

# God's Law – Dead or Alive?

by Michael Rudolph

What follows is my response to a young woman from my congregation who was dismayed when she read an internet article which said that the Law of Moses was no longer in force. She wrote:

At [www.ariel.org](http://www.ariel.org) there were some teachings that I thought were way off base concerning the Law of Moses and the "Law of Christ." Basically, they were saying that the Law of Moses is completely abolished – even the Ten Commandments.

This was my response to her:

First you should know that the paper to which you refer was written by Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum. He is a good brother in the Lord who has contributed significantly to God's work in Hebrew Christianity and Messianic Judaism. That notwithstanding, like any of us, his doctrine must be judged against Scripture.

In his paper entitled "The Law of Moses and The Law of Christ," Dr. Fruchtenbaum says:

"The division of the Law of Moses into ceremonial, legal, and moral parts is convenient for the study of different types of commandments contained within it, but it is never divided this way by the Scriptures themselves. Neither is there any scriptural basis for separating the Ten Commandments from the whole 613 and making only the Ten perpetual."

I believe he is essentially correct. The Ten Commandments are certainly unique in the manner of their conveyance, having been written by God Himself, and they are certainly exemplary of the highest principles of the Law. Nevertheless, they are law like the rest of the Mosaic Law, capable (according to [Matthew 22:36-40](#)) of being reduced to two prime commandments which are not even among the Ten; Yeshua (Jesus) was asked:

““Teacher, which *is* the great commandment in the law?” Jesus said to him, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is *the* first and great commandment. And *the* second *is* like it: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” (NKJ)

Why then, did God give those particular Ten Commandments in so special a way? I believe it is because they were symbolic of the covenant that God was making with Israel -- a sampling of law to represent the whole. In old English law, a man conveyed his tract of land to another by picking up a handful of the soil and handing it to the new owner. That handful of soil was a ceremonial representation of the whole. It is the same, I believe, with the Ten Commandments.

Elevating the Ten Commandments above other law, combined with the common practice of classifying the Mosaic Law into ceremonial, legal and moral components, is often used to rationalize adhering to certain parts of the Law, while ignoring others. In this, Dr. Fruchtenbaum

is also right. A violation of any part of the Mosaic Law is a breaking of the Mosaic Law in general, and if we are subject to any of the Mosaic Law, then we are subject to all of it. He goes on to say:

"The clear-cut teaching of the New Testament is that the Law of Moses has been rendered inoperative with the death of Messiah; in other words, the Law in its totality no longer has authority over any individual. This is evident from Romans 10:4, with Paul telling us that *Christ is the end of the law*. Galatians 2:16 concurs, stating that neither is there justification through the Law. Furthermore, there is no sanctification or perfection through the Law (Hebrews. 7:19)."

Dr. Fruchtenbaum justifies this statement with Biblical references to the change of priesthood, and his own interpretation of Hebrews 7:18, which he takes to mean that the Mosaic Law has passed away. In my opinion, there is both truth and error in his positions. Of Hebrews 7, Dr. Fruchtenbaum says:

"Was there a change in the Law? Hebrews 7:18 states that the Mosaic Law was disannulled."

What Hebrews 7:18 actually says is:

"For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness..." (NKJ)

Also, Hebrews 8:13 states:

"In that He says, 'A new *covenant*,' He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away."

When this statement was made, Messiah had already died, yet the first covenant (the Mosaic Covenant) was still in the process of passing away. From this it is clear that Messiah's death did not automatically extinguish the Mosaic Covenant, nor its Law. Also, a fair reading of Romans 10:4 will show that in saying "Christ is the end of the law", Scripture is not saying that He ended the Law, but that the end (ultimate fulfillment) of the Law is in Him. Yeshua anticipated that such things would be said of him, so He set the record straight:

"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill." (Matthew 5:17).

Now comes the really hard part. When Hebrews was written, the Mosaic Covenant was in the process of passing away. Although it is debatable, I believe it has now fully passed away. When the Temple was destroyed in 70 A.D., the possibility of performing the requisite sacrifices came to an end, and the Levitical Priesthood could no longer perform its function. Since the Mosaic Law was given as an integral part of the Mosaic Covenant, and so much of it had to do with animal sacrifice and the Priesthood, the Mosaic Law (as a body of commandments, statutes, ordinances and judgments), had to end also (Hebrews 7:18).

But God, praised be He, did not leave us without law, for Jeremiah 31:31-33 says:

"Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah -- not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day *that* I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them," says the Lord. "But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel: After those days, says the Lord, I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people." (NKJ)

Since what was prophesied in Jeremiah is the New Covenant, the law that was put in the minds and written on the hearts of the Israelites – whatever that law was – is New Covenant law. This is what Dr. Fruchtenbaum (citing Galatians 6:2) refers to as "the Law of Christ."

As to whether the Mosaic Law is still intact as an enforceable function of government, Dr. Fruchtenbaum has a very good analogy. He speaks of being subject to the traffic laws of California when he lived in California, and to the traffic laws of New York when he moved to New York. The two laws said similar things, but they were different laws because one could not be charged in California for violating the New York statute. Yet the conduct that each required was the same as the other.

Now we come to the place, in my opinion, to where Dr. Fruchtenbaum's position weakens. Although he is correct that there came a time when the Mosaic statutes were no longer enforceable by the Government of Israel, he goes a bit too far when he says of "the Law of Christ":

"This is a brand new law totally separate from the Law of Moses."

There are two problems with this statement. First, the Hebrew of Jeremiah 31:33 (verse 32 in Hebrew versions) says in part:

"I will put my *Torah* within them and write it on their hearts;" (CJB)

While "*Torah*" can be translated "law", The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament defines "Torah" (תּוֹרָה) - Strong's number 8451) as "teaching":<sup>1</sup>

"The word *tôrâ* means basically "**teaching**" whether it is the wise man instructing his son, or God instructing Israel. The wise give insight into all aspects of life so that the young may know how to conduct themselves and to live a long blessed life (Prov 3:1f.)."

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<sup>1</sup> R. Laird Harris, editor, Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, TWOT No. 910, p. 404, Moody Press (Chicago, Illinois: 1980).

In addition, The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon gives “direction, instruction, law”<sup>2</sup> as the primary definitions of “*Torah*”, and the Encyclopaedia Judaica states:<sup>3</sup>

“*Torah* is derived from the root *hry* which in the *hifil* conjugation means “to teach” (cf. Lev. 10:11). The meaning of the word is therefore “teaching,” “doctrine,” or “instructions”; the commonly accepted “law” gives a wrong impression. The word is used in different ways but the underlying idea of “teaching” is common to all.

If God put His "teaching" on our minds and in our hearts in Jeremiah 31:33(32), than what we received in the New Covenant was not something new at all, but rather God's eternal standard that was also embodied in the commandments, statutes, ordinances and judgments of the Mosaic Law.

To demonstrate that God's statutes remain a standard of conduct in the New Covenant, consider Ezekiel 36:27:

"I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep my judgments and do them." (NKJ)

God's statutes can be found as early as in Genesis 26:4-5, where He tells Abraham:

“I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky, I will give all these lands to your descendants, and by your descendants all the nations of the earth will bless themselves. All this is because Avraham heeded what I said and did what I told him to do—he followed my *mitzvot*, [commandments] my regulations and my teachings [*v'torotay* a derivative of *Torah*].” (CJB)

While it is true that there has been an annulling of the enforceable statutes given under Moses (Hebrews 7:18), God's *Torah*, being the very basis for the statutes, did traverse the covenantal divide (my term). Consequently, New Covenant law bears a close resemblance to Mosaic statutory law, and God consistently refers to both of them as "My Law" (Exodus 16:4, Psalms 89:30, Proverbs 7:2, Isaiah 5:7).

Because Dr. Fruchtenbaum does not believe this, he makes statements like:

"The Law of Moses did not permit one to eat pork, but the Law of Christ does."

How does he know this? Has he found Scripture that says so? I think not, since none exists. Has he sought revelation through God's law placed in his mind and written on his heart? I cannot speak for him, but having sought to do so for myself, I testify that God has not cleansed pork and, because I am a Jew, He does not to eat it. God's designation of clean and unclean

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<sup>2</sup> Francis Brown, editor, The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon, “*Torah*”, p. 435-436, Hendrickson Publishers (Peabody, Massachusetts: 1979).

<sup>3</sup> Louis Isaac Rabinowitz, Encyclopaedia Judaica, “*Torah*”, vol. 15, pp. 1235-36, Keter Publishing House Ltd. (Jerusalem: 1971).

animals dates all the way back to Noah, and during the time of Moses, He gave certain instructions of lifestyle to Israel (including instructions to abstain from unclean foods) to set us apart as his Holy people -- to make us visibly different from the nations around us. This principal is as valid today as during the time of Moses.

Although we are to walk in God's statutes, New Covenant law is not statutory – it is pure *Torah* (teaching). Consequently, one should not look for New Covenant law by searching the New Testament for statutes. On the other hand, since Paul said that the Mosaic Law is a "schoolmaster" or "tutor" (Galatians 3:24), a valid approach to finding New Covenant law is to first become familiar with the Mosaic Law, and pray for God to reveal its New Covenant application.

Sometimes God tells me (through the Holy Spirit) that I should treat a Mosaic statute as unchanged because it is perfectly applicable as it stands (I wear the fringes required by Numbers 15:38-39). Other times, I hear that a statute's objective is still valid, but that its application in the New Covenant ought to change (e.g. I have not put a fence on my roof as directed in Deuteronomy 22:8, because my roof is not flat, and no one lives up there). Sometimes, God even reveals that a Mosaic statute cannot or should not be literally complied with in the New Covenant (e.g. I do not kill animals for sacrifice) but, even then, the statute's underlying *Torah* has something to teach me, for we read in 2 Timothy 3:16-17:

“All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (NKJ)

I have informed Dr. Fruchtenbaum of these comments concerning his paper.

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