**How Should Christians Use the Old Testament**

**for Ethical Guidance?**

The Mosaic covenant, which began at Exodus 20, was terminated when Christ died. Christians are no longer directly subject to the laws of the Mosaic covenant, but now live instead under the provisions of the new covenant. However, the Old Testament is still a valuable source of ethical wisdom when understood in accordance with the ways in which the New Testament authors use the Old Testament for ethical teaching, and in light of the specific changes brought about by the new covenant.

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1. **The Mosaic Covenant was Terminated at the Death of Christ**
   1. Several Explicit Statements Teach that the Mosaic Covenant has Come to an End (Jer. 31:31; Luke. 22:20; Heb. 7:17; Heb. 8:6-13)
   2. Some Specific Legal Obligations under the Mosaic Covenant are Explicitly said to be no Longer Required for Christians
      1. Christians no longer must offer Old Testament sacrifices (Rom. 12:1)
      2. Christians no longer must be circumcised (Gal. 5:11)
      3. Christians no longer must follow the food laws of the Old Testament (Rom. 14:20)
      4. Christians no longer must observe the Old Testament Sabbath and other Old Testament festivals (Rom. 14:5)
      5. Christians no longer must follow the Old Testament laws regulating the civil government of Israel (1 Pet. 2:13-14, 17; Matt. 22:18-22)
   3. Reasons Why the Covenant was Terminated
      1. The Mosaic Covenant was established by God only for a temporary period (Gal. 3:19)
      2. The Mosaic Covenant was intended to be fulfilled by Christ (Matt. 5:17-18)
      3. The Mosaic Covenant was established to govern God’s people while they constituted a separate Jewish nation before Christ came, but it was not intended for a time when God’s people would have no nation of their own but would live and citizens of all nations
      4. The Mosaic law could not impart spiritual life or empower people to obey it (Gal. 3:21)
2. **The Mosaic Covenant was still in Effect during Jesus’ Earthly Ministry**
   1. A New Covenant takes Effect only at Death (Heb. 9:17)
   2. Jesus Never Violated any Law of the Mosaic Covenant though he did Violate the Highly Detailed Additional Rules Made by the Rabbis, Especially Respecting the Sabbath (Joh. 8:46)
   3. But Much of Jesus’ Teaching was about the Kingdom of God, with Application both to the Time of Jesus’ Earthly Ministry and to the New Covenant Age
3. **A Critique of Theonomy**: The moral instructions found in the law—God’s commandments revealed in the Old Testament have not been laid aside along with the redemptive instructions for circumcision, priesthood, sacrifice, and the temple
   1. A failure to recognize the termination of the entire Mosaic Covenant
   2. A failure to recognize the unique historical and governmental context of the mosaic laws
   3. Harsh and intemperate attitudes
   4. Bringing reproach on the gospel
4. **The New Testament Authors Teach Us How to use the Old Testament for Ethical Instruction**
   1. Jesus taught his apostles how to use the Old Testament for ethics
      1. Some of Jesus teaching about the Old Testament is recorded in the gospels (Matt. 5:43)
      2. Some of Jesus teaching about the Old Testament was not recorded in the gospels but is reflected in the teaching of the Apostles (Acts 1:1-3)
   2. The Apostles had further teaching directly from the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Joh. 16:13)
   3. The Result is that the Apostles spoke with the authority of the Lord (1 Cor. 14:37)
   4. The Law of Christ and several other expressions in the New Testament refer to the entire body of Christian teaching about a life pleasing to God (1 Cor. 9:21)
   5. Specific ways in which the New Testament authors understand the entire Old Testament as a valuable source ethical wisdom (2 Tim. 3:16-17)
      1. Genesis 1 - Exodus 19: This material predates the Mosaic Covenant and teaches ethical principles for all-time (Heb. 9:18-20)
      2. Exodus 20:1-17: The New Testament authors reaffirm all of the 10 commandments (except the Sabbath Commandment)
         1. The First Commandment (Matt. 4:10; 22:37)
         2. The Second Commandment (Acts 17:16)
         3. The Third Commandment (Rom. 2:24)
         4. The Fourth Commandment
         5. The Fifth Commandment (Eph. 6:1-3)
         6. The Sixth Commandment (Rom. 1:29; 1 Tim. 1:9; 1 Joh. 3:12)
         7. The Seventh Commandment (Rom. 13:9; Jam. 2:11)
         8. The Eighth Commandment (Rom. 2:22; 1 Cor. 5:11; Heb. 10:34)
         9. The Ninth Commandment (Rom. 1:30; Eph. 5:3-4)
         10. The Tenth Commandment (Rom. 13:9)
      3. The Rest of the Old Testament: The New Testament Authors Apply Various Passages in Five Significant Changes brought about by the New Covenant
         1. The Old Covenant has been terminated
         2. The Messiah has come and offered a final sacrifice
         3. God’s laws are now more powerfully written on the hearts of his people
         4. God’s People no longer constitute a separate earthly nation
         5. Gentiles no longer have to become Jews to be saved
5. **Should we Characterize Old Testament Laws as Civil, Ceremonial and Moral?**
   1. Recognize that the Mosaic Covenant in its entirety has been terminated
   2. Recognize the specific differences between the old and new covenants
   3. Seek wisdom for life from the whole Old Testament, including all its laws
6. **Summary of Principles for Using the Old Testament for Guidance Today**
   1. Three Inadequate Solutions
      1. Everything not cancelled by the New Testament is still required
      2. Nothing is required except what the New Testament reaffirms
      3. Framing the question in terms of more continuity or discontinuity
   2. A Better Solution: Understand Each Old Testament Ethical Statement in Light of the Differences between the Old and New Covenants
      1. Genesis 1- Exodus 19
      2. Exodus 20:1-17
   3. The Rest of the Old Testament
      1. The Old Covenant has been terminated (so its laws are no longer directly binding on us)
      2. The Messiah has come and offered a final sacrifice (so the sacrificial system is abolished)
      3. God’s laws are now more powerfully written on the hearts of his people.
      4. God’s people no longer constitute a separate earthly nation.
      5. Gentiles no longer have to become Jews to be saved.