

The Law Added Because of Transgression

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All Scriptures are from the New King James translation unless otherwise noted.

Paul wrote to the Galatians that “that law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ” (3:17). The covenant Paul spoke of was God’s promise that Abraham’s posterity would be blessed. In other words, any laws given to Israel did not terminate the covenant God made with Abraham.

Two verses later, Paul wrote “What purpose then *does* the law *serve*? **It was added because of transgressions**, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; *and it was* appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator” (Gal. 3:19). Does this mean that God added a law outside of the Ten Commandments that was not originally intended? The answer is yes. The law that was added was the priestly code and required sin and trespass offerings.

It must be understood that God’s Commandments and holy days existed before Adam and Eve. Evidence of this is found in the fact that:

- Satan is known as a liar and a murderer from the beginning (John 8:44).
- God set the sun and moon in their particular positions so that we would have an astronomical calendar enabling us to keep track of holy day observance (Gen. 1:14).
- Adam and Eve broke nearly every one of the Ten Commandments during their original sin (Gen. 3:6)
- Abel and Cain were found counting days to the annual observance of Pentecost in which they made firstfruit offerings to God (Gen. 4:3-4).
- Cain sinned when he killed his brother Abel (Gen. 4:8).
- Before the flood, the earth became populated with wicked people who continually broke God’s moral code (Gen. 6:5).
- God later said that “Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws” (Gen 26:5).

For these reasons, it is obvious that the Ten Commandments and holy days existed from a time prior to man’s creation.

Because of his obedience, God made a covenant with Abraham in which He promised that, through him “all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 12:3). This covenant was passed down to Abraham’s descendants. However, the children of Israel’s disobedience caused them to be oppressed by taskmasters who afflicted them with cruel bondage (Eze. 20:7-13). Still, God would honor his covenant with Abraham and bring Israel out of their bondage in Egypt (Exo. 2:24). But because the twelve tribes had lost sight of God’s way, the Ten Commandments and holy days had to be reintroduced. God found it necessary to reconfirm his covenant with them and remind Israel of His laws.

When the covenant was first confirmed at Mount Sinai, God did not give Israel a law concerning offerings and sacrifices for sin. He did not set up the tribe of Levi as priests who would minister to the people. God originally intended for the entire nation to be priests. Each

head of household would minister to his family as was done in the domestic sacrifice of the Passover lamb (Exo. 12:3-10). As Moses recorded:

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 children of Israel: ‘You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and *how* I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth *is* Mine. And **you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.**’ These *are* the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel. So Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before them all these words which the LORD commanded him. Then all the people answered together and said, “All that the LORD has spoken we will do.” So Moses brought back the words of the people to the LORD (Exodus 19:3-8).

Notice that after these words were spoken by God, the people agreed to the covenant. This occurred before anything was said about a law regarding the priesthood or sin and trespass offerings. It must be noted that offerings and sacrifices were originally made in admiration and as an expression of gratitude. They were not given as atonement for sin.

Next, God instructed Moses to tell the people to wash their clothes and consecrate themselves for He would come and speak to the entire nation in three days. On the third day, God proceeded to thunder His covenant from Mount Sinai. The people were terrified during this event and asked that Moses might speak to them instead of God. The Almighty listened to their request and told Moses to instruct the people how to apply the Ten Commandments in various ways. He told them how to build an altar in accordance with the first commandments. He told them how to treat servants, neighbors, and property according to the application of the last six commandments. God also instructed the entire nation regarding keeping His annual holy days (Exo. 23:10-19). These instructions are evidence that God did not originally intend for the tribe of Levi to be priests for all the people. Nor did He desire required offerings and sacrifices for sin. Moses related all of these instructions to Israel and the people responded by saying:

All that the LORD has said we will do, and be obedient (Exodus 24:7).

God called Moses up the Mount to receive tablets of stone on which the Eternal had inscribed the Ten Commandments. Before receiving the tablets, Moses spent 40 days and 40 nights on Mount Sinai. Because 40 is a number referring to a time of trial, this period was a test for the people of Israel—a test in which they failed.

During these 40 days the people began to doubt both Moses and God. They lost faith and sinned by making a golden calf, worshipping, feasting, and making sacrifices before this graven image (Exo. 32). For this reason, while Moses was on the mount and while Israel was fashioning the idol, God saw what the people were doing and sent Moses down to correct them.

God punished the people for their blatant sin, but before He did the Eternal realized that something had to be added to the covenant. Because of Israel’s lack of faith and their stubborn disposition, the people needed something more than words. Israel needed a physical reminder of God’s presence and a continual admonition explaining the enormous cost of sin. The Eternal proceeded to give Moses instructions to build a Tabernacle and declared that Aaron and his sons

would be anointed as priests in this holy edifice. The tribe of Levi was appointed as ministers for the people, and everyone would be required to give various offerings and sacrifices for their sins. These offerings are discussed throughout the book of Leviticus—a book written primarily as an instruction manual for the Levites.

It is clear that God did not originally intend Israel to make burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin. Though people did sacrifice in the past, these consisted of free will offerings that were not for the purpose of cleansing sin. After the incident of the golden calf, it became a requirement for individuals to atone for their sin with various offerings. This was the law added because of transgression.

This truth becomes obvious when we consider Paul's entire statement in Galatians 3:19. He wrote that the law added because of transgression remained in effect "till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made..." The "Seed" is a reference to Christ. The promise made is a reference to the pledge God made to Abraham (Gen. 12:3). That promise was fulfilled in Christ who was born as a descendant of the patriarch. It was Christ's sacrifice that did away with the need to make sacrifices and offerings for transgression. He paid the penalty of death that our sin requires. This was a fulfillment of God's promise that through the seed of Abraham "all families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 22:18). But it must always be remembered that Christ's sacrifice did not do away with the need to keep the Ten Commandments.

Other scriptures reveal that the sin and trespass offerings were not God's original intent. Consider the words recorded by three champions of faith:

Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: "Add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices and eat meat. **For I did not speak to your fathers, or command them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices.** But this is what I commanded them, saying, 'Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be My people. And walk in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well with you.' Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but followed the counsels *and* the dictates of their evil hearts, and went backward and not forward (Jeremiah 7:21-24).

Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin you did not desire, nor had pleasure in them (which are offered according to the law) (Hebrews 10:8).

For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, And the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings (Hosea 6:6).

We see that God did not intend for us to have a need for continual sin and trespass offerings. However, after the incident of the golden calf, it was obvious that Israel was incapable of following God's instructions without a continuous reminder of His expectations and the wages of sin (Rom. 6:23). Therefore, the Almighty added a required tabernacle, the Levitical priesthood, and various sin and trespass offerings (Exo. 29-31, 40; Lev. 4-9, 12, 14-16). Now that Christ has become our High Priest and atoned for our sin, such sacrifices are no longer necessary, but they will be reinstated when Christ returns for the same reasons they were added in the first place. The lesson still remains. As Christ stated:

But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments (Matthew 19:17).