

Chapter 2

Does God Make Mistakes?

God does not change (Malachi 3:6; James 1:17). Indeed, his Hebrew name *Yahweh* indicates that he is The One Who *Is*, or the Eternal One (Exodus 3:14). But if God remains the same, how can his laws change? Can the Eternal give temporary laws?

It is obvious throughout Scripture that God does in fact give commands to some people but not to others. Commands he gave to Noah do not apply to others. When he told Abraham to sacrifice his son (Genesis 22:2), he did not intend for anyone else to go and do likewise. When he commanded Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, he did not intend for anyone else to do it.

When he told Joshua to go around an enemy city seven days in a row (Joshua 6:2-5), he was not creating a law for all future followers. Similarly, when Jesus commanded his disciples to go only to the cities of Israel (Matthew 10:5-6), he was not creating an eternal law.

Even though God remains the same and his purpose remains the same, he sometimes gives commands that are suited to a particular person and circumstance. When we read a command God gave Abraham, we do not have to assume that we must also obey it. When we read a command given to the Jews, we do not assume that we must do it, too. Some of the commands he gave through Moses are still valid for us today; others are not, and we want to know how to discern the difference.

Animal sacrifices

Most Christians know that God commanded his people in the Old Testament to make animal sacrifices. Every day, they had rituals to perform, animals to kill and burn on the altar. There were various washings, grain offerings, wine offerings, and other offerings. Most Christians also know (by observation, if nothing else) that Christianity does not involve any animal offerings. What God once commanded, he no longer requires.

We can see this explained in the book of Hebrews, chapter 10. The law was only a shadow, verse 1 says, not

the reality of salvation. We could compare it to a sketch or a simple diagram, not the full picture. Or it is a silhouette, not the real person. Although the law had “the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year,” it was not able to make the worshippers complete, and it could not cleanse their consciences (verse 2). “It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (verse 4).

So when Christ came into the world, he said (quoting one of the Psalms) that sacrifices were not what God really wanted (verse 5). And by doing God’s will, Christ did away with the need for sacrifices (verses 9, 18). Christ did what they could only symbolize, and now that the reality is here, we no longer need the picture. The sacrifices were only a temporary command, given to the nation of Israel until Christ would come and fulfill what the sacrifices symbolized.

God gave these commands — but he did not give them to us. We can’t assume that “if they were good enough for Israel, they are good enough for us.” No, in this case we would be wrong to try to do what Israel was commanded to do. We are a different people.

I use the example of sacrifices because it is something that all Christians agree on: These commandments given to Israel do not apply to us today. God himself, in the Scriptures, has told us so.

Earlier in the book of Hebrews, we are told that “there must also be a change of the law” (Hebrews 7:12). The subject in that chapter is the priesthood. The Law of Moses said that only Levites could be priests. But Jesus Christ is our priest now, and the fact that he is a priest (even though he is not a Levite) shows that there has been a change in the law. The law that restricted the priesthood to Levites is no longer in force. The Eternal’s laws have changed.

So, the book of Hebrews tells us, “The former regulation is *set aside* because it was weak and useless (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is

God gives certain commands to some people but not to others.

In this case we would be wrong to try to do what Israel was commanded to do.

introduced, by which we draw near to God” (verses 18-19). We draw near to God by Jesus Christ, of course, but notice those strong words about the law that God had given: It was *weak* and *useless*. It told people that they were sinful, but it could not cleanse their consciences. It could not forgive their sins. It was not the way that God was trying to save people. It had only a temporary purpose.

Later, we are told that there was something wrong with the first covenant (the agreement that God made with the Israelites at Mt. Sinai). The people couldn't keep their part of the deal. God knew they couldn't, but he made the covenant with them, anyway. It would be like us making a contract to sell our house for ten million dollars, knowing full well that the “buyer” didn't have any money. Something is wrong with an agreement like that. God made this agreement with Israel even though he knew that they couldn't live up to the bargain.

God had a purpose in this, of course. It was one step in his purpose to bring us salvation. But it was just a preparatory step. It was designed to show that people could not keep laws. We need a Savior, not more and better laws. We need supernatural rescue, not more guidance and teaching.

A temporary law

Paul asks, “What, then, was the purpose of the law? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come” (Galatians 3:19). It was a temporary addition, designed from the start to be in force only until Christ came. That is why sacrifices and offerings are no longer needed. The same law that restricted the priesthood to Levites, the same law that commanded animal sacrifices, is all swept away by the coming of Christ.

“The law was put in charge to lead us to Christ,” Paul writes (verse 24). “Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law” (verse 25). The law that Moses gave no longer supervises our relationship with God. We do not look to Levitical priests or sacrifices or rituals or anything else that is

found only in the Law of Moses. Instead, we look to Christ. We trust in him for our salvation, not in our ability to keep laws.

Jesus' death set aside some of God's laws, such as animal sacrifices, because they had been designed in advance to cease when Christ died.

Paul says the same thing in a different way in Ephesians 2. There he discusses the laws that separated Jews and Gentiles, laws that Jews had to keep to make them different from Gentiles. (Many of the laws we mentioned above were never given to Gentiles, and God did not expect Gentiles to keep them; they would cause Jews to be different from Gentiles. This purpose is specifically mentioned for some laws,

such as in Leviticus 20:24-25.)

The law created a barrier between the two peoples, and it created some hostility between them. But Christ destroyed this barrier “by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations” (Ephesians 2:14-15). He did this, Paul says, to reconcile both people to God through his cross (verse 16).

Jesus did not die to remove human-made laws. In God's sight, human religious laws were never in force in the first place. But Jesus' death did set aside God-made laws, such as animal sacrifices, because they had been designed in advance to cease when Christ died. In this way Jesus removed laws that separated Jews from Gentiles. This

includes animal sacrifices and many other laws. Now, God does not have different rules for Jews than for Gentiles.

The laws of Moses have fulfilled their purpose, and now there is no need for anyone to offer sacrifices or do the old rituals. As it says in Hebrews, the old covenant is “obsolete” (Hebrews 8:13). Laws that the Eternal gave are indeed obsolete. Not because we are tired of them or think they are old-fashioned, not because church history says so, but because God himself says so in Scripture.

But how much does this include? The old covenant included laws against stealing, murder, and adultery. Are those laws obsolete? Of course not. We will need to investigate a bit further. But to provide a better foundation for our studies, we need to take a closer look at circumcision.

We need a *Savior*, not more and better laws. We need supernatural rescue.

The law told people that they were sinful, but it could not cleanse their consciences.

Review 2

- God gave commands that were designed to be temporary.
- It would be wrong to offer sacrifices, even though God once required them.
- Question: What is wrong with the argument, “God’s law doesn’t change, because God doesn’t change”?

Sabbath, Circumcision, and Tithing: Which Old Testament Laws Apply Today? By Michael Morrison. 4th edition. Copyright 2002, 2005 Michael Morrison. Scriptures are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version, Copyright 1984 International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers.