

Some Defining Features of the Mosaic Law in the Cultural-Religious Context of the Ancient Near East

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Abstract

The law of Moses contains the commandments ordained by God in the books of the Pentateuch (Torah) for His chosen people. However, these do not constitute a unitary, complete and compact collection, thoroughly systematized, as we can see in the codes of ancient laws. Unlike the legislation of other peoples, the Mosaic law is fundamentally related to the Covenant that God made with His people on Mount Sinai. Although they are two separate concepts, the Law derives from the Covenant and is inextricably linked to it. The covenant expresses a unique connection, which requires a full commitment from the people, called to participate with all their being in this relationship with God. The Covenant causes each Israelite to manifest himself as a part of a whole, as an individual responsible before God. The commandments are based on this call to obedience and service to God, their fulfilment activating the Covenant and making all its benefits flow into the life of the chosen people. Thus, before the commandment becomes law, it is covenant. Taken out of the context of the Covenant, the commandment becomes only a prescription, a usage, a custom devoid of substance, just like in the other peoples of the ancient Eastern world.