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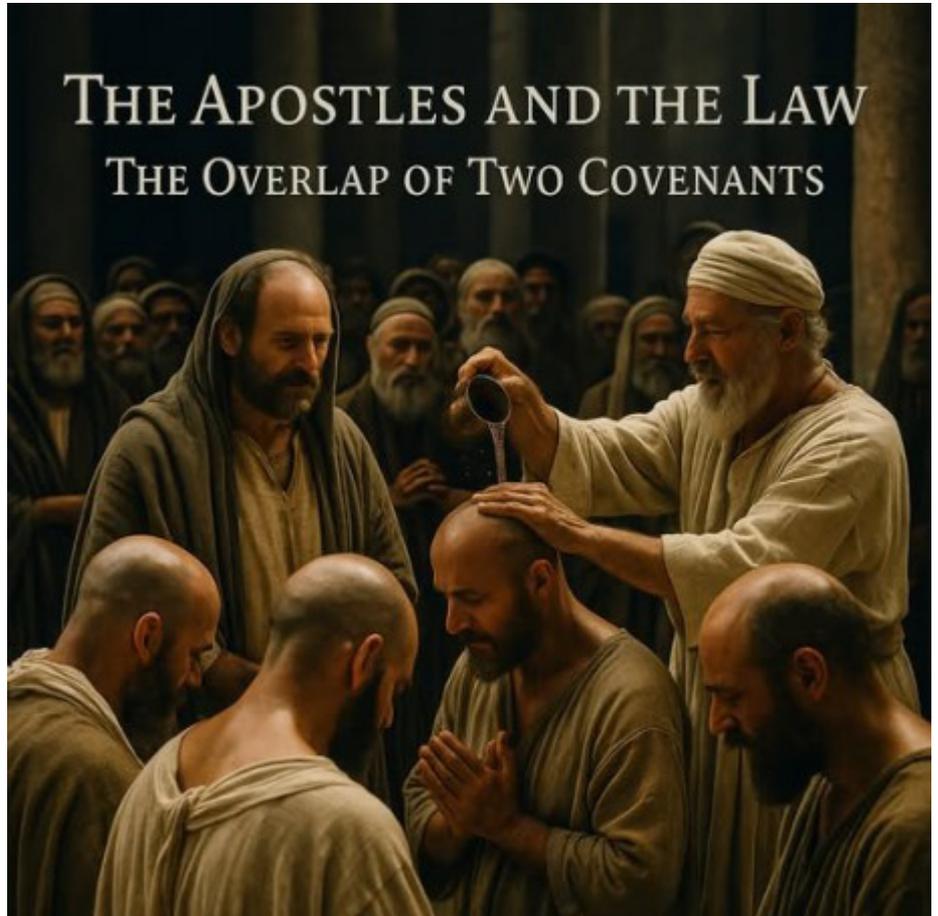
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## Law - The Apostles and the Law, The Overlap of Two Covenants



By Dan Maines

## The Apostles and the Law, The Overlap of Two Covenants

### Acts 21:20-26

And when they heard it they began glorifying God; and they said to him, You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed, and they are all zealous for the Law; and they have been told about you, that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs. What, then, is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come. Therefore do this

that we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; take them and purify yourself along with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads; and all will know that there is nothing to the things which they have been told about you, but that you yourself also walk orderly, keeping the Law. But concerning the Gentiles who have believed, we wrote, having decided that they should abstain from meat sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication. Then Paul took the men, and the next day, purifying himself along with them, went into the temple giving notice of the completion of the days of purification until the sacrifice was offered for each one of them.

† The early church stood in a time of transition, when both the Old and New Covenants overlapped. Though Christ had fulfilled the Law on the cross, the temple still stood, and many Jewish believers continued in its customs. This period reveals God's patience as He moved Israel from the shadow to the substance, from ritual to reality.

† Paul's actions in Acts 21 weren't a return to the Law for justification, but an act of peace and unity among Jewish believers who were slow to understand the change. He didn't compromise the gospel; he demonstrated wisdom in bridging the gap between covenants. 1 Corinthians 9:20 says, To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law.

† This shows that Paul understood the Law's end through Christ, yet out of love and prudence, he adapted to those still under its influence. The temple was still active, priests still offered sacrifices, and old traditions still functioned. But the gospel had already declared these things obsolete (Hebrews 8:13).

† The apostles lived during the overlap of two worlds. On one side stood the physical temple, priesthood, sacrifices, and feast days; on the other stood the new covenant reality of faith, grace, and spiritual worship. They lived in a unique generation when both covenants operated side by side until the old physically vanished in AD 70.

† The Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 confirmed this transition. Jewish believers continued in their customs, but the Gentiles weren't placed under the Law. Peter declared, Why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? (Acts 15:10). The gospel made clear that salvation was through grace, not through Moses.

† James, Peter, and the elders recognized the sensitivity of the time. Jewish Christians could still visit the temple, offer vows, and observe customs, but none of it added to their righteousness. It was part of a fading age, the old covenant still standing, yet declared ready to vanish away.

† Paul's vow in Acts 21:26 and his earlier vow in Acts 18:18 were personal acts of devotion, not means of justification. They reflected Jewish heritage and gratitude, but he knew that righteousness was in Christ alone. Philippians 3:8-9 says, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ.

† Peter himself once struggled with this balance. In Galatians 2:11-14, Paul rebuked him for withdrawing from Gentiles out of fear of those of the circumcision. Even Peter, an apostle, found it difficult to fully separate from the old order. Yet through correction, he too stood firm in grace.

† The existence of temple worship until AD 70 doesn't mean God still honored those sacrifices. Rather, it shows His patience as Israel's old system came to a physical close. God allowed that generation to see both the end and the fulfillment side by side, until judgment fell on Jerusalem and the temple was destroyed.

† The apostles kept the old law as well. Acts 21:20-26 shows Paul participating in a vow and purification, and Peter and James continued in Torah observance among Jewish believers. Acts 15 clearly distinguishes the obligations for Gentiles. This supports the reality of the overlap between the two covenants.

† Romans 14 reveals how believers were to handle differences in observance. Some still kept days or dietary rules, others didn't. Paul wrote, One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord. The goal was not division but peace, knowing that Christ had fulfilled it all.

† Hebrews 9:8-9 confirms this overlap: The Holy Spirit is signifying this, that the way into the holy place hasn't yet been disclosed while the outer tabernacle is still standing, which is a symbol for the present time. The writer saw that the temple's continued existence represented a system that was about to disappear.

† When the temple fell in AD 70, the shadow finally gave way to the substance. The Law's rituals could no longer continue, and the gospel stood alone as the everlasting covenant. What the apostles witnessed wasn't contradiction but completion, the passing of one age and the full revealing of the new.

† This history explains why we find Paul in the temple and Peter among observant Jews even after the resurrection. They were walking through the closing moments of an era, leading others

out of the old into the new. They honored God's patience, His unfolding plan, and His faithfulness to fulfill all things in Christ.

† Today, we look back at that overlap and see the wisdom of God. He didn't destroy the old covenant abruptly, but let it fade as the light of Christ grew brighter. The apostles' temporary observance of certain customs wasn't a denial of grace, but a testimony of unity and patience during the great transition of the ages.

† In Christ, the Law has found its fulfillment. Romans 10:4 says, Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to everyone who believes. The apostles lived in the time between the promise and its completion, showing that God's plan moved from shadow to reality exactly as He ordained.

### **How It Applies to Us Today**

† The example of the apostles teaches us that God works through transition with patience and mercy. He didn't demand instant understanding from His people but guided them step by step from the shadows of the Law into the light of Christ's fulfillment. In the same way, we should show patience toward those still learning the truth of the fulfilled covenant.

† Just as the apostles lived faithfully during a time of change, we also live in a world where many still hold to the old ways of religious systems, rituals, and fear-based obedience. Our calling isn't to condemn but to teach, showing that Christ's work has already completed redemption. We walk in the reality of His kingdom, not in the shadows of tradition.

† Romans 6:14 reminds us, For sin shall not be master over you, for you're not under law but under grace. The Law pointed to Christ, but now we live in the fulfillment of His grace. The temple, sacrifices, and ceremonies are gone, yet the heart of worship remains. We now serve God in spirit and truth, through

a living relationship with Christ.

† Galatians 5:1 says, It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and don't be subject again to a yoke of slavery. We're not bound by the rituals or burdens of the old covenant, but walk freely in the righteousness He's already provided.

† The apostles' temporary observance of the Law reminds us to stay grounded in love and understanding. While the old has vanished, many still cling to it out of habit or tradition. Our task is to help others see the finished work of Christ, not by force but by truth and grace, leading them into the joy of complete redemption.

† Today, our worship isn't in temples made with hands, but in hearts made new. We honor God, not through old rituals, but through faith, thanksgiving, and love. Every act of grace and unity among believers is the fruit of living under the fulfilled covenant.

**† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †**

### **Source Index**

† Acts 21:20-26, Acts 18:18, Acts 15:10, 1 Corinthians 9:20, Romans 10:4, Romans 14:5-6, Galatians 2:11-14, Philippians 3:8-9, Hebrews 8:13, Hebrews 9:8-9, Romans 6:14, Galatians 5:1

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