The LORD doesn’t see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”

The heart is so important to God that if a person’s heart was not with Him, He does not value their actions. The actions by themselves are meaningless to Him.

Isaiah 29:13 (NIV)

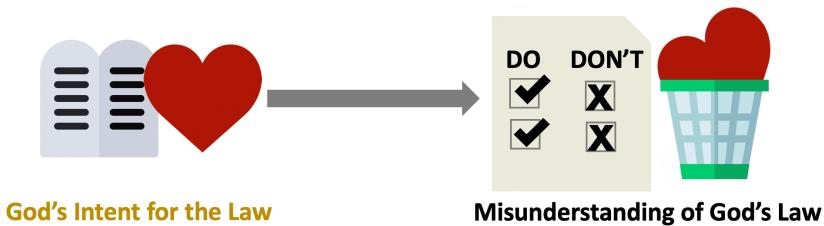
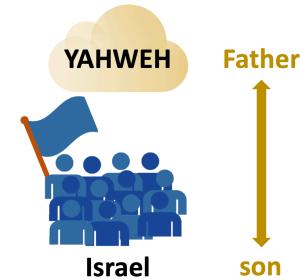
The LORD says:

‘These people come near to me with their mouth
and honour me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me.

Their worship of me
is based on merely human rules they have been taught.

It is very important that we understand God's heart in giving the Law. It is not meant to be a list of dos and don'ts. God is not a policeman. He is a loving Father, sharing His heart with His son, giving him advice on how to live well. However, many people misunderstand this.

In Jesus' day, the Pharisees took God's Law (which was meant for the heart) and applied legalism and made it all about behaviour. The Pharisees got it wrong. They did not understand that God did not want rigid obedience to cold hard rules. They totally misunderstood and misapplied God's Law.



For example, the Pharisees took God's law about resting on the Sabbath to the extreme of legalism. This was not what God intended at all. Jesus had to challenge their thinking.

Mark 3:1–6

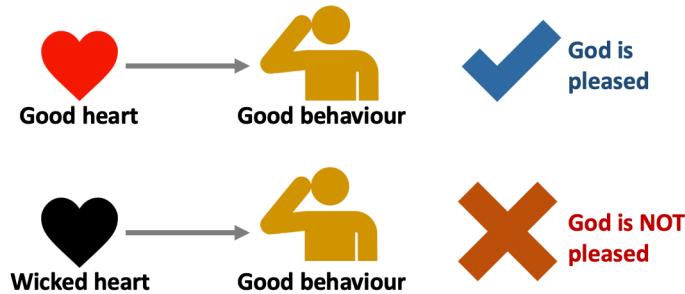
¹ Jesus went into the synagogue again and noticed a man with a deformed hand. ² Since it was the Sabbath, Jesus' enemies watched him closely. If he healed the man's hand, they planned to accuse him of working on the Sabbath. ³ Jesus said to the man with the deformed hand, "Come and stand in front of everyone." ⁴ Then he turned to his critics and asked, "Does the law permit good deeds on the Sabbath, or is it a day for doing evil? Is this a day to save life or to destroy it?" But they wouldn't answer him.

⁵ He looked around at them angrily and was deeply saddened by their hard hearts. Then he said to the man, "Hold out your hand." So the man held out his hand, and it was restored! ⁶ At once the Pharisees went away and met with the supporters of Herod to plot how to kill Jesus.

The confrontation between Jesus and the Pharisees showed that the Pharisees were interpreting the Law wrongly. Jesus was not saying that the Law is bad. However, He was not happy that people treated the Law mechanically, heartlessly and coldly. This changed God's intent for the Law. The reason God gave instructions for the Sabbath rest was that the rest would be a benefit for man. It was to be for man's refreshment as they remembered their God. The Sabbath was never meant to be a burden to man. What's more, the Sabbath was not given to prevent man from doing good on that day of rest!

The heart of God's Law regarding human needs is that human needs are more important than ceremony or tradition. The Pharisees perverted God's Law and depersonalised it. They made it into a list of dos and don'ts.

God looks first at man's heart and then at man's behaviour. Both are important. But man's behaviour must come from man's heart. Yahweh does not care for a person with good actions but a wicked heart. God's Law is personal and relational just like Himself.



How did Israel Respond to the Covenant?

After Moses read the Book of the Covenant to the Israelites, the people all agreed to this contract.

Exodus 24:7

Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it aloud to the people. Again they all responded, "We will do everything the LORD has commanded. We will obey."

If the Israelites had seriously thought about what God was expecting of them and had sincerely examined their own track record of grumbling, complaining and faithlessness, they would have realised that it would have been impossible for them to fulfil their part of the Mosaic contract.

In humility, they should have fallen on their knees and begged God for help and a solution. They should have realised they would have problems fulfilling their responsibilities. However, in their pride, they agreed to it.

And because both parties now had responsibilities to fulfil, God put in place witnesses to the agreement.

The Witnesses

In God's Mosaic Covenant with His people, the Bible talks about three witnesses to the contract.





1. Book of the Law

God spoke His Law to Moses who wrote them all down in the Book of the Law, also known as the Book of Instruction. Interestingly, God told Moses that the book would be a “witness” against the people of Israel.

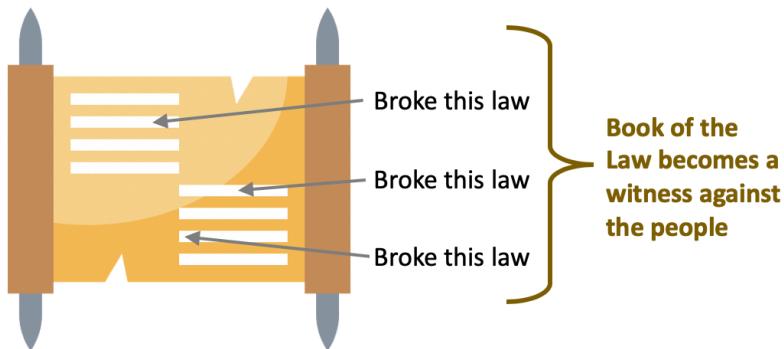
Deuteronomy 31:24–26

²⁴ When Moses had finished writing this entire body of instruction in a book, ²⁵ he gave this command to the Levites who carried the Ark of the LORD’s Covenant: ²⁶ “Take this Book of Instruction and place it beside the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD your God, so it may remain there as a witness against the people of Israel.”

What did God mean by the Book of the Law being a “witness” and, more significantly, why was it “a witness *against* the people”?

Whenever there is a contract, the terms are clearly stated. People would be able to observe and verify if the terms have been followed or if they have been broken. If the parties to the agreement violate the terms of the contract, someone can take the Book of the Law, read through it, say “Yes, this law has been kept but that law has been broken.”

Book of the Law



The Book of the Law therefore proves or gives evidence that the law has been kept or broken.

- If the law has been **kept**, then the Book will be a **witness FOR** the people of Israel.
- If the law has been **broken**, then the Book will be a **witness AGAINST** the people of Israel.



2. Israel’s “National Anthem”

God also told Moses to write down a national anthem, a song for the Israelites. This song can be found in Deuteronomy 32.

Again, God said that this song would be a “witness for me against them”.



Deuteronomy 31:19–22

¹⁹ “So write down the words of this song, and teach it to the people of Israel. Help them learn it, so it may serve as a witness for me against them. ²⁰ For I will bring them into the

land I swore to give their ancestors—a land flowing with milk and honey. There they will become prosperous, eat all the food they want, and become fat. But they will begin to worship other gods; they will despise me and break my covenant.

²¹ And when great disasters come down on them, this song will stand as evidence against them, for it will never be forgotten by their descendants. I know the intentions of these people, even now before they have entered the land I swore to give them.” ²² So that very day Moses wrote down the words of the song and taught it to the Israelites.

This national anthem is unlike any song we would ever hear today. No nation would ever have this type of national anthem! Why?

- **It is a prophesy.** In this song, God is actually telling them the future. The song says that the Israelites would be unfaithful to God. Despite all that God had done for them, they would forget Him, worship idols who were actually demons, and break His laws. Disaster would come on them for all their unfaithfulness, but ultimately, God would restore them.
- **It was written by God.** Can you imagine if our country’s national anthem contained lyrics about future wars and successes, good times and bad times? That is not possible! Humans cannot write a prophesy-song because no one can tell the future before it happens. No one... except God! God controls the future and He knows what is to come. So this truly is a unique national anthem.

People in the past and even today like to try and see into their future. People read horoscopes, go to fortune tellers or try to engage the spirit world to tell them what they want to know. Perhaps they think by knowing the future, they can make better decisions.

Ironically, God did tell Israel their future. God told them how unfaithful they would be and how much disaster would fall upon them. However, even knowing the future did not stop it from happening just as God said. God did not “make it happen” in the sense that God did not force them to be unfaithful. God wanted them to be faithful! But they did not pay attention to the warnings that God gave at all. Knowing the future did not help them make better choices because the people still had evil, rebellious hearts.

Similar to the Book of the Law, this national anthem was to be God’s witness against the people. The people would break God’s laws. The national anthem that would be sung for generations would give evidence to that, as the people lived out the lyrics of the song.



3. “Heaven and Earth”

The third witness was “heaven and earth”. After writing the Book of the Law, Moses wanted all the leaders of the people to listen to the reading of the Law, so that he could call “heaven and earth to witness against them”.

Deuteronomy 31:28–29

²⁸ “Now summon all the elders and officials of your tribes, so that I can speak to them directly and call heaven and earth to witness against them. ²⁹ I know that after my death you will become utterly corrupt and will turn from the way I have commanded you to follow. In the days to come, disaster will come down on you, for you will do what is evil in the LORD’s sight, making him very angry with your actions.”

What did Moses mean? How could heaven and earth be witnesses? Interestingly, even the first verse of the national anthem referred to “heavens” and “earth”.

Deuteronomy 32:1

“Listen, O heavens, and I will speak!
Hear, O earth, the words that I say!”

“Heavens” refer to the angelic beings in heaven and “earth” refers to people in the world. People of all kinds would be witnesses of God’s covenant and they could observe if indeed Israel kept or violated the laws.

In fact, today, we can also stand as witnesses when we read the Bible. In the Bible, we can:

- Read God’s laws for ourselves.
- Read the historical account of what Israel did.
- Compare God’s laws with what Israel did and decide if they kept or broke the covenant.

In summary, God had three different types of witnesses for the Mosaic Covenant.

THE WITNESSES		
 The Law	 The Song	 Heavens and Earth
This is the contract . It gives the standard of righteousness that God and the people agreed on.	This is the prophetic testimony of what the Israelites will do in the future concerning the Law.	This is the third-party testimony . People looking at how the Israelites behaved can tell if they kept the law or not.

Unfortunately, all three witnesses had the same verdict.

THE VERDICT: ISRAEL FAILED		
 The Law	 The Song	 Heavens and Earth
This contract was read aloud every 7 years to all the people so the Israelites knew for sure they were breaking the contract.	The song prophesied that the Israelites would break the contract and they did. The song was a bad testimony for them.	People looking at how the Israelites behaved could tell that they broke God’s Law. They saw that Israel failed.

God really wants people to **know Him**. In the Old Testament, God reveals who He is, what He is like and how He interacts with man. Through the accounts of His interactions with the Israelites, people can see God's actions of faithfulness, love and righteousness. However, God doesn't just **tell** people what He is like. The Old Testament accounts **show** these attributes, so people throughout the ages can make up their own minds and draw their own conclusions about His character.

Oftentimes, man in their pride thinks very highly of themselves. But God also wants people to **know what man is really like**. People believe they are "good" and they think their own made-up standard of right and wrong is accurate. Through the Old Testament accounts of how man treats God, all people can observe that man's heart and actions towards God and each other are evil, sinful and unfaithful.

When God called **witnesses** to observe the Israelites' behaviour, God was **showing** people through the ages that He is faithful and man is not. For man to escape eternal separation from Him, God needs to take action because people cannot save themselves.

The Prosecuting Attorneys

God meant for the Mosaic Covenant to be a contract between His people and Him. But did God put in place lawyers or policemen to announce when the contract was broken? Yes. God's prosecuting attorneys were the prophets.

There are more than 133 named prophets in the Bible, including 16 women. Their jobs were to:

- write down biblical history as interpreted by God.
- teach people about God.
- give the people God's promises and prophesies about the future.
- be the "lawyer". This was a very important job of the prophets.

God's lawyers



**are the
PROPHETS**

How do we know this? When we read the books of the prophets, we will notice something very interesting. For example, in the book of Isaiah, the prophet Isaiah is calling upon witnesses of the contract!

Isaiah 1:2–3

² Listen, O heavens! Pay attention, earth!

This is what the LORD says:

"The children I raised and cared for
have rebelled against me.

³ Even an ox knows its owner,
and a donkey recognizes its master's care—
but Israel doesn't know its master.

My people don't recognize my care for them."

Isaiah was calling up the witnesses to the covenant between God and man! In this case, he was calling on heaven and earth to witness what Israel had done—they had rebelled. In the original

Mosaic Covenant, God called upon the heavens and the earth to be His witnesses. Now through Isaiah, God was calling them once again to witness the behaviour of His people.

So what did the prophets do in their jobs as “lawyers”?

- **Announce the curse.** Each time Israel rebelled and God was going to curse them, the prophets would be the ones to announce the curse. For example, a prophet would warn the people that because of their continued rebellion towards God, He was going to enact Stage 2 of the curses. Then another prophet would come along and warn the people that if they still did not obey, Stage 3 would start.



The cursings that God gave were also prophecies of disasters that eventually came upon the nation of Israel later in their history. All of them came true for Israel. This was because the people continually broke God’s covenant.

- **Encourage repentance.** The reason why God wanted the prophets to announce the curses was to remind people of the terms of the contract and to encourage them to repent.



Some people think the prophets were social reformers, just teaching people how to be “good” or moral people. No, the prophets reacted to how the people responded to God. The prophets did not come up with new ideas. They were enforcing the agreement that God had with His people.

That was how the prophets were related to the law. The prophets were not random people saying random things. They were God’s prosecuting attorneys.

In this lesson, we covered an overview of God’s Mosaic Law. However, there is one very important point we must not miss.

Exodus before Sinai: Salvation before Relationship

The accounts of the Exodus and Mount Sinai teach us a very important lesson that should help assure and comfort us today.

It is very important for us to understand that the **Exodus came before the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai**. This sequence of events is very important to understand.

First: Exodus

When God approached the Jews in Egypt, He told them that He had seen their suffering and heard their crying. **God told them to trust Him and He would save them.**

- God did not enter Egypt and tell the people to obey Him and then He would save them.
- He did not say, “If you have good behaviour, then I will save you.” God did not tell them to “stop this” and “stop that” before He would save them. He did not say stop stealing, cheating, lying, worshipping other gods, sleeping with your girlfriend, living with your boyfriend, etc.

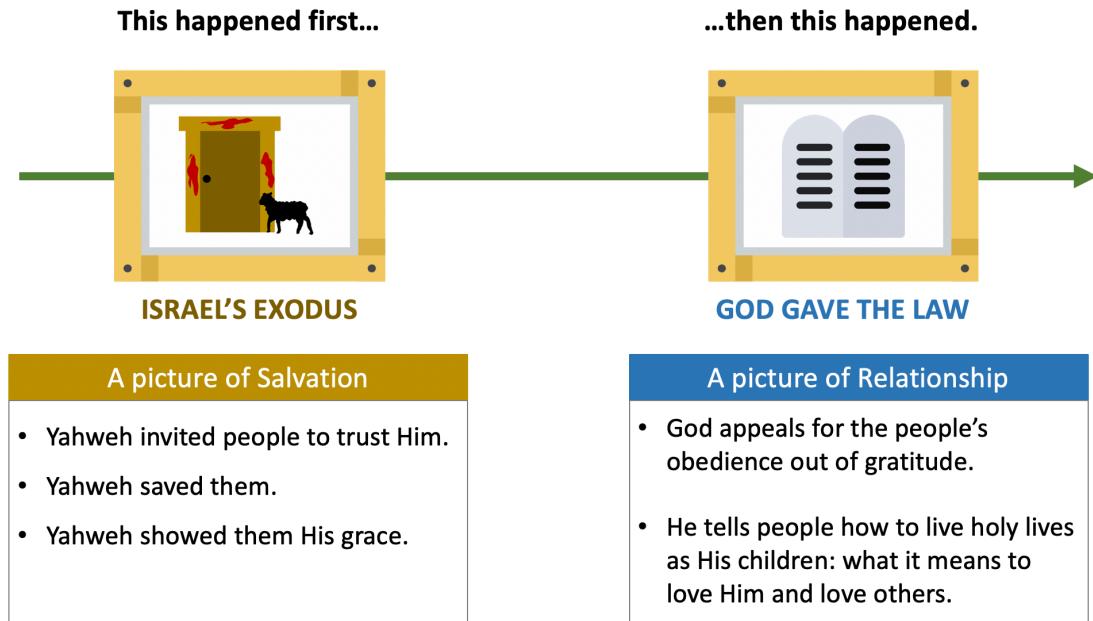
- God simply invited them to trust Him.
- God formed this Father-son relationship with Israel first.

Then: Mount Sinai

Only after the people were saved, then **God gave the Israelites the Law at Mount Sinai**.

- The law came after the Exodus, after God saved them, after salvation.
- God saved them and then later, He appealed to them to be obedient to Him out of gratitude for what He had done for them.
- God spoke to them about what a good relationship with Him would look like.

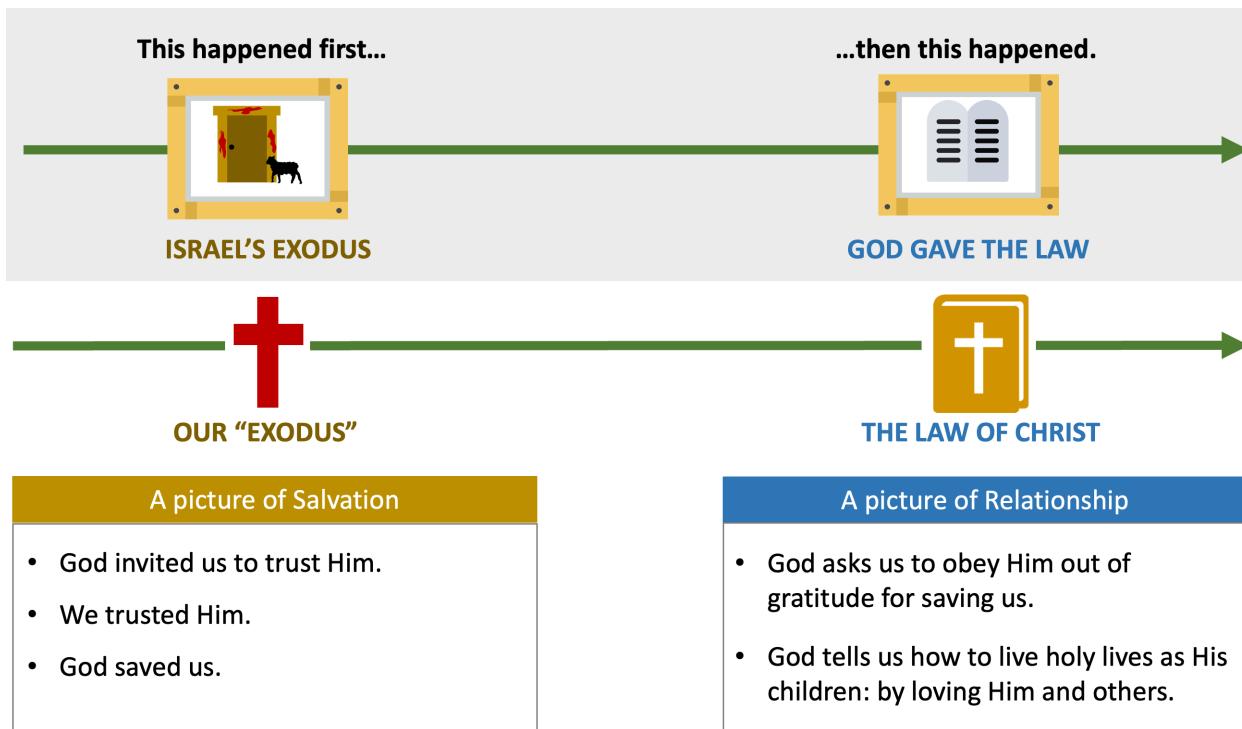
God made Israel His son even **before** He told them about His laws. This means God did not make Israel His son because they followed or kept God's laws or because they were "good" or obedient. Salvation is never man's work. It is always and only God's.



This Exodus-Mount Sinai sequence is the same for us.

- Our "Exodus": God saves us when we have faith in Him.
- Our "Mount Sinai": After we are saved, God tells us how we are to live as His people.

We do not do "good" first or obey God's Law first and then God saves us. This is not how it works at all.



This is very important for us to understand, especially as we think about the unbelievers in our lives. We must not start by trying to change their values and behaviour. Rather we should follow God's example:

1. We make the invitation for them to know God and put their trust in Him (that is, Exodus).
2. After that, God will work on His relationship with them (that is, the Law).

Let us be careful not to be like the Pharisees who focused on the mechanical acts. Let us not impose our values on people who do not yet believe, or try to speak into their values based on human arguments.

This might be very tempting for believers to do especially when we live among family and friends who make choices and live lives that are very contrary to biblical morals.

Does that mean that as believers we shouldn't encourage good moral behaviour? No. This was what the apostle Paul said to the church in Corinth:

- He told them to be concerned with the holiness of **believers**.
- He said the holiness of unbelievers was not our concern. God would judge those who were unbelievers.

In the following passage, Paul was disappointed by how hard-hearted and unrepentant believers in the Corinthian church were. The ones who were sinning were arrogantly and persistently abusing their freedom in Christ, using it as an excuse to sin. Others in church tolerated their sin because they had a perverted understanding of God's grace. This was Paul's rebuke.

1 Corinthians 5:9–13

⁹ When I wrote to you before, I told you not to associate with people who indulge in sexual sin. ¹⁰ But I wasn't talking about unbelievers who indulge in sexual sin, or are greedy, or cheat people, or worship idols. You would have to leave this world to avoid people like that.

¹¹ I meant that you are not to associate with anyone who claims to be a believer yet indulges in sexual sin, or is greedy, or worships idols, or is abusive, or is a drunkard, or cheats people. Don't even eat with such people.

¹² It isn't my responsibility to judge outsiders, but it certainly is your responsibility to judge those inside the church who are sinning. ¹³ God will judge those on the outside; but as the Scriptures say, "You must remove the evil person from among you."

As believers who live among unbelievers, let us determine to love the unbelievers, to get to know them and to genuinely care for them as people. Let's not start by attacking their values. This does not mean we must never speak about the Bible's morals with them. If it comes up in conversation, we should share God's Word as clearly and lovingly as we can. But attacking their morals by pushing God's standards onto them is not the way to build a relationship. Let's start by building a friendship and a trust with them that would one day allow us to share the hope that we have in Jesus Christ. Focus on "Exodus" first, then "Sinai" after they become believers.

Let's be careful not to be like the cold-hearted, soulless Pharisees who were judgmental and harsh. Rather, let's be like Jesus and treat everyone with gentleness, kindness and respect. Even those whose values and beliefs contradict the Bible.

Discussion Questions

Discuss the following questions as a group or use them for personal reflection.

1. What impact does it have on us to know that our salvation is taken care of by God before we are expected to live by God's righteous standards?
2. Israel failed to live righteously even though they had God's laws, the prophets, and even though they suffered God's discipline. What can we learn from their example about how to handle our own pride, self-righteousness and sinfulness?
3. As we interact with unbelievers in our daily lives, how do we form trust and friendship with them while at the same time not compromising on God's expectations on how to live?



Pre-reading for next lesson: Deuteronomy 4–8, 28, 32; Leviticus 26