

Salvation and the Mosaic Law

Introduction

The first five books of the Bible – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy – are collectively known as the *Torah*. The Hebrew word “Torah” is usually translated as “Law”; but other valid translations are “Teaching” and “Instruction”.

Some of the information in the Torah deals with the rules and regulations that God gave to Moses – i.e., the so-called “Mosaic Law”. According to the traditional Jewish interpretation of the Torah, there are a total of **613** rules and regulations, in the entire body of the Mosaic Law.

One of the questions that often arises in Christian groups is: “How relevant is the Mosaic Law to Christians?” In other words, the question is: “Should Christians care about the Mosaic Law at all – and if so, why?”

From my experience, there are two main beliefs about that question, among the various Christian denominations.

One of the main answers is as follows:

“The Mosaic Law is **still in effect**. Therefore, it **absolutely required** for a Christian to follow the Mosaic Law as much as possible, in order to be saved. In other words, if a Christian does *not* follow the Mosaic Law, then he will not be saved – no matter how much faith he has in Jesus.”

The other main answer is the following:

“The Mosaic Law is **completely obsolete**. Therefore, it is definitely **not** necessary for a Christian to follow *any part* of the Mosaic Law, in order to be saved. Not only that, but there is no benefit whatsoever in following any of the 613 Mosaic Law regulations.”

As we can see, the statements above raise two separate, independent issues:

1. Is following the Mosaic Law required for salvation?
2. Is there any benefit at all, to following any of the Mosaic Law’s tenets?

So, let’s take a look in Scripture, to see if we can discover any information about those two issues.

Three different meanings of “salvation”

To begin with, let’s take a look at the definition of the term “salvation”. From my experience, most Christians only have *one* meaning in mind, when they discuss salvation; but it appears to me that there are at least three distinct meanings of that term in Scripture.

By definition, the word “salvation” refers to being “saved from” something. So, when a person refers to “salvation”, the question is: **what**, exactly, are people being saved from? From what I can see, there are (at least) *three* separate things that people can be saved from, in Scripture:

Meaning 1: Salvation from death, during the kingdom age – i.e., being saved from **permanent death**, in the Kingdom of God. In other words, this meaning of “salvation” refers to being granted eternal life, in the kingdom age.

Meaning 2: Salvation from death, during this age – i.e., being saved from **premature mortal** death, in this current age. In other words, this meaning of “salvation” refers to being granted a long mortal lifespan, in this current age.

Meaning 3: Salvation from national enemies – i.e., being saved from **military defeat**, by a foreign country. In other words, this meaning of “salvation” refers to being granted military victory, over another nation’s armed forces.

Here are some examples from Scripture, which demonstrate these three meanings of salvation:

John 3:16 (ESV):

¹⁶ “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have **eternal life**.”

Deuteronomy 4:40 (NIV):

⁴⁰ Keep his [God's] decrees and commands, which I am giving you today, so that it may go well with you and your children after you and that you may **live long** in the land the LORD your God gives you for all time.

Joshua 8:1 (NIV):

¹ Then the LORD said to Joshua, “Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Take the whole army with you, and go up and attack Ai. For I have delivered into your hands the king of Ai, his people, his city and his land.”

The first verse (John 3:16) refers to being granted *eternal* life, during the *kingdom* age – i.e., it refers to “meaning 1” of salvation.

The second verse (Deuteronomy 4:40) refers to being granted a long *mortal* life, during *this* age – i.e., it refers to “meaning 2” of salvation.

The third verse (Joshua 8:1) refers to being granted a *military victory*, over an enemy city – i.e., it refers to “meaning 3” of salvation.

Does the Mosaic Law have any bearing on eternal life?

From my experience, when Christians use the term “salvation”, they *almost always* are referring to “meaning 1” of salvation – i.e., they are referring to being granted eternal life in the kingdom. So, when a

Christian brings up the subject of “is the Mosaic Law required for salvation”, what he is really asking is: “Is it necessary to follow the Mosaic Law, in order to be granted eternal life?”

One of the most central parts of the Mosaic Law is the system of *animal sacrifices* – i.e., the sacrifices of animals to God, in official ceremonies. The following passage discusses that sacrificial system – and how it relates to eternal life:

Hebrews 10:1-14 (NIV):

¹ The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. ² Otherwise, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. ³ But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins. ⁴ It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

⁵ Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said:

“Sacrifice and offering you did not desire,
but a body you prepared for me;

⁶ with burnt offerings and sin offerings
you were not pleased.

⁷ Then I said, ‘Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—
I have come to do your will, my God.’”

⁸ First he said, “Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them”—though they were offered in accordance with the law. ⁹ Then he said, “Here I am, I have come to do your will.” He sets aside the first to establish the second. ¹⁰ And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

¹¹ Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹² But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, ¹³ and since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool. ¹⁴ For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

The above passage tells us that animal sacrifices can never take away people’s sins – i.e., they can never make people “perfect”. In addition to that, the passage states that God did not even *want* those sacrifices – i.e., He was not “pleased” with them.

I draw the following conclusions, from the above passage:

- In order for a person to be granted everlasting life, his sins must be taken away.
- Animal sacrifices were never able to take away people’s sins.
- Therefore, animal sacrifices were never able to grant people eternal life!

Think about that: The centerpiece of the Mosaic Law – the sacrificial system – was never able to grant people eternal life! In other words, the sacrificial system of the Mosaic Law does *not* allow anyone to be granted everlasting life – and it never did.

In other words, not only is the Mosaic Law not able to grant people eternal life now, but it never was able to – not even in Old Testament times!

The reason why this is important is because many Christian groups say things like this: “During Old Testament times, the way that people were granted eternal life was by following the entire Mosaic Law - but in the New Testament, the Mosaic Law no longer has the ability to grant people eternal life.”

From what I can see, that statement is *incorrect* – because it appears that following the sacrificial system of the Mosaic Law was never able to grant people eternal life – neither in Old Testament times, nor in New Testament times.

What does God actually want from us?

The passage above also states that God did not desire sacrifices – not even in the Old Testament. So, that raises a question: what did God desire of us in the Old Testament? Fortunately, there are many passages in the Old Testament which address that question; here are some examples:

Isaiah 1:16-17 (ESV):

¹⁶ Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;
remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes;
cease to do evil,
¹⁷ learn to do good;
seek justice,
correct oppression;
bring justice to the fatherless,
plead the widow's cause.

Amos 5:14-15 (ESV):

¹⁴ Seek good, and not evil,
that you may live;
and so the Lord, the God of hosts, will be with you,
as you have said.
¹⁵ Hate evil, and love good,
and establish justice in the gate;
it may be that the Lord, the God of hosts,
will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.

Micah 6:8 (ESV):

⁸ He has told you, O man, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?

Hosea 6:6 (ESV):

⁶ For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice,
the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

All of the above passages were written between the time of Moses, and the time of Jesus. Many Christian churches assert that during *that* period of time, God explicitly required people to make animal sacrifices, in order for them to be granted eternal life. However, from the passages above, it certainly appears that even during that period of time, God did *not* desire sacrifices. Instead, He desired that people love and honor God, and love and do justice to their neighbor.

As it turns out, Jesus also gave us a “summary” of what God desires of us from the Old Testament:

Matthew 22:34-40 (ESV):

³⁴ But when the Pharisees heard that he [Jesus] had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. ³⁵ And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ³⁶ “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” ³⁷ And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

Jesus told us that the entire Mosaic Law *depends* on loving God, and loving one’s neighbor. This is the same type of information that the prophets gave us – and the apostles continued teaching those same two commands.

In other words, what God has always desired from us is that we love Him, and love our neighbors! This has been true throughout all of human history.

What about the other two meanings of salvation?

As mentioned above, there are three different meanings of the term “salvation”. One of those meanings – being granted eternal life – was discussed above. So, what about the other two meanings of salvation – being granted a long mortal life, and being granted military victory over enemies?

First, let’s take a look at “meaning 2” – being granted a long mortal life, during this age. Part of the Mosaic Law states that people must be punished, if they break any of the tenets of the law. In some cases, that punishment involves executing the offender. Here is an example of this:

Numbers 15:32-36 (ESV):

³² While the people of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering sticks on the Sabbath day. ³³ And those who found him gathering sticks brought him to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation. ³⁴ They put him in custody, because it had not been made clear what should be done to him. ³⁵ And the Lord said to Moses, “The man shall be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp.” ³⁶ And all the congregation brought him outside the camp and stoned him to death with stones, as the Lord commanded Moses.

In the above passage, a man was *executed* for breaking one of the Mosaic Law’s regulations – in this case, the prohibition against working on the Sabbath. As a result, that man did not have a long mortal life – instead, his life was ended *prematurely*, because he did not follow the Mosaic Law.

Of course, people are not executed for working on the Sabbath now – in other words, the Mosaic Law is not being “enforced” now. So, it certainly appears that the following is true:

In Old Testament times, it was necessary for people to follow the Mosaic Law, in order to have a long mortal life. However, that is not true any longer – it is not necessary to follow the Mosaic Law, in order to have a long mortal life now.

In other words, the Mosaic Law did have an effect on “meaning 2” of salvation in the Old Testament – but it apparently does not have that effect in the New Testament.

The final meaning of salvation – “meaning 3” – deals with military victories over national enemies. There are many, many examples in the Old Testament, of the Israelites’ success – or failure – in battle being determined by their *obedience* to the law. In other words, if the Israelites do follow the law, then they are granted victory in battle – but if they do not obey the law, then they are defeated.

There are no examples in Scripture of any *other* countries having their military success being determined by their obedience to the Mosaic Law, though. In other words, “meaning 3” of salvation appears to be exclusively related to the Israelites – not to any other group of people. This makes sense, since God only gave the Israelites the task of possessing the land of Canaan – and he only told the Israelites that their success in battle was related to following the Mosaic Law. (In some cases, God caused other countries to conquer the Israelites – but that is always because the Israelites, themselves, had turned away from the Mosaic Law.)

So, it appears that “meaning 3” of salvation *exclusively* refers to the Israelites following the Mosaic Law – i.e., it does not apply to any other groups of people.

Is there any benefit at all, to following any aspects of the Mosaic Law?

As mentioned above, it appears to me that the Mosaic Law – at least, the sacrificial system of it – was never able to grant anyone eternal life. So, the next question that arises is: “Is there any benefit at all, to following any of the Mosaic Law’s regulations?”

Most Christian groups believe that there is *no* benefit, of any kind, to following *any* part of the Mosaic Law. However, is that really true? Let’s examine some of the regulations in the Mosaic Law, to determine if they can be beneficial or not.

First of all, consider the “clean and unclean” food laws that are contained in the Mosaic Law. There are many of those laws, of course; but the two most famous regulations are as follows:

- In order for a fish to be considered clean, it needs to have both fins and scales.
- In order for a land animal to be considered clean, it needs to chew its cud and have cloven (split) hooves.

As a result, salmon, cod and halibut are Biblically clean fish; but shrimp, lobster and catfish are *not* clean. This is because shrimp and lobster (and all other shellfish) do not have fins or scales. Catfish have fins, but they do not have scales.

Similarly, bulls, sheep, and deer are Biblically clean land animals; but pigs, horses and dogs are not. Horses and dogs do not have cloven hooves, and they do not chew their cud. Pigs do have cloven hooves, but they do not chew their cud.

So, the question is – is there any benefit at all, to following the Biblical “clean and unclean” food laws?

It appears to me that there are at least two definite benefits to following those laws. First of all, many of the animals which are considered unclean are classified as “scavengers”. Catfish, pigs, and shellfish all fall into that category. (Scavengers are also known as “bottom feeders”.)

Scavengers eat almost **anything** that they can find – garbage, carcasses, slop, and even *excrement*. Also, everything that a scavenger eats eventually gets transformed into muscle tissue in the animal. So, if we eat a scavenger animal, then we are consuming items that that animal, itself, consumed. This is very unhealthy for humans, since many of the items that scavengers eat cause them to be toxic to humans.

The fact that eating scavengers is unhealthy to us is borne out by many studies. For example, research has shown that shellfish contain *extremely* high levels of mercury – far higher levels than fish that have fins and scales – and mercury is incredibly toxic to humans. Also, studies have demonstrated that pig products have an extremely high risk of transmitting parasitic diseases – such as cholera and trichinellosis.

As a result, one benefit of following the Mosaic food laws is that it allows people to avoid eating scavenger animals – and therefore, to avoid the health risks associated with eating them.

Some other unclean animals are *not* scavengers, though. Some examples of unclean animals that are not scavengers are horses, dogs and cats. The animals in this group have traits that make them ideal *companions* for humans – they are intelligent, loyal and affectionate to humans. (In fact, people, themselves, typically form emotional bonds to those animals.)

So, it appears to me that another benefit of following the Mosaic food laws is that it demonstrates the special significance of animals that are ideal human companions.

Another famous regulation from the Mosaic Law is the Sabbath rest. Basically, the Mosaic Law prohibits people from working on the seventh day (the Sabbath) of every week. Instead, people are required to rest, and focus on God, on that day.

So, is there any benefit at all, to following the Sabbath rest regulations? Well, many people have very demanding, stressful jobs – and therefore, taking a break from one’s job, for at least one day of the week, can be extremely beneficial in preventing “burnout”. (Interestingly, the medical community is finally beginning to acknowledge the dangers of long term stress.)

Not only that, but dedicating a one day of the week to focus on God – rather than on our jobs – can also have spiritual benefits. Basically, observing the Sabbath allows us to dedicate that day to worshiping God, and learning about Him – as opposed to being concerned with our daily lives.

Of course, we should definitely learn about God, and worship Him, on *every* day of the week – but working at a job, and taking care of daily activities, dramatically limits the amount of time that we can dedicate to God. Not only that, but from my experience, in many cases people can get completely “caught up” in their daily lives – and therefore, they can end up not dedicating any significant amount of time to God, on any day of the week.

So, observing the Sabbath ensures that we dedicate at least *one* day of every week, to focus on our Heavenly Father.

A third regulation of the Mosaic Law, which is familiar to most people, is that of circumcision. The Mosaic Law states that every baby boy needs to be circumcised, on the eighth day after he is born. (This regulation actually pre-dates the Mosaic Law – it was originally given to Abraham; and it was later incorporated into the Mosaic Law, at Mt. Sinai.)

So, are there any benefits at all, to following the circumcision regulation? As it turns out, circumcision can *significantly* reduce the risk of venereal disease. This is especially true in very poor areas, which do not have much access to modern disinfectants. In some cases, circumcision can also increase fertility.

Also note that the Mosaic Law explicitly specifies that babies be circumcised on the eighth day after they are born – as opposed to immediately after birth (as is common now). An interesting point to note about this is that a newborn baby's blood does not coagulate (or clot) particularly well; but the coagulation ability *increases* each day after birth – and the coagulation strength peaks on the eighth day! This means that waiting until a baby is eight days old before circumcising him will decrease the risk of hemorrhaging – and it also indicates that God had specific *reasons* for why He specified the Mosaic Law as He did.

So, circumcision does provide some specific medical benefits – and it is safest if it is done eight days after a baby is born (as specified in the Mosaic Law.)

Conclusion

The apostle Paul made quite a few statements in Scripture, about the Mosaic Law. One of the most famous of those statements (from Romans 6:14) is the following: “we are not under the law, but grace”.

From my experience, most Christians assume that Paul's “not under the law” statement means the following:

“In Old Testament times, it was **necessary** to keep the entire Mosaic Law, in order to be granted eternal life. However, in New Testament times, it is **no longer** necessary to keep the law, to gain eternal life.”

However, from what I can see in the book of Hebrews, the above statement is not correct. From Hebrews 10, it appears that the keeping the Mosaic Law – with its system of animal sacrifices – was never able to grant people eternal life – neither in New Testament times, nor in Old Testament times!

So, if Paul is not speaking about eternal life, then what is he speaking about, when he states that “we are not under the law”? As it turns out, there are several different meanings of “salvation” in Scripture. One of those meanings refers to being granted eternal life. Another, separate meaning refers to being granted a long **mortal** life, during this age – i.e., being saved from *premature* mortal death.

There are many examples in the Old Testament, of people being *executed* because they did not keep the Mosaic Law. The example in Numbers 15 – of a man being executed for working on the Sabbath – is one of the most dramatic examples of this. Of course, in our current time, no one is executed any longer, simply because they did not keep the Sabbath.

As a result, it appears to me that when Paul states “we are not under the law”, he is referring to the fact that we are not going to be executed, for failing to keep the law properly. In other words, we are not under *condemnation* of the law.

To put it another way, during Old Testament times, it was necessary to keep the Mosaic Law, in order to avoid premature death – due to the threat of execution. However, that threat of execution is no longer in place – and in **that** sense, we are “not under the law” any longer.

Paul also makes statements about some of the *specific* tenets of the Mosaic Law. For example, in 1 Corinthians 7:19, he states that “circumcision is nothing”; and in Romans 14:14, he states that “nothing (no type of food) is unclean in itself”. From what I have seen, most mainstream Christian churches take those statements to mean the following:

“There is no benefit whatsoever, to following any of the Mosaic Law’s regulations.”

However, modern science – as well as practical experience – has demonstrated to me that there actually are significant benefits, to following some of the Mosaic Law’s regulations. Consider some examples:

- Observing the food laws allows us to avoid significant mercury poisoning and parasitic disease risks;
- Observing the Sabbath allows us to avoid stress-related risks, and ensures that we dedicate at least one day per week to God;
- Observing the circumcision regulations allows us to minimize venereal disease risks, and allows it to be performed in the safest way possible.

So, when Paul says “circumcision is nothing” and “nothing is unclean in itself”, he certainly is not claiming that there is *no benefit* to following those laws – because there plainly **are** benefits to following them. Instead, Paul is evidently referring to the fact that following the Mosaic Law is not *required* for *eternal life* – which is exactly the point made above.

Overall, it appears to me that following the Mosaic Law regulations – at least, the regulations that it is possible to follow today – is for our benefit. In other words, if we follow those regulations, we will generally have happier, healthier lives than we would have had otherwise. I think this is what Jesus was referring to in Mark 2:27, when he said: “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath”. In other words, following the Sabbath (and some of the other regulations) is for our *benefit*.

Here is an overall summary of this document:

- Some Christian groups believe that following all 613 regulations in the Mosaic Law is required, in order to be granted eternal life.
- Some other Christian groups believe that the Mosaic Law is completely obsolete – so that there is no benefit in following any of its 613 regulations.

As it turns out, I disagree with *both* of the above statements. My response to those statements is as follows:

- Following the Mosaic Law was never required for eternal life – not even in the Old Testament. However, in the Old Testament, it *was* required to follow the law, in order to avoid being *executed*. (That threat of execution does not exist today.)

- Modern science has demonstrated that there are some very definite practical benefits, to following certain aspects of the Mosaic Law. This scientific evidence also shows us that God has *reasons* for the rules He gives us.

So, from the above two points, my overall belief on the “Mosaic Law and salvation” subject is as follows:

Following the Mosaic Law – at least, the parts of it that we *can* follow – is recommended; but it is **not required**. In other words, since certain aspects of the law promote our physical and spiritual health, it appears to me that God would want us to follow those regulations – and certainly, we should all try to do what God wants of us. However, following the Mosaic Law is definitely **not** required, in order to gain eternal life – and it never was required for eternal life.