

What Does the Bible Say?

Old Testament

The Law first appears in the Old Testament in the book of Exodus in chapter 20, after God had graciously delivered His people Israel from the bondage of slavery under Pharaoh, having destroyed the Egyptian army at the Red Sea. After feeding them manna, quail and water from the rock, God then meets with them at Sinai and gives them “the covenant” at Sinai. The Lord first delivers the Decalogue (10 Commandments) on two tablets of stone (Exodus 20), and then goes onto to give both Civil (Exodus 21-22) and Ceremonial Laws (Exodus 23-31) as the narrative history of the Exodus unfolds. The historical narrative continues through the books of Leviticus and Numbers in which God gives additional Civil and Ceremonial Laws throughout. Then the book of Deuteronomy is a summarizing of the whole of the Law, and a reaffirmation of the covenant, and the continuation of the historical narrative wherein the role of leadership is passed from Moses to Joshua.

The **Old Covenant** is contained in this section of the Old Testament, **Exodus through Deuteronomy**, and outlines God’s covenant with His chosen nation Israel. It is under this covenant that God will unfold the course of redemptive history all the way through the Old Testament narrative up until the time of the arrival of the Messiah and the New Covenant Age. Joshua through Esther give a historical narrative covering approximately 1000 years through the time of the Exile and return to Palestine under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah. During that portion of history, the Wisdom and Poetry literature was written, as well as the all the major and minor Prophets were written at various times in the course of that historical narrative.

Here see that the **Old Covenant** was a specific covenant that **God made with Israel**, (and not the Church), that served its place in redemptive history to establish the basis for everything that God would accomplish in Christ and prepare the way for the New Covenant blessings that have now come in the Kingdom of God. It is important to see however, that the blessings of the Messianic Age of salvation were a **mystery in the Old Testament period** and not realized or fully understood by the people of that age. This accounts for the typological role of the Old Covenant worship which laid the necessary foundation for all that God has brought to pass in Christ, ushering in the Kingdom of God through Him.

Romans 16:25-27 - 25 Now to Him who is able to establish you **according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past**, 26 but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, **has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith**; 27 to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen. NASB

Ephesians 3:4-7 - 4 And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight **into the mystery of Christ, 5 which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit**; 6 to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, NASB

See then that New Testament outlines a view of the Old Covenant which sees it as temporary and preparatory in order to fully establish a basis for what God would do in the New Covenant Age of Messianic salvation. Although this is true, the Old Covenant is filled with tremendous revelation about God’s character and nature, his redemptive purposes in the world, a pattern for the true worship of God and requirements of worship based on God’s holy character. It is also filled with instructions about how mankind is to love one another and what that looks like

practically in a society through the civil Law. It is a bright shining light that leads us to see the will of God for how He is to be worshipped and how we are to treat each other according to His holy character in this fallen world.

Texts and Contexts – Moses and the Prophets

The Making and Breaking of the Covenant

The Mosaic Covenant, or Old Covenant was made by God with Israel at Mount Sinai 3 months after their deliverance and Exodus from Egypt, the tyrannical oppression of slavery under Pharaoh king of Egypt. After leading them through the desert, the Israelites come to Sinai and there God meets with them and makes a Covenant with them.

Exodus 19:1-8 - 19 In **the third month** after the sons of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that very day they came into the wilderness of Sinai. 2 When they set out from Rephidim, they came to the wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness; and there Israel camped in front of the mountain. 3 And Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the sons of Israel: 4 'You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to Myself. 5 'Now then, **if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; 6 and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'** These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel." 7 So Moses came and called the elders of the people, and set before them all these words which the Lord had commanded him. 8 And all the people answered together and said, **"All that the Lord has spoken we will do!"** And Moses brought back the words of the people to the Lord.

NASB

Here God mentions the **“Covenant”** He will make with the people, and they agree that they will keep it. One of the great purposes of the Old Covenant is mentioned here, that God desires to make Israel a **“kingdom of priests and a holy nation”** so that they would be a people set apart unto God to reflect His holiness to the watching world. During a terrifying meeting with God at Sinai in Exodus 19:9-24, the Lord God Himself speaks the words of the Decalogue, the 10 Commandments, in Exodus 20:1-17. With the people in great fear at the thunder and lightning, fire and smoke from the presence of the Lord on the mountain, He further delivers and expands the Law in Exodus 20:22-23:19. Then in Exodus 23:20-33, the Lord gives a prophecy and direction for the Israelites to enter into the promised land of Canaan, and the conquest of the wicked Canaanites who lived there. All of this Conquest will be accomplished by a supernatural deliverance by God and at His sovereign direction and timing. All of these words are written down by Moses (Ex24:4,7) who is given special privilege to go up on the mountain in the presence of the Lord. In this section of text, **Exodus 20:1-23:33, the whole Law is summarized** and in it Moral, Civil and Ceremonial precepts are given in **summary** form. This summary of the Covenant is later expanded on greatly in Exodus through Deuteronomy in many diverse ways.

After the Lord had spoken the words of the Covenant, He gathers Moses, the priests, and the elders of Israel together at the base of the mountain, and the people being present but farther away, with blood sacrifice for cleansing, He reads the whole **“book of the Covenant”** in the hearing of the people. Here the people formally hear the summary of the whole Covenant and agree to do as the Lord has spoken.

Exodus 24:7-8 - 7 Then **he took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!"** 8 So Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, and said, **"Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord has made with you** in accordance with all these words." NASB

Here see **that God made the Old Covenant with Israel at Sinai**. And this He did so that Israel would be a *“kingdom of priests and a holy nation”* belonging to the Lord, as His own possession, a people set apart unto God to reflect His holiness to the watching world, both in their generation AND in the annals of recorded history (in the Bible), for all the generations of humanity to see.

It is worth noting here that Moses then goes up on the mountain for forty days and nights to receive the Law and the Covenant from God, During this time, God gives a portion of the Ceremonial Law in great detail which includes instruction on the forming of the Tabernacle and the Priesthood, along with the Sabbath instructions. **The Sabbath is set forth here as the perpetual SIGN of the Covenant between God and Israel**, which is for all their future generations.

Exodus 31:12-17 - 12 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 13 "But as for you, speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'You shall surely observe My sabbaths; for **this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations**, that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you. 14 'Therefore you are to observe the sabbath, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people. 15 'For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest, holy to the Lord; whoever does any work on the sabbath day shall surely be put to death. 16 **'So the sons of Israel shall observe the sabbath, to celebrate the sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant.'** 17 **"It is a sign between Me and the sons of Israel forever;** for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day He ceased from labor, and was refreshed." NASB

See here that **the Sabbath is specifically set apart by God as a SIGN of the Old Covenant that He made specifically with Israel**, and explains that this sign is specifically for them, and all there future generations, the physical ethnic line of Israelites. This is clearly set forth in Exodus 31:16-17, “So the sons of Israel shall observe the sabbath, to celebrate the sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant.' 17 "It is a sign between Me and the sons of Israel forever;”

NASB. For an excellent and detailed study of this matter, see the study written by Greg Ferreri, **“The Sabbath – Shadow and Substance,”** published on the HCF website here; http://www.heritageabq.org/library/details/the_sabbath_shadow_and_substance/

This is followed by **the tragic breaking of the Covenant by Israel** just a few short days after these great events. As Moses is up on the mountain receiving the Decalogue on two stone tablets, written by the *“finger of God”* (Ex 31:18), Israel goes astray from the God and breaks the Covenant by forging an idol of a golden calf and bowing down to worship it, calling it their god. This they did indulging in immorality and drunkenness, *“pagan revelry OR rose up to play”* in celebration of this god, which was really no god at all, but only an image formed by the art and craft of man. The words *“rose up to play”* (v-32:6) in Hebrew have sexual connotations, and verse 25 speaks of them being severely *“out of control.”*

Exodus 32:3-8 - 3 Then all the people tore off the gold rings which were in their ears, and brought them to Aaron. 4 And he took this from their hand, and **fashioned it with a graving tool, and made it into a molten calf; and they said, "This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt."** 5 Now when Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow shall be a feast to the Lord." 6 **So the next day they rose early and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play.** NASB

See here the weakness of the flesh to uphold and obey the Law of God! Israel quickly broke the commandments and in a very overt and antagonistic way they even broke the first, second and