

Are We Under The Law of Moses Today?

Tim Haile

Many people turn to the Old Testament for their authority for modern religious practices. The practices that are most commonly defended from the Old Testament are *tithing, Sabbath observance, burning of incense in worship, instrumental music in worship, infant church membership and a separate priesthood*. People turn to the Old Testament to justify such practices because no authority can be found for them in the New Testament. But, are we under either the Patriarchal or Mosaic Law today? Should we seek to justify today's religious practices by appealing to the Law of Moses? This study shall cite several obvious reasons why we should not turn to the Old Testament for modern religious authority. However, before discussing these reasons I wish to address a common misconception about "inspiration" and "authority."

The Difference Between Bible *Inspiration* and Bible *Authority*

One is often accused of "not believing in the Old Testament" when he teaches that the Old Testament is not our standard of authority today. However, there is a difference between *inspiration* and *authority*. The apostle Paul wrote, "*All Scripture is inspired of God...*" (2 Timothy 3:16), and he made it clear that this includes both *Old* and *New* Testament "Scriptures." He had written in the first letter, "*For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle the ox when he treads out the grain,' and, 'The laborer is worthy of his wages'"* (1 Timothy 5:18). The first quote is from Moses (Deut. 25:4), and is a part of the *Old Testament*. The second quote is from Jesus (Luke 10:7), and is a part of the *New Testament*. Paul classified *both* sayings as "Scripture." This means that the *Old* and *New* Testament Scriptures are equally *inspired*. No true Bible believer can deny the inspiration of the Old Testament. All "Scripture" must be believed, accepted, and considered as "profitable for salvation" (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). The question is not whether or not one should "believe in" the Old Testament, for he must! The question of our title concerns the present *purpose* and *application* of those Scriptures. Does the fact that the Old Testament is *inspired* necessarily mean that it constitutes our moral, spiritual and religious standard? Does the Old Testament constitute an *authoritative* religious guide for people today?

1. The Law of Moses was given to the Jewish people. Old Covenant Jews were under a *theocratic* form of government. Their *spiritual*

law was also their *civil law*. This is often overlooked by religious people of today. They fail to consider that many of the Mosaic laws had to do with maintaining the purity of the *Abrahamic lineage*. The Old Testament contains special instructions prohibiting the Jewish people from marrying outside of their race (Deuteronomy 7:3). Certain food restrictions and cleanliness laws maintained the peculiarity and holiness of the Jewish people (see Leviticus 11).

After summoning “*all Israel*,” Moses said to them, “*The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. Not with our fathers did the Lord make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us alive here today*” (Deuteronomy 5:2, 3). In case there was any question about which people were under consideration, Moses said it was the nation that God had earlier delivered from Egyptian slavery (Deut. 5:6). The Law of Moses was a *Jewish law*. It was given to Jews in order to regulate their social and spiritual conduct. As we shall see later, this law had a certain life expectancy.

Non-Jews (Gentiles) before the cross were “*alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenant of promise, having no hope and without God in the world*” (Eph. 2:12). Because of its peculiar relationship to the Jewish people, the Law of Moses was “*a dividing wall of hostility*” that separated Jews from Gentiles. According to the apostle Paul, in order for peace to be achieved the Law of Moses had to be “*abolished*,” and this was accomplished upon the death of Christ (Ephesians 2:14, 15; Colossians 2:14). Since God cannot be blamed for this “hostility” between Jews and Gentiles, we must conclude that God never intended for the Gentiles to be governed by the Law of Moses! The abolition of the old covenant paved the way for the ratification and inauguration of the New Covenant: “*He abolished the first in order to establish the second*” (Hebrews 10:9). This was “*the new and living way*,” which allowed both Jews and Gentiles access to forgiveness of sins and fellowship with God (Ephesians 2:16-18)

2. The Law of Moses was temporary. It served God’s intended purpose and it was taken out of the way. In explaining the relationship between the Law of Moses and the promise to Abraham, Paul pointed out that the Law was given 430 years after God had given the “seed” promise to Abraham. He explained that the “seed” [“offspring”] to which God referred was *Christ* (Galatians 3:16). Paul told the Galatians, “*Why then the law? It was added [to the law of Moses, th] because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it*

was put in place through angels by an intermediary” (Gal. 3:19). The word “until” implies an end – a stopping point. Paul went on to explain that end: “Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under the guardian” (Galatians 3:23-25). The Law of Moses served as “a guardian,” to be in effect “until” Christ came and inaugurated his system of justification by faith. The Law of Moses perfectly accomplished its mission and was removed. No human is “under” this guardian today. This passage actually sets up a dangerous scenario for those who contend that the Law of Moses remains: If the Law of Moses remains, then Christ has not come. And if Christ has not come, then we have no hope of salvation!

3. The Law of Moses was fulfilled by Jesus. As noted, the Law of Moses had a certain life expectancy. Paul explained that the Law reigned “until Christ came,” but he did not explain *how* the coming of Christ affected the Law. We leave this explanation to Jesus: *“Think not that I have come to destroy the law or the prophets: I came not to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass away, till all things be accomplished”* (Matthew 5:17, 18). The “jot” was the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The “tittle” was a small accent mark that distinguished some Hebrew letters from others. Jesus’ point was that he completely accomplished the Law. The sinless and perfect life of the savior “fulfilled” the law. Before Jesus, no human had ever lived a sinless life (Gal. 3:22; Rom. 3:23). By his perfect life and obedience, Jesus satisfied the legal requirements of the Law. We should remember that while on the cross, Jesus uttered the words *“it is finished”* (John 19:30). This was a highly significant statement. The death of Jesus marked the end of the Old Testament era and the inauguration of the New Testament (see Hebrews 9:15-17).

4. It constitutes *spiritual adultery* for one to be under the Old Testament and the New Testament at the same time (Romans 7:1-4). This is what Paul told the Jewish Christians at Rome, and the same consequence would apply to us today. Paul here cites the physical marriage relationship to illustrate the nature of the relationship between Christians and the Law. The woman, who marries another man while her husband yet lives, is “an adulteress.” Similarly, people commit *spiritual adultery* when they simultaneously join themselves to both the Law of Moses and the Law of Christ. *“Through the body of Christ”* [his death]

people “*died to the law*” [of Moses.] The death of Christ released the Jews from the Law of Moses (Romans 7:6), thus freeing them to be bound to Christ. Interestingly, no one living today *has ever been under* the Law of Moses! Paul, writing in the first century AD, wrote to Jews who were actually once amenable to that Law (*see point #1, above*).

5. One cannot be saved by Christ while seeking *justification by the Law of Moses*. Paul told the saints of Galatia, “*You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace*” (Galatians 5:4). This verse alone should be enough to convince people that no one is under the Law of Moses today. Due to the nature of the two laws, one simply cannot fulfill the requirements of the Law of Moses and the Law of Christ at the same time. As explained before, Jesus *fulfilled* the teaching of “the Law and the prophets” (Matt. 5:18). Paul later told these Galatians to “*fulfill the law of Christ*” (Gal. 6:2). All today are “*under the law to Christ*” (1 Corinthians 9:21).

It should be noted that Galatians 5:4 states that one “falls from grace” if he seeks justification by the Law of Moses. Along with teaching that no human today is accountable to God through the Law of Moses, this verse also teaches that it is possible for a person to “fall from grace!” In one fell swoop, Galatians 5:4 decimates both of these human errors.

6. Those who seek justification by the Law of Moses are obligated to “keep the whole law.” Paul said, “*I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law*” (Galatians 5:3). And, “*For all who rely on works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them’*” (Galatians 3:10). These passages plainly teach that the Law of Moses must be followed *wholly* if it is to be followed at all! First century deceivers tried to convince people that they had to “be circumcised” in order to be Christians. Paul made it clear that if one goes to the Old Testament for his authority for circumcision, then he is bound to keep the rest of that law. There is no “picking-and-choosing” when it comes to obedience to God.

In our day, we don’t see many people turning to the Old Law to justify or bind *circumcision* as a religious rite or requirement. However, we do see many people turn to the Old Testament in order to justify *Sabbath keeping, tithing* and the use of *instrumental music in worship to God*. But have such people considered the consequences of their actions? According to Paul’s argument, these same people must observe every

other requirement of the Old Law. This would include not only *circumcision*, but also *the burning of animal sacrifices, the observance of Mosaic civil laws, including death penalty laws for a number of sins, cleanliness laws, food restrictions* and a host of other rules, regulations and restrictions. Why don't those who use the Old Testament for their authority for the type of music that they want in worship (mechanical), also use the Old Testament for their authority for the type of "sacrifices" that they offer in worship? Why don't we see people running to the Old Testament for their instructions about sacrifice? It appears that folks want to be able to appeal to the Law of Moses to justify their *favorite* and *preferred* practices, but they don't want to be stuck with having to accept the others. According to the apostle Paul, in Galatians 3:10, they don't have this choice. Consistency demands that if they go to the Old Testament to justify one religious act, they are obligated to go their for justification of all other religious acts.

7. The Hebrew writer said, "For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Hebrews 10:4). However, this is precisely the type of sacrifice that was offered under the Law of Moses (Hebrews 9:13-22; 10:1-4). The conclusion: Salvation is not through the Old Covenant. Under the Law of Moses "*remembrance was made of sin year after year.*" No *actual* forgiveness was accomplished. The sacrifices under the Law were *types* and *shadows*. They taught people to look forward to the coming of the Messiah and to the perfect sacrifice that was to come – the antitype, "*the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world*" – Jesus Christ (Jn. 1:29). Jesus instituted his own covenant, which he ratified by his own blood (Hebrews 8:9-13; 9:14-28). The lesson from Hebrews 8-10 is clear: The *saving* blood is the blood of the *New Covenant*, not of the Old! One cannot be saved by the Law of Moses. This wasn't even its purpose, which leads us to our next point:

8. The Law of Moses Was Given To Define and to Prevent Sin. Let us revisit Paul's words in Galatians 3:19: "*Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary.*" Note that the Law was added (to the promise) "*because of transgressions.*" Old Testament history reveals that prior to the giving of the Law at Sinai, the Jewish people were adopting the abominable practices of the peoples around them. The Old Testament served to identify, codify and define sin. Paul said, "*I had not known sin but by the law, for I had not known lust, except the law had said, 'Thou shalt not covet'*" (Romans 7:7). Paul here quotes one of the Ten Commandments in

order to illustrate the purpose of the Old Testament. Had God not intervened, the Jewish people would have utterly lost their identity, having melded in thought and practice with the nations around them. We are again reminded of the fact that the Law of Moses was peculiarly *Jewish* in its purpose and design.

9. If the Law of Moses remains binding today, then Jesus does not qualify as our High Priest. This must be the most significant consequence of this error. Without Jesus as our High Priest we would have no one to “*make propitiation for our sins*” (Heb. 2:17). We would be unable to “*draw near to the throne of grace, to receive mercy, and find grace to help in time of need*” (Heb. 4:16). We would have no priest that identified with both *God* and *man*. We would have no priest “*after the order of Melchizedek.*” There would be no *eternal* and *infallible priesthood* (Heb. 7:3, 23, 24). Old Testament priests had to offer sacrifices for their own sins, as well as for the people (Heb. 9:7), and death prevented them from continuing in office (Heb. 7:23). And, as touched upon earlier, there was a problem with their *sacrifices*. These priests offered *animal* sacrifices, which were never intended to atone for sin. These sacrifices “could not perfect the consciences of the worshippers” (Hebrews 9:9). Herein lies the real significance of the sacrifice of Christ (Heb. 9:11-28). Jesus executed his priestly duties in heaven itself, in the immediate presence of God! Without Jesus as our High Priest we would be doomed. Let us now consider what the Hebrew writer said about Jesus’ priesthood and the Old Law.

The Hebrew writer observed that had perfection been attainable through the Levitical priesthood and the order of Aaron, there would have been no need for a priest to arise “after the order of Melchizedek.” The inspired writer then said:

“For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well. For the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests” (Hebrews 7:12-14).

The argument is simple: If the Law of Moses remains binding upon men today, then Jesus does not qualify to serve as our High Priest! As stated, Jesus was not from the tribe of *Levi*. He was of the tribe of *Judah*, and Moses never authorized priests from the tribe of Judah. This meant that Jesus could not serve as High Priest while the Law of Moses “yet

stood.” This condition required *“a change in the law.”* As we observed in previous points, upon Christ’s death upon the cross, the Old Covenant was replaced with the New Covenant or New *Testament* – the last will and testament of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 9:15). Unlike the Law of Moses, the Law of Christ DOES authorize Jesus to serve as High Priest, and he presently functions in that capacity (Hebrews 4:14-16; 7:22-28).

There is another important lesson to learn from Hebrews 7:11-14. Non-Levites were not refused admittance into the priesthood upon the basis that “God told them not to,” for God didn’t tell them “not to.” Rather, non-Levites were forbidden to serve as priests upon the very basis that God specified “Levi” as the priestly tribe, and he *“said nothing about priests”* from Judah or any other tribe of Israel! God’s silence is prohibitive in every instance where God specifies something within a particular class of activity.

10. The Law of Moses was “abolished.” The gospel of Christ plainly affirms that the old law has been abrogated. In his death on the cross, Jesus *“abolished in his flesh the Law of commandments contained in ordinances”* (Ephesians 2:14, 15). Notice also Colossians 2:14, where Paul said, *“Having cancelled the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and he has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.”* 2 Corinthians 3:13-16 likens modern adherence to the Law of Moses to the wearing of a veil. When one turns to Christ that “veil” is “taken away.” Some people want to believe that these passages are addressing only “the ceremonial aspect of the Law.” This simply is not true, for 2 Corinthians 3:7 speaks of what was *“carved in stone,”* clearly referring to the Ten Commandments.

After quoting Jeremiah’s prophecy of the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34), the Hebrew writer cited its fulfillment in the ratification of the New Testament (Heb. 8:7-13). *“In speaking of the new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away”* (Heb. 8:13). The writer infers from the use of the word “new” that “the first” covenant is *old, obsolete and vanishing away*. And in chapter 10, after quoting part of the prophecy again, the writer concludes, *“Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin”* (Heb. 10:18). The next verse says, *“Therefore brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus.”* There can be no doubt that Jeremiah’s prophecy was fulfilled – the Old Covenant gave way to the New Covenant.

Conclusion

Though the Law of Moses provides us with a valuable treasure of history, examples and insights into the nature of God (Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:6, 11), it is not our religious standard today. We are amenable to God by means of the law of Christ. It is the law that we are to fulfill (Galatians 6:2). It is the *“law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus”* (Romans 8:2). Jesus is the author of eternal salvation to those who meet the conditions and keep the provisions of his law - the law of the gospel.

Tim Haile