

Book of the Covenant Vs Book of the Law

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” II Timothy 2:15

Our Bibles today all have Torah divided into 5 Books; however the first four Books are all connected with the word “and”. This suggests that, from God’s perspective, they are all one Book with one theme. A careful reading of Exodus 19 reveals the use of the term “Book of the Covenant”; a similarly careful reading of Deuteronomy 31 reveals the term “Book of the Law”. This study is about “rightly dividing” the Word of God contained in Torah – distinguishing between the Book of the Covenant and the Book of the Law.

The Book of the Covenant

At Mt Sinai, in Exodus 19, God proposed marriage to Israel. The two parties entered into the wedding covenant (a *ketubah*) which is identified in Exodus 24 as the “Book of the Covenant.” It is a conditional covenant:

*“...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.”* Exodus 19:5b-6a

Israel’s status as a “special treasure”, a “kingdom of Priests” and a “holy nation” is dependent upon her obedience to the Covenant. If Israel is faithful to God and keeps the Covenant, then she will enjoy that special status; if not, then she loses that status and must pay the penalty for breaking covenant. In the remaining verses of chapter 19 Moses prepared the people to meet God and to receive the Covenant from Him. Then, starting in Chapter 20, God dictated to Moses the specific terms of the Covenant; these Covenant details continue to the end of Chapter 23.

Ratification of the Covenant

This Covenant at Sinai between God and Israel was a blood-ratified covenant. The first blood-ratified covenant that we saw in Torah was Abram’s Covenant with God. There are four elements to the ratification process and all four of these elements are shown in the Abrahamic Covenant:

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| 1) Proposal | Genesis 12:2 & 15:5 |
| 2) Agreement | Genesis 15:6 |
| 3) Blood Ratification | Genesis 15:9 |
| 4) Covenant-Confirming Meal | Genesis 18:4-8 |

We see some (but not all four) of these elements present in Circumcision (Gen 17), in Passover (Ex 12-14) and in David & Jonathan’s relationship (I Sam 18-20). But we don’t see all four elements again until God’s Covenant with Israel at Mt Sinai. Here God told Moses to write all the Words that He had spoken in the marriage *ketubah* (the “Book of the Covenant”), and then came the ratification process:

Proposal: *“Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people.”* Ex 24:7a

Agreement: *“All the words which the Lord has said we will do.”* Ex 24:7b

Blood Ratification: *“Then he sent young men of the children of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the Lord. And Moses took half the blood and put it in basins and half the blood he sprinkled on the altar.”* Ex 24:5-6

Covenant-Confirming Meal: *“So they saw God, and they ate and drank.”* Ex 24:11b

So the Book of the Covenant was blood ratified, meaning whichever party breaks the covenant must shed his blood just as the animals that were sacrificed shed their blood. And once ratified, the covenant could not be added to, taken away from, nor changed:

“Brethren, I speak in the manner of men: though it is only a man’s covenant, yet if it is confirmed, no one annuls or adds to it.” Galatians 3:15

The Covenant Broken

Moses had not even returned from the top of Mt Sinai with the stone tablets of the Covenant before Israel had molded the image of the Golden Calf and was worshipping it. Israel had committed spiritual adultery; they broke the Covenant, and the penalty for breaking that blood covenant is the shed blood of the guilty party. That's why God wanted to kill the entire Nation of Israel and start over again with Moses. But Moses interceded:

"Then Moses returned to the Lord and said, 'Oh, these people have committed a great sin, and have made for themselves a god of gold! Yet now, if You will forgive their sin—but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written.'"
Exodus 32:31-32

Moses even offered to give his life in place of the people...and God responded:

"And the Lord said to Moses, 'Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book. Now therefore, go, lead the people to the place of which I have spoken to you. Behold, My Angel shall go before you. Nevertheless, in the day when I visit for punishment, I will visit punishment upon them for their sin.'"
Exodus 38:33-34

So God postponed Israel's punishment (the shedding of their blood, i.e. DEATH!) for the Sin of the Golden Calf until *"the day when I visit for punishment."*

The Book of the Law

With the Covenant broken, God needed a way to allow Israel to postpone her death penalty; this is where the Book of the Law comes in. The Apostle Paul explains:

"What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, until the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator."
Galatians 3:19

When Paul uses the word "law" here, he means "the Book of the Law" – that portion of Torah from Exodus 24:12 to the end of Deuteronomy. In fact, whenever he talks about "law versus grace" he is referring to The Book of the Law ... not the entire Torah! (*Selah* – pause here to let that sink in!) No wonder Paul's writings have been so confusing: if he wants us to keep the law, then why does he say we are not under the law??? (*Selah*...again!) He's talking about the Book of the Law (Ex 24:12 – Deut 34:12).

The Greek word translated "added" is *pros-te-tha-me*, from which we get our English word "prosthetic". Ask any amputee if his artificial limb works just as well as the original!! So the Book of the Law was added to (assist but not take the place of) the Book of the Covenant. And all this was necessary because the Covenant was broken by Israel's idolatrous actions with the Golden Calf. But the Book of the Law had an expiration date: when the "Seed should come" – and the Seed is Messiah Yeshua, the Promised Seed!

With these things in mind, we could paraphrase Galatians 3:19 this way [my comments in brackets]:

"What purpose does the [Book of the] Law serve? It was added [like a prosthetic limb] [to the Book of the Covenant] because of transgressions [Sin of the Golden Calf], until [this word signals impending change] the Seed [Yeshua] should come....."

The phrase "Book of the Law" does not appear until the end of Torah – Deuteronomy Chapters 29-31:

"Take this Book of the Law, and put it beside [outside] the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there as a witness against you;"
Deut 31:26

Paul got it right in Galatians! The Book of the Law was added to (not replaced) the Book of the Covenant; and it was on the outside of the ark (for all to see) as a witness against them.

So God imposed (there was no two-party agreement) the Book of the Law upon Israel as a way to postpone her death penalty resulting from the broken Covenant. Only a blood sacrifice could satisfy that penalty. The Levitical sacrifices that Israel offered (under the Book of the Law) served that purpose. Every year, on *Yom Kippur*, the blood of sacrificed animals was offered in place of the blood of Israel to satisfy their breaking the Blood Covenant. But God, in His Mercy, had a plan:

"It [the Book of the Law] was added because of transgressions, until the Seed should come to whom the promise was made."

Yeshua Paid Our Penalty

Only Yeshua's shed blood could permanently erase that blood penalty! On the eve of His sacrifice, He took the cup, offered it to His Disciples and said:

"Drink from it all of you. For this is My blood of the New Covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."
Matthew 26:27-28

Yeshua was not just the Passover Lamb; He was not just the Red Heifer Sacrifice. His shed blood satisfied the 1,500 year old blood debt that Israel owed for their Sin of the Golden Calf. The Book of the Law came to an end on that Tree of Sacrifice. As Believers, we are now partakers of the New Covenant with Messiah Yeshua! That's why the writer of the Book of Hebrews keeps driving home the point that there is a more perfect sacrifice than the blood of bulls & goats (the Levitical Sacrificial System); and that is the blood of Messiah Yeshua shed once, for all!

The Good News!

Torah is rightfully divided into two Books:

The Book of the Covenant	Genesis 1:1 to Exodus 24:11
The Book of the Law	Exodus 24:12 to Deuteronomy 32:12

Those who have not received Yeshua's blood sacrifice as payment for breaking the Covenant at Sinai are still under that blood penalty; they are still trying to operate under the Book of the Law. And it is impossible today to keep all the Levitical Laws: no Temple means none of the laws associated with the Temple can be kept. It is impossible to please God today while trying to operate under the Book of the Law.

But those of us who have accepted Yeshua's sacrifice have been freed from the Book of the Law! The conditions of the Book of the Covenant are attainable by us today!! We do not have to wait for the Temple to be built (by Rabbis who deny that Yeshua is the Messiah) in order to keep "The Law"; every element of the Book of the Covenant is achievable today: It includes instructions for:

The 10 Commandments	Relationships with People
Relationships with Animals	Moral & Civil Principles
Equal Justice in Society	Shabbat & the <i>Shmitah</i>
The <i>Mo'edim</i>	Dietary Laws

God's Protection & Provision for His People:

"Behold, I send an Angel before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into The place which I have prepared. Obey His Voice.....for My Name is in Him."

We have been united with Messiah Yeshua under the Book of the Covenant! We can "*indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant*" and have become:

"...a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;"

I Peter 2:9

God's Plan for Us!

God's desire is for us to have a personal relationship with Him, through Messiah Yeshua. When we are in Covenant with Him, we are operating within the Book of the Covenant; we are in **God's Perfect Will**.

Those who have not yet received Yeshua's Gift of Salvation are still operating under the Book of the Law; they are operating in **God's Permissive Will**.

Where would you rather be: in God's **Perfect Will**, or in His **Permissive Will**??