

Chosen by God

The Jewish Roots of Christianity

Gezeirah

Fence Laws

"If you give them an inch, they will take a mile." This was the answer I was given when I asked for the scriptural reason for forbidding a particular activity in the church we were attending. In other words, this church leader had no scriptural reason for this man made rule, it was based purely on a fear that it might lead the congregation into "dangerous" territory. I was indignant at first, but then realized that I have often done the same thing with my children. Like when we climbed onto the roof of our 2 1/2 story house just to see what we could see. My young rambunctious daughters were not allowed to go within 3 feet of the edge of the roof, for reasons obvious to any parent. They felt understandably confined and limited standing in the middle of the roof, but as the one responsible for their well being, I felt much more secure. As the saying goes, "better safe than sorry."

Like our own church elder, the Jewish leaders also practiced a spiritual version of this caution. They took a genuine, God spoken command, and then made laws that would serve as a fence to keep the people from coming anywhere near the edge of breaking that law. We call these fence laws, and the Jews of Jesus' day had loads of them. There were so many in fact, that they were doing more harm than good, so intent on the letter of the Law that they neglected the Spirit of the Law. Jesus was frequently in trouble with the religious leaders of the day for breaking one or another of these fence laws, but we do not see Him breaking the commands that had been set in place by His Father. When Jesus criticized the burdensome laws enforced in God's name, He was not rejecting God's Law, but man's law. These laws were probably originally set in place with the good intention of keeping the Jewish people "safe", but they had since been elevated to a position of equality with God's Law. When Jesus "broke the law" it is important for us to recognize just what laws He was breaking. To walk as Jesus did means to have the same respect and obedience for God's Words as Jesus did, words that have now been written on our hearts as well.

So what is our attitude to be toward laws of man designed to keep us safe from dangerous temptation? What are we to do with all of those commands that God gave in the Old Testament, but seem so foreign to our lives today? Where have the Jewish people gotten it right, and where have they strayed? How can we adopt their reverence for pleasing God without erring by tying burdens on the backs of others? In what ways might we do that ourselves? How are we to walk obediently in the footsteps of our rabbi Jesus?

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Mitzvot

The Jews define 613 commandments given by God in the Torah. These commandments are the mitzvot. Some of these are clear, explicit commands, like those of the Ten Commandments, while others are implied by Scripture, and still others are reasonably deduced from another of God's commandments. Some of them overlap, like the commandment to rest on the Sabbath, and a separate command to not work on the Sabbath.

Of these 613 commands, 248 are positive commands to do something, and the remaining 365 are commands of what not to do. Many of them can no longer be observed because they center around the requirement of sacrifices and offerings and without the Temple there is no proper place for these to be made. Some cannot be kept because of the different political structure of today's Israel.

Rabbi Israel Meir Kagan has identified only 77 positive mitzvot and 194 negative ones that can be observed today. (Rich)

Which, if any, Old Testament laws do you feel should be kept? _____

How did you arrive at that decision? _____

What does Paul indicate about the Law in Romans 5:20? _____

In Galatians 3:19-25? _____

According to Romans 6:14-17, what do we live under? _____



Every Jot and Tittle

"Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled."

Matthew 5:17-18 (KJV)

In the Jewish culture, there is a great deal of debate and discussion, sometimes heated, about the meaning of Scripture. One participant might accuse another of a false interpretation by insisting that their false claim destroyed Scripture, while someone who agreed with him might say that a true meaning fulfilled Scripture. (Booker 16)

16) How is this different than how we interpret the words fulfill and destroy? _____

A jot is the smallest of the Hebrew letters (yod) and a tittle is a small mark that distinguishes some Hebrew letters. (Booker 16) A Jew (like Jesus in Matthew 5) might use these in a common adage similar to our own phrase "I dotted every i and crossed every t." What do we mean when we use that saying? _____

How would you paraphrase this passage from Matthew? _____

In light of the culture in which He was speaking, what do you think Jesus meant by these words? _____

What do you think Jesus meant in Matt. 5:20? _____

What insight did Jesus give about His attitude toward the law in Matt. 5:21-22? _____

How is Jesus calling us to more than the law, not less? _____

Broken Fences

What fence law did Jesus violate in Matt. 12:1-2? _____

How did Jesus describe the intent of God's original law? _____

What Law of Moses was this fence law meant to protect? (Exodus 20:8) _____

How did Jesus violate a fence around the same law in Luke 13:14? _____

Do you think Jesus honored God's command in Deut. 5:15? _____

What did Jesus accuse the teachers of in Matt. 23:15? _____

How did they do this according to Luke 11:46? _____

What prophesy of Isaiah 29:13 did Jesus remind His hearers of in Mark 7:6-13? _____

What did He say they held **instead of** the commandments of God? _____

What was the specific offense they were guilty of? _____

Good Fences?

What does Jesus say about keeping oneself safe from temptation in Matt. 5:27-30? _____

How is that similar to a fence law? _____

What do the following verses have to say about avoiding temptation?

Luke 11:4 _____

Luke 22:40 _____

1 Cor. 7:5 _____

Gal. 6:1 _____

How would you describe the difference between a good fence that helps us avoid sin, and a bad fence like those Jesus objected to?



Oral Law

Much of our confusion about Jewish Law stems from the differing interpretation of Exodus 24:12. The Pharisees based their idea that written and oral law were delivered at the same time, from the same source, and should therefore be considered of equal weight. (Kosofsky 3)

"....And I will give to you the tablets of stone,	(The Ten Commandments)
...the law, ...	(the torah)
....and the commandments,	(mitzvah, or oral law, later called Mishnah)
...that I have written to teach them	(them meaning Israel)

With a change of commas (which were not in the original Hebrew text), we have a different meaning. How much of Moses teaching, as delivered to him by God, do you think was oral rather than written? _____

THE SPIRIT OF THE LAW Lev. 19

God instructs Moses to say to the entire assembly of the Israelites "Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy." (19:2) He follows with a specific list of rules that mainly seem to elaborate on the Ten Commandments. They are moral obligations that we can readily agree with like showing respect to the elderly or providing for the poor. We only have to figure out how to follow the spirit of the law where the letter of the law does not match our cultural setting.

For example, instead of leaving the edges of the fields for the poor, we could _____

Other laws listed were of a different nature, like not cutting your hair at the sides of your head. The purposes of these laws were simply to keep the Israelites from participating in the practices of the pagan nations around them. Pagan worship included things like cutting their hair a certain way, disfiguring themselves with cuttings, tattoos to protect a person from magic or show that they belonged to a specific god. The Israelites were not to do anything that would be confused with pagan worship.

Which regulations in Lev. 19 are of that type? _____

What does that mean for us? _____

Gezeirah

A law initiated by the rabbis that provided a protective fence around the 613 laws of the Torah. Where the Torah commands that we remember the Sabbath and keep it holy, the gezeirah laws forbid things like even holding something that could be used for work so that we would not accidentally perform some task on the Sabbath. Another example is the command to not cook a young goat in its mother's milk. The fence laws would not only forbid having any kind of milk and meat in the same meal, but not even using the same pot to cook meat that you have used to hold milk. No beef stroganoff for the observant Jew!

Takkanah

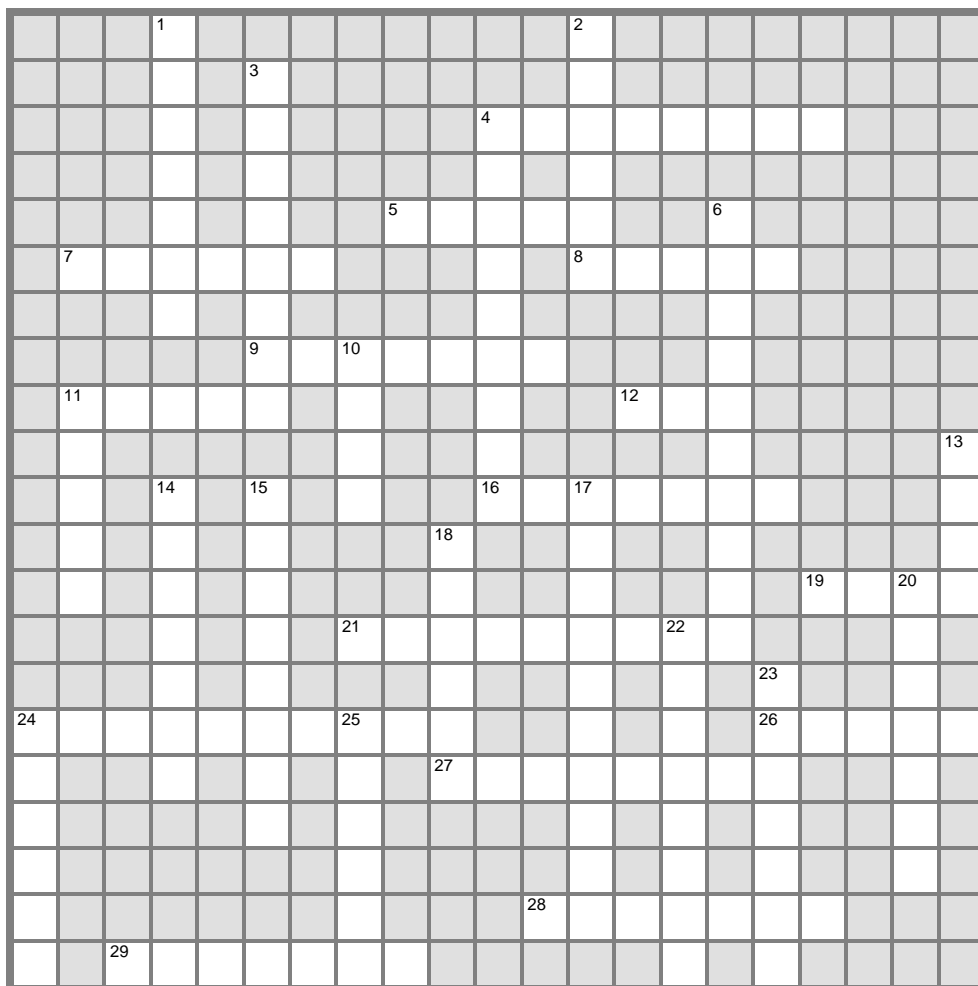
These rules have nothing to do with biblical laws, but are simply rules created by the rabbis for the public welfare. An example would be lighting candles on Hannukah, a post biblical holiday. The word itself means to fix or repair. It carries the concept of making the world a better place.

Minhag

There is a fundamental passage in the Talmud that says, "*Let a man busy himself with observing the commandments and customs even if his heart is not in them, for eventually the hand will teach the heart.*" (Kosofsky 1)

This does well to summarize the importance of custom in Jewish life. The minhag are customs that developed for religious reasons, but have been in effect so long that they have become a custom, sometimes even when the original reason for it is forgotten. These often vary from community to community, or even among individuals within the community, yet it is still considered binding.

Puzzle Page



Across

- 4 248 of the Torah's commands are this (8)
 5 increased when sin increased Rom. 5:20 (5)
 7 Jewish customs (6)
 8 worship of God was only made up of these Is. 29:13 (5)
 9 Jesus did not come to do this to the Law (7)
 11 has replaced the supervision of the law Gal. 3:25 (5)
 12 smallest of the Hebrew letters (3)
 16 the religious leaders objected to Jesus plucking grain on this day (7)
 19 Jesus said it was better to lose a part of this than to sin Matt. 5:29 (4)
 21 fruit for the first three years according to God's commands in Lev. 19:23 (9)
 24 what Jesus called the Pharisees and teachers of the law Matt. 23:15 (10)

Across

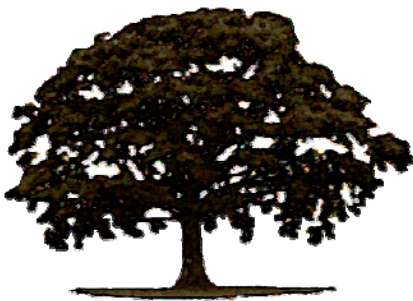
- 26 God said not to clip the edges of this in Lev. 19:27 (5)
 27 increased with the addition of the law Rom. 5:20 (8)
 28 God said not to do this to each other in Lev. 19:11 (7)
 29 God said not to spread this in Lev. 19:16 (7)

Down

- 1 Jesus was guilty of doing this on the Sabbath (7)
 2 sin will not be ours because we are under grace Rom.6:14 (6)
 3 rules created by the rabbis for the public welfare (8)
 4 our righteousness must surpass theirs to enter heaven (9)
 6 Jesus instructed the disciples to pray that this would be avoided Luke 11:4 (10)

- 10 the Jewish people feel that much of the law they follow is this (4)
 11 laws designed to keep one far away from breaking God's laws (5)
 13 what God said to keep the Sabbath Ex. 20:8 (4)
 14 613 commandments in the Torah (7)
 15 fence law initiated by the rabbis (8)
 17 the laws of the Pharisees (10)
 18 what the law was to lead us to Gal. 3:24 (6)
 20 what God said to keep all of in Lev. 19:37 (7)
 22 God said not to do this to your neighbor's live in Lev. 19:16 (8)
 23 God instructed His people to _____ the Sabbath Deut. 5:15 (7)
 24 God said the _____ of His people were far from Him Is. 29:13 (6)
 25 small distinguishing Hebrew mark (6)

Puzzle Answers:



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