



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dr. S. Lewis Johnson

Eschatology

“The Mosaic Covenant”

TRANSCRIPT

We are studying the covenants as they have been revealed in the Bible. Some of the things that we have been trying to say are these: We must distinguish between the theological covenants and the biblical covenants. The theological covenants are threefold, the Eternal Covenant of Redemption in which the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have met together, covenanted together, to carry out certain operations that determine the salvation of the saved and the lost condition of the lost. This is the Eternal Covenant of Redemption. It is a biblical covenant. It is referred to in several places in the Bible, particularly in the New Testament. That is also a theological covenant in the sense that the theological system of the covenants includes that particular covenant as one of its basic covenants.

In addition, according to the theological covenantal system, there is a covenant of works made between God and Adam in the Garden of Eden conditional upon the obedience of the first man. If Adam had obeyed, certain blessings were evidently promised and implied. If Adam disobeyed, certain consequences should follow. This is not called a covenant, but the features of a covenant seem to be there. And so we find it reflected, for example, in the Scofield Bible in which we have reference made to the

Edenic Covenant. Some have called it an Adamic covenant. That is the second covenant of the theological covenantal system.

The third covenant is the covenant of grace. The covenant of grace is conceived of by those who hold to the covenantal system as a covenant made between God and the saved, that through the saving work of Jesus Christ, the elect would be brought to faith in the Lord Jesus. That covenant, that covenant of grace is not mentioned in the Bible at all. And as far as I am concerned, I do not conceive of it as being Biblical teaching. I do think that there is such a thing as an eternal covenant, and there is such a thing as a covenant of works or an Edenic Covenant. The biblical covenants are the covenants that are specifically referred to in the Scripture.

Now, I have been proceeding on the basis that the historical covenants, those revealed in the Scriptures, are the outworking, the issue, of the Eternal Covenant of Redemption. In other words, the Biblical covenants are designed by God to be the steps along the way to the accomplishment of the aims of the Eternal Covenant of Redemption. So when we read in the Bible of individual covenants, they bear relationship, certain ones of them particularly, to the fulfillment of the Eternal Covenant of Redemption.

Now, we have looked at the covenant of works, or the Edenic Covenant, because it is an historical covenant. We have looked at the Noahic Covenant. And then we spent three times in discussing the Abrahamic Covenant. We have studied that covenant in detail because that is the covenant by which God promised Abram and his seed certain significant blessings which are important blessings and promises in connection with the fulfillment of the provisions of the everlasting covenant.

For example: Abram was promised a seed. That is set forth for us in Genesis chapter 12 in verse 3 and verse 7 and then again in other places. It is referred to in the New Testament in Galatians chapter 3, verse 16 and verse 29. Abram was also promised a land. The Old Testament reveals that that land is the land of Palestine. A particular portion of the land of the east from the river of Egypt to the river Euphrates, this was to

belong to Abram and his seed. Abram was also promised a royal line. He was promised that kings should come from his seed. Now, we did not look in great detail at this because, well, you just cannot cover everything in a series such as this, unless we decide that we want to study this for the next five or ten years. But in chapter 17 in verse 6 of the Book of Genesis reference is made to the fact that out of Abram there will come kings. Moses writes: “And I will make thee exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of thee (And of course, these are the words of God.) And kings shall come out of thee.” Later on, we will study the Davidic covenant in which this is developed and expanded, and in which covenant we are taught that the kings that come from the seed of Abraham are of the tribe of Judah and the ultimate king is our Lord Jesus, himself.

So you can see in this the unfolding of the features of the everlasting covenant and each of the historical covenants, with a few exceptions as we shall see, fill in details and expand and develop the plan and purpose of God as expressed in that ultimate covenant. These promises that God made to Abraham of a seed, a land, and a royal line are the basic biblical promises. And the story of the Bible is the record of the path along which Israel treads toward the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promises which in turn are means by which the Eternal Covenant of Redemption is fulfilled.

In Luke chapter 1 when Mary utters her Magnificat, she connects all that is happening in the ministry of the Lord Jesus with the Abrahamic Covenant. Let me read again some words that I read in one of our studies previously: Mary said,

“My soul doth magnify the Lord. And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name. And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation. He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low

degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away. He hath helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy. (In other words, he is fulfilling his covenant that he has made with Abraham and his seed.) And he adds, “And he spoke as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed forever.”

So the things that were transpiring in the birth, the life, the death, the burial, the resurrection, the ascension, the ascension of our Lord Jesus, and the second coming are all steps along the way to the fulfillment to the Abrahamic promises which in turn are steps along the way to the fulfillment of the Everlasting Covenant of Redemption.

We move on in our story from Genesis chapter 12 and 17 and other chapters there which have to do with the story of Abraham to the time when Israel has now become a nation after they have been in Egypt for many years. Redeemed by blood and power from bondage, she journeys to Mount Sinai, and there at Mount Sinai we are going to see Israel given another covenant. This covenant is called the Sinaitic Covenant or the Mosaic Covenant. It is remarkable that as Israel came out of the land of Egypt and passed into the land and ultimately came to Mount Horeb that they should come to a spot which was so beautifully prepared by God for the giving of this immortal set of commandments and this undying system of government for Israel while they were waiting for the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promises.

The Abrahamic covenant was characterized by promises, we have said. Now it did not stress, however, human sin and inability, nor did it instruct in grace. These great promises were given to Abraham and to his seed, to Isaac and to Jacob, but nowhere is there any great stress upon the fact that man is a sinner and in need of divine justification. So Israel now has been redeemed out of Egypt. They have become a nation formed into a nation under the leadership of Moses in the land of Egypt and now having come out through the Red Sea, they are in the land, and they have come to Mount Horeb. And it is evident from the story of the nation that God thinks that they need a tutor to instruct them

in divine truth and in divine grace. So, they have come to Mount Horeb in order to receive a tutor, a *paidagogos*, Paul says in Galatians chapter 3, The law was our schoolmaster in order that we might reach the stage where we understand justification by faith.

So we’re going to turn now to Exodus chapter 19. Israel arrives at Mount Sinai, and there God will speak to them and give them a new covenant. It will be a different kind of covenant from the Abrahamic Covenant. But it is one of the most important covenants for us to understand if we are to read the Bible with understanding and intelligence. Chapter 19 in verse 1 of the Book of Exodus:

“In the third month, when the children of Israel were gone forth out of the land of Egypt, the same day came they into the wilderness of Sinai. And they were departed from Rephidim, and were come to the desert of Sinai, and had encamped in the wilderness; and there Israel camped before the mount. And Moses went up unto God, and the Lord called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel; Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, (that is, the Abrahamic Covenant) then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel. And Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before their faces all these words which the Lord commanded him. And all the people answered together, and said, All that the Lord hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the Lord.”

Israel needs a tutor. It is at this place that the age of the law begins. Now, we know that the consummation of the age of the law is the time when Jesus Christ cries out

upon the cross at Calvary, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” And then concludes by saying, “It is finished.” And when he cries out, It is finished; the veil of the temple is writ in twain from top to bottom, signifying the doing away of the Mosaic system. It is there that the Levitical cultus with all of its arrangements that we shall look at briefly are done away with, and the redeemed now rest under the guidance of a new tutor who will come on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit.

Now, we must, of course, keep in mind the fact that the basic promises are the Abrahamic promises. These promises are the promises under which Israel lives. And those promises contain the hope that Israel as a nation has. That is, they expect a seed. They expect to inhabit a land. They expect to have a king. They expect to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation upon the earth. But the one thing that they do not understand at this point is the facts of their own nature, the facts concerning the nature of a holy God, and all of these factors that -- or all of the factors that go to make up the saving work of Jesus Christ. It is by virtue of the giving to them of the law of Moses that Israel is to be brought into the place of preparedness for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So we look at the preparation for the Legal Covenant in chapter 19 of the Book of Exodus. Now, all of this was anticipated by some words back in chapter 3 of the Book of Exodus because years before this Moses, remember, had been absent from Egypt and over in the land when he kept the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, he had this experience with God at the burning bush, and had been commissioned by God to be the leader of Israel out of the land of Egypt. And in the course of the instructions which God gave him in that land before Mount Horeb, for that is where he was, that is, Mount Sinai, he had heard these words from God in the 12<sup>th</sup> verse of Exodus 3. And he said: “Certainly I will be with thee and this shall be a token unto thee that I have sent thee when thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain.”

Now, they have arrived at *this mountain*, and things begin to happen. Moses went up unto God, the Lord having called him out of the mountain, and Moses heard God say to him, “Thus shall you say to the house of Jacob and tell the children of Israel. ‘You have seen what I did unto the Egyptians and how I bore you on eagle’s wings and brought you to myself. Now, he will unfold the conditions under which Israel is to serve God.’” (Possessed with the Abrahamic promises.)

Notice, first of all, that God takes the initiative in this. He is the one who calls Moses up. He is the one who tells Moses. Now I want you to say to the children of Israel these things. And further, it is he who calls to their attention the fact that it was he who did unto the Egyptians the things that he did unto them, and also that it was he who brought them on eagle’s wings out of the land of Egypt and brought them into this relationship that they have with him at the present time. So everything begins on the note of the divine initiative in the provision that he makes for Israel.

Now, this is nothing more than the same thing that we find from the first chapter of the Bible to the last chapter of the Bible, everything in the word of God proceeds upon the solid basis of divine initiative. It is divine initiative by which and through which you are saved. It is divine initiative that you have come under the sound of the word of God. It is by divine initiative that you have come to understanding of it through the illumination of the Holy Spirit. It is by divine initiative that you are given new life and brought to the saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus. It was divine initiative which is responsible for your eternal election. So, everything proceeds from divine initiative. And Israel is being taught this in their experiences with God. He reminds Moses then, right at the beginning; you have seen what I have done.

Now, Israel is a typically redeemed people when they come to Horeb. Now, I don’t know that we can speak with authority on this. I certainly wouldn’t want to speak with authority on it -- which I know is a rare modesty as far as I’m concerned [laughter] -- but it is very difficult to speak with authority and say everybody in Israel was saved or

not. We do know that are a typically redeemed people. They have been brought out of Egypt by the blood on the doorposts and the power of God manifested in the parting of the Red Sea. So they have been redeemed by blood and power.

But, if the story of Israel in the wilderness is any hint to us, it is probably quite clear to most of us, that there were some in that congregation who had not really believed in God. Just as in our congregations today, we have congregations of so-called believing people. There is a congregation that meets here in Believer’s Chapel. Ideally it is a group of people who have made confession of their faith in Jesus Christ. Let us assume that all of them make profession of their faith in Christ. Well, let us just assume that they meet at the Lord’s Table, which would make this even more likely. Everybody has made profession of faith in Christ, but the chances are that there are some there who have not truly believed in the Lord Jesus. They are a kind of representation of redeemed people, but it may not be true in each individual case. Well, that’s what I’m saying here, that Israel is a typically redeemed people as they stand before Mount Horeb and receive the law from God.

What we learn from this, of course, is not simply that a typically redeemed people may not contain altogether redeemed people, but what we learn is that the law is not intended for our salvation. Israel receiving the law was already a typically redeemed people. So here we have right at the beginning of Israel’s history, confirmation of the fact that the Mosaic Law, the commandments, the judgment, the cultus, the tabernacle, the services, all the things that make up the cultus, the Mosaic Law was never intended by God to be the means of salvation of anyone.

Now, that message is a message that is lost in most of our professing churches today. In most of our churches, the Ten Commandments are looked at as the means by which we please God and merit our salvation before him. If you attended the average little church throughout the southern part of the United States, for example, the average church -- I’m not talking about a Believer’s Chapel or a Grace Bible Church, or a Scofield



Memorial Church, they are not average churches. But if you attended an average church, you would find that the great mass of the teaching, if it is Christian at all, gathers around the law of God and a kind of morality for salvation.

Now, we learn right here at the beginning, the law was given to a typically redeemed people. It was never intended to be the means of salvation of anyone, and particularly Israel. The obedience, however, that Israel was to render to God is an obedience that is to be grounded in grace. So he begins by saying you have seen what I have done to the Egyptians and what I have done to you, in order to draw out from them a desire to obey him. That’s why we obey as Christians. We obey not in order to merit salvation, but we obey out of gratitude for the salvation that has become ours in grace at the divine initiative. There’s all the difference in the world between those two approaches to God.

Now, he says that he bore Israel on eagle’s wings and brought them to himself. Israel was saved, and they have been separated to God. And that figure of the eagle’s wings is a most beautiful figure. The eagle, because it was the highest flying bird, feared no attack from above. And consequently, it carried its young on its wings to protect its young from anything that might come up from below. Likewise, God extended to Israel his protection by means of the pillar of cloud through which no missile could pass, a Jewish commentator has put it -- has said. What he is expressing, of course, is the fact that when we are born on eagle’s wings, we are born by that which suggests strong, sustained, protecting by the everlasting God.

Now, we don’t have time to look at Exodus chapter 32 in verse 11, but you might look there, or Deuteronomy 32, verse 11 for additional reference to the eagle’s relationship to Christian truth.

He says in verse 5: “If ye will obey my voice indeed and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me of all people for all the earth is mine.”

Now, you can see that this promise that he offers Israel here of being a peculiar treasure unto me above all peoples and a kingdom of priests and an holy nation is grounded upon obedience. It is conditioned upon obedience. He says, If you will obey my voice indeed, then you will be a peculiar treasure above all people for all the earth is mine.

This, of course, is different from the Abrahamic Covenant we are learning already. This covenant is a covenant that is grounded upon certain conditions, the condition of obedience. If you obey, then you will be God’s peculiar treasure. Now, this does not, of course, mean that those Abrahamic promises are cancelled. They stand as we read in the New Testament. What he is saying to Israel is that if you obey my voice, and if you keep the Abrahamic Covenant, then you will be a peculiar treasure unto me in the sense that you will possess your possessions. But if you are disobedient and if you reject the counsel of God, then you will lose the enjoyment of your right and title to the Abrahamic promises. You do not lose the promises, but you do not have the enjoyment of them. That is evident from the whole story of the Mosaic Law. He expresses the fact that they will be a peculiar treasure and that, of course, refers to valuable property. He says that they will be a kingdom of priests. Now, this further explains what the treasure is, the reference being to Israel as the mediatorial nation among the nations. They will be, of all the nations of the earth, a kingdom of priests and thus in special relationship to God.

Now, we know, of course, that that will be fulfilled in the kingdom of God upon the earth ultimately. And so this is the ultimate reference of kingdom of priests. He states also they will be holy nation. That is, they will be in covenant relationship with God. The indispensable subjective condition for maintenance in the Abrahamic Covenant is Israel’s trust in the promises that have been given to her. Well, now having made this magnificent promise conditioned upon obeying his voice, Moses calls the elders of the people and he lays before their faces all the words which the Lord has commanded him. In other words, the law is proposed before it is imposed upon Israel. It is presented to

Israel as a privilege. The answer of the people is very important. Notice, what they say. They say all that the Lord has spoken, we will do.

Now, it is often said that this is a bad response. I would like to say that it is up to a point a very good response, and I want to show you why I think it is a very good response. I want you to turn over with me to Deuteronomy chapter 5, Deuteronomy chapter 5, verse 28 and verse 29.

Now, in the context, the mediatorship of Moses is being discussed, and we read in the 27<sup>th</sup> verse: “Go thou near and hear all that the Lord our God shall say and speak thou unto us all that the Lord our God shall speak unto thee and we will hear it and we will do it. And the Lord heard the voice of your words when ye spoke unto me, and the Lord said unto me, I have heard the voice of the words of this people which they have spoken unto thee. They have well said all that they have spoken.”

In other words, when Israel responded all that the Lord has said to us, we’ll do it, God said that was a good reply. That was a good reply. So far as it went, but then the very next words say, and God is speaking: “Oh that there were such a heart in them that they would fear me and keep all my commandments always.”

In other words, it was great of them to express the aspiration to obey God. But then God says, Oh that there were such a heart in them, because of course there was no such heart of them. Therefore, the response that Israel made was good so far as it went, but it revealed a couple of important things.

Now, this is something we all have to learn. In the first place, it revealed that Israel had little knowledge of the holy character of God. To say all that the Lord has said we will do, well, that’s a magnificent aspiration but it does not -- it does not in this aspiration conceal the fact that they do not understand the nature of a holy God and the nature of the law of God. Paul tells us the law is holy, just, and good. And the idea that we could say, Israel could say, all that the Lord has spoken we will do, is evidence of the

fact that they have little knowledge of how holy God really is. But perhaps more important, it also reveals that Israel had little knowledge of themselves.

Paul says of Christians in Romans chapter 7: We are carnal, sold under sin. Naturally speaking, not a one of us could ever say to God, all that the Lord has spoken I will do. If you know anything about yourself, you could not possibly say that and have any anticipation of being able to carry that out apart from divine enablement. We find this illustrated over and over in the Bible. Take Peter in Luke chapter 23, verse 33 and 34. He expresses wonderful aspirations, but the trouble with Peter is he doesn’t know Peter. In Luke chapter 22, verse 33 and 34, we read: Our Lord has said, “I have prayed for thee, Peter, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren. And he said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison and to death. And he said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me.”

So Peter expresses all these aspirations, Lord, I’m willing to die with thee, and our Lord says, Why before the cock crows twice you’ll deny me thrice. Peter’s difficulty is that Peter does not understand Peter. And Israel’s problem is that while they have expressed beautiful aspiration, they don’t know the character of the Holy God, and they don’t know the character of unholy Israel.

Now, notice there is a great difference here between the Mosaic Covenant or the Sinaitic Covenant and the Abrahamic Covenant emerging already. In the Abrahamic Covenant, remember everything was done by God. Abram slew those animals, put the pieces of the animals over against one another and God came down between the pieces and he did not invite Abram to follow. He was covenanting that he would fulfill certain promises. But here it is not a question of God binding himself to Israel; here it is a question of the people attempting to bind themselves to God affirming all that the Lord has said we will do.

Now, following this aspiration on their part, Moses gives the charge from God to the people. They are sanctified. It is ceremonial, but it is very suggestive of the need for inner sanctification and approach to God. The Mount is sanctified, and the darkness, the thick clouds, the bounds, so that Israel is told not to touch the mountain are all designed to show that God is a holy God and when he gives his law, it’s going to be a very holy kind of law.

Second now we want to come to the delineation of the Legal Covenant. This is the introduction in chapter 19. But, in chapter 20 Israel, now prepared, receives the commandments and the law that make up the Mosaic Covenant. We’ll just briefly review the three aspects of the Mosaic Covenant. There are three parts to it. There is the moral law, there is the civil and social law, and there is the ceremonial law. And remember now, God is giving this Mosaic Law to a typically redeemed people. They are typically believers; they are typically the recipients of the relationship with God, so that this law is to be a law not for a way of salvation, but as a way of life.

In chapter 20 Moses is given the Ten Commandments, the Moral Law. Let’s be very plain, very clear, about our understanding of the Mosaic Law. The Ten Commandments are a revelation of the moral will of God. Because they are a revelation of the moral will of God, we should never disparage the Ten Commandments. They are expressive of the character of a holy God. They were given to Israel as a way of life. They were given only to Israel, directly. They were given as a way of life under the Abrahamic covenant. That is, they were added.

Let’s turn over to Galatians for a moment, chapter 3, verse 15 through verse 18 where Paul points out that the Mosaic commandment is not the fundamental covenant. The Abrahamic Covenant is the fundamental covenant. In Galatians chapter 3 in verse 15, having just spoken of the blessing of Abraham coming upon the Gentiles through Jesus Christ, Paul says -- because you see, the Galatians had been confused by men who told them that it was necessary to keep parts of the Mosaic commandment, Mosaic Law in

order to be saved. So he says: Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; though it be but a man's covenant, (He’s illustrating) yet if it be confirmed, no man annulleth, or addeth to it.”

Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, and to seeds, as of many; but as of one, and to thy seed, which is Christ: And this I say, that the commandment, that was confirmed before by God in Christ, (the Abrahamic Covenant) the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot annul, that it should make the promise of none effect.

In other words, the Mosaic Law cannot annul the Abrahamic Covenant. The Mosaic Covenant cannot destroy the Abrahamic covenant. The Abrahamic Covenant is the fundamental covenant. It’s still in force. The Mosaic Covenant has been added later. He goes on to say that it should make the promise of no effect, for if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise. But, God gave it to Abraham by promise: wherefore then serveth the law. It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made, and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator.

Now, then it is evident from this then that the Mosaic law -- I’m sorry the moral law, the Ten Commandments, is a revelation of the moral will of God. It is given to Israel as a way of life under the Abrahamic Covenant. It is a temporary arrangement and it passes out of existence as a legal covenant at the time that Jesus Christ does.

Well, what about those statements in the New Testament when we read that it is possible for a person to have life by keeping the commandments? We do have passages like that. What shall we say about them? For example, our Lord Jesus had a young lawyer come and ask him a significant question. In Luke chapter 10 in verse 25, we read: And behold a certain lawyer stood up and tested him saying master what shall I do to inherit eternal life.

Jesus said to him what is written in the law: “How readest thou? And he answering said, ‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul,

with all thy strength, with all thy mind and thy neighbor is thine self.” He sums up the two tables of the law in these statements of loving God and loving ones neighbor, a very succinct and careful and theological analysis of the significance of the Mosaic Law and its requirements. It’s one of the evidences of the fact that the lawyer was trained in theology.

And the Lord Jesus, who doesn’t take the attitude toward theology that a lot of nincompoops do who profess to be Christians today, who say that theology is unimportant, doctrine is not significant, it’s only the kind of life relationship to God that’s significant. Why these things should be opposed to one another, I don’t know. Why a person cannot understand theology and at the same time have a living vital relationship that we have to God through Jesus Christ is something I don’t understand. And to knock theology because there’s some people who have a knowledge of facts about the Bible but don’t have any living vitality is no more right than if I were to attack someone who goes around making shouts and sounds of hallelujah who doesn’t understand the first thing about the Bible. The Lord Jesus, when he heard this word of good theology come from this man, says, “Thou hast answered right, this do and thou shalt live.” Well, now does not our Lord say here that if you keep the commandments, you shall live? Yes, he does.

Now, this man desiring to justify himself said unto Jesus: And who is my neighbor. And the rest of the story is unimportant for us. The point is that the thing that the young lawyer needed was to come to a knowledge of himself. And it was the office of the law to bring a man to the knowledge of himself. But he, seeking to justify himself, thinking that he could by doing something to become righteous sought to gain life that way. Jesus said hypothetically, yes, keep the law perfectly from the time you breathe, breath one, until you breathe your last breath, and you will attain eternal life. But there is only one man who ever kept the law and that is the Lord Jesus. He’s the only one who could ever earn eternal life. So hypothetically, yes, but actually, the only way men can attain to life is through Jesus Christ because the law shows us that we need Christ.

Dr. Ironside in one of his books -- I’ve referred to this before -- *The Lamp of Prophecy*, said that he attended a little church in a country village one Sunday and got there just as Sunday school was convening. He was to preach that morning and so he sat down in the morning Sunday school class. I remember sitting in a similar class in Texas just below Dallas, about sixty miles on the way to Houston one morning about twenty-five years ago and hearing a similar kind of conversation. The teacher was querying the class, and he said, “Class, how were people saved before Christ came into the world?” Someone answered, “By keeping the law.”

“Exactly,” the leader said and he was going on.

Dr. Ironside said, he was a stranger and hated to interrupt but he could not allow that to get by and so he did interrupt. And he said, “I beg your pardon, but did I understand you correctly? Did you say that people were saved by keeping the law before Christ came into the world?”

“Certainly. Until Christ came, that was the only way.”

“Well, then,” he said, “what do you do with that text in Galatians that says if there had been a law given which could have given life, then verily righteousness would have been by the law?” The implication, of course, being and Paul plainly says it in Galatians, there was no law given to give righteousness.

“Oh yes, I hadn’t thought of that. Well, class, we were wrong.” [Laughter]. “What other suggestions have you?”

A woman finally spoke up he said, and she said, “Why by offering animal sacrifices.”

“Exactly, I think the woman is right.” “Now, is that satisfactory?” [Laughter].

Dr. Ironside said, “I’m sorry. It would be, but there is a verse in the Bible that says it’s not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to put away sin.”

“Well, that’s true, isn’t it?” he said. “Well, how do you think that people were saved in the Old Testament?”



“Why exactly as Abraham,” Ironside replied. “He rejoiced to see the salvation of the Lord. He saw it and was glad. He looked on in faith to the seed of Abraham.” In other words, he believed on one who has come because he had acknowledged before God the fact that he needed redemption.

The moral law then was never intended to be the means of salvation. It was given to a typically saved people. Ideally and hypothetically, if there were such a person who could perfectly keep the law, there are none except Christ. He could earn eternal life, but that is impossible.

The second part of the law is the civil and social law. That is unfolded for us in chapters 21, 22, and 23. These are the ordinances. And by the ordinances, Israel is given instructions for their civil, their social, and some of their political life. These are the judgments. And in these chapters, we are given the system under which Israel lived.

And finally, in chapter 25 through chapter 40, we are given the ceremonial law. Now, the ceremonial law is that part of the law which Israel carried out which expressed in typical fashion the ministry of the coming Redeemer. In the commandments, Israel was condemned, but in the Tabernacle and in the services Israel was shown in picture form how they would be delivered from the condemnation that the Ten Commandments brought to them. So grace is seen in the Tabernacle in the service.

You will notice as you begin those great chapters in the Book of Exodus that they do not call a meeting of the building committee and submit plans to Moses. And the building committee having approved them, they do not set out to construct a Tabernacle according to their own measurements and their own desires and their own plans. This Tabernacle is given by God. And furthermore, it is not only given by God but the plans are found in heaven. Again, the great stress rests upon the fact that all of this is initiated by God, because it is an attempt on the part of God to instruct Israel throughout the centuries in that which the Redeemer would do.

Now, that continues on into the Book of Leviticus in which we have all of the offerings, the services that are to be carried out in the Tabernacle. Redemption, my Christian friend, is a revelation from God. It is not an invention of men. It is of the greatest importance that you understand that. We are talking about something that is given us as a revelation from God. We are not talking about something that we have invented. William Childs Robinson who used to teach church history at one of our schools in the South has said, “The cross is not a compromise but a substitution. It is not a cancellation but a satisfaction.” He means a satisfaction of the penal requirements of God. It is not a wiping off but a wiping out in blood and agony and death. Thus mercy does not cheat justice. God is absolutely just in the cross but at the same time he is totally merciful to those who believe.

Now then thirdly, the ratification of the Legal Covenant. Will you turn with me to chapter 24? I want to point out one or two final things here. In the ratification of the Legal Covenant, the ceremony is -- by which it is ratified is described for us in chapter 24, and I’m going to read beginning at verse 3 through verse 8. Now, I want you to notice carefully the distinction between what we find here and what we found in Genesis 15 with reference to the Abrahamic Covenant: And Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord, and all the ordinances:

“and all the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which the Lord hath said will we do. And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord, and rose up early in the morning, and built an altar under the hill, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. And he sent young men of the children of Israel, who offered burnt offerings, and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen unto the Lord. And Moses took half of the blood, and put it in basons; and half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. (God and his part in this transaction, this covenant.) And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the hearing of the people: and they said, All that the Lord hath said

will we do, and be obedient. (Oh that they had a heart to obey.) And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, (On the altar, on the people.) and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord hath made with you concerning all these words. (The important phrases are the blood was sprinkled on the altar.)

God covenants according to the words of chapter 19, verses 5 and 6: The blood is sprinkled on the people, and they covenant all that the Lord has spoken will we do.

Now, you can see from this that this is not a one-sided covenant at all. This is a conditional covenant. This is a covenant that depends upon God to carry out his promises and upon man to carry out his promises. It is a covenant then that is conditional and, as you know, it is broken right at the beginning after it is confirmed by the blood. So this is the distinction between the Abrahamic Covenant, an unconditional covenant depending totally upon the mercy of God which shall be fulfilled in the future. The Mosaic Covenant, a conditional covenant, which Israel breaks over and over and over again until it finally passes out of existence with the coming of Jesus Christ and his cross. But, it serves its purpose. It serves its purpose.

Let me conclude by pointing out the purposes that the law had. First of all, it was given individually to instruct Israel regarding sin. Remember Paul said, “Wherefore then serveth the law.” It was added because of transgressions. It was given Israel to intensify sin so that they would understand the horrible guilt of sin. “The law came,” Paul said, “and I died.” He came to understand the horrible guilt of sin by virtue of the law. Those thou shalt not, thou shalt nots, thou shalt nots, those were the things that brought Paul to the conviction of his sin. That was the intention of the law, instruct Israel regarding sin. It intensified sin, revealed its horrible guilt. It tore the veil away from sin as that which is rebellion against a holy God.

It’s like a glass of water. A glass of water that has all kinds of filth and poison within it may be left to stand and pretty soon the water becomes very clear. But all you

need in order to reveal the filth and the poison of it is to take a spoon and stir it. The law acts accordingly. It intensifies the sin of the human heart and it brings out the horrible character of sin and its guilt. It increases sin. By the law, sin abounded, Paul states in Romans chapter 5. And it also instructs in righteousness. “It is like a whip to an idle and bulking ass to arouse us to work,” Calvin says in the *Institutes*. But it is designed to instruct us in the character of God. Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path, the Old Testament psalmist said, thinking about that which contained the law of Moses.

Second, the law was given to instruct and order the national life of the nation, their temporal affairs under divine government. It was their system of government, and Exodus chapter 21, chapter 22, and chapter 23 reveal a system of government that was theocratic. God was the real ruler in Israel. And so the law was given to set forth a kind of theocratic government under which Israel was to live and minister until the time that the seed should come.

And, finally, it was to instruct in the coming Savior. We read in Hebrews chapter 10 in verse 1, in connection with the ceremonial side of the law these words, “For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make those who come to it perfect.”

The law has a shadow of good things to come. It was by virtue of the law that Israel was taught the aspects of the ministry of the Redeemer. And all of the sacrifices, all of those offerings, all of those priestly rituals set forth in the Scriptures were designed to explain to them carefully the aspects of the saving work of the Lord Jesus.

The Sinaitic Covenant then is a conditional covenant given to a people who were typically a redeemed people. Never intended to be a way of salvation, it was intended to be a temporary way of life until the seed should come. But in that period of time, they were to learn the nature of sin. They were to learn the nature of their own heart, and

they were also to have an unfolding in shadow and pictorial fashion of the work of the redeemer. So that when the Lord Jesus came, it might truly be the fullness of time with a people prepared to respond to his ministry.

Now, it accomplished its purpose because when our Lord came, there were people who were waiting, Simeon, Anna, and others. There were others who were prepared in heart to receive him as the apostles and others. And God, through the ministry of the Messiah, accomplished his purpose and is accomplishing it in the present time. You may think, of course, that it was a great defeat when Israel as a nation rejected him, but as Paul explains in Romans chapter 9, that’s a misreading of history, for he never intended to save them all. Not all who are of Israel are Israel. It is that company of the elect that he had in mind and he has won them, and the law has triumphantly accomplished its purpose. Time’s up. Let’s close in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for Thy word and Thy truth. We thank Thee that we stand under an unconditional covenant not a conditional one. For, we could never in our own strength, render Thee the obedience that thou dost deserve and must have. We thank Thee for the provision of the Holy Spirit, for the provision of the word of God, and Oh God may we have hearts to obey Thee.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

