

The Relationship Between Faith and Obedience (part five of a seven-part study)

Based on what we have learned thus far, it begs a very important question. Why was there a need for a covenant established through Moses? On one level, the answer is simple and straight forward. The Mosaic Covenant was given in order to *govern the obedience* of those who were the physical descendants of the Abrahamic Covenant. This is made clear by Moses in Deuteronomy 28:1-2, 15 –

“Now it shall be, if you diligently obey the Lord your God, being careful to do all His commandments which I command you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. All these blessings will come upon you and overtake you if you obey the Lord your God . . .”

“But it shall come about, if you do not obey the Lord your God, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes with which I charge you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you . . .”

As the physical descendants of Abraham were eventually formed into a theocratic nation under God, it resulted in an inadequacy within this governance covenant. It regulated the obedience of those who were the physical descendants of Abraham, but who were not necessarily his spiritual descendants by faith. This inherent weakness (Romans 8:3a), did not make the Mosaic Covenant flawed or fallible in any way. It was authored by God, so it could be nothing other than flawless and infallible (Romans 7:12-13). But it was *inadequate* in that it fell short of completely fulfilling the redemptive purpose of God; serving as a bridge to what would one day complete that purpose (Galatians 3:24-25; Hebrews 8:6-13). This is why Paul, in Romans 9:6-8, defends the faithfulness of God, especially to his Jewish readership in Rome, by assuring them that, circumstances notwithstanding, God has not permanently abandoned His chosen people, Israel, in favor of a new group, Christ’s Church (Matthew 16:18). How? By seeking to resolve that dilemma by reminding his fellow Hebrews of the all-important relationship between faith and obedience. It was Israel’s failure within that relationship which brought about the consequence of being temporarily set aside as God’s instrument for the fulfillment of His redemptive purpose:

“But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel; nor are they all children because they are Abraham’s descendants, but: ‘through Isaac your descendants will be named.’ That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants.”

The Mosaic Covenant served a limited purpose within the plan of God. The historical failure of the people under it involved the misguided pursuit of a relationship with God on the basis of works rather than faith; getting the cart before the horse. They are the ones whom Paul refers to as “the children of the flesh” in Romans 9:8. That pursuit, in seeking justification with God on the basis of works rather than faith, was doomed to failure from the outset, and had its culmination in Israel’s rejection of their promised Messiah (Romans 9:30-33). But Paul also makes it clear throughout Romans 11, that God will fulfill all of His promises to the nation of Israel when the Church Age is completed (Romans 11:25-29). He even offers himself as “living proof” to support his affirmation that God would never permanently forsake His chosen people. As a Jewish believer in Israel’s Messiah, Paul viewed himself as part of the “remnant” confirming the faithfulness of God (Romans 11:1-6). This is due to the fact that the redemptive purpose of God rests upon the unconditional promise covenant which He established with Abraham, and not the conditional governance covenant which was ratified through Moses (Romans 4:16).