

WHY DID THE ISRAELITES HAVE SO MANY SPECIAL LAWS?

Genesis 12:3 “All peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

Romans 3:23-24 All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

The Bible is the history of how humankind fell into sin, and how God graciously delivered them from sin through the promised Messiah (Savior.) This promise of deliverance comes with “no strings attached.” God simply told Abraham that he would bless the whole world through him. God has “justified” us, that is, declared us righteous, simply by his free grace. We might call this a **one-way covenant**. God does all the work.

Exodus 19:5-6 “Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

Within the Bible’s history is another history: the history of the nation of Israel. Since it would take God several thousand years to send a Messiah, he chose the Israelites to be his special people. Through their prophets he would send the promises of his Word. Through their family line he would eventually send Jesus. This nation would be a special beacon of hope for the world, and God wanted them to act the part. He gave them detailed, specific laws to follow so that they would stand about as the family line of the Savior. We might call this God’s **two-way covenant** with Israel. God had already called them by his grace, and now he had special work for them to do.

Colossians 2:16 Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.

Although the Israelites failed miserably at keeping their side of the covenant, God continued to preserve the nation until the Messiah came. But once Jesus arrived, **the special laws and lifestyle that were meant to teach and point to Jesus were no longer needed**. And so the two-way covenant came to an end. Paul calls these Old Testament laws “shadows” of Jesus. Why look at the shadows anymore when you’ve got the real thing?! Christians today no longer need to follow these specific Israelite laws. We simply study them to better understand the way God preserved his promise of the Savior down through the years.

