

Preface

And God spoke unto Noah, and to Noah's children with him, saying, And as for Me, behold, I establish My covenant with you, and with your seed after you.

— Genesis 9:8-9

Seven was a special number to the ancient Israelites. It symbolized the completion and perfection of God's Creation. The people of Israel believed that God gave the whole human race a set of laws which would lead men and all the children of men to a coming glorious golden age.

According to the Hebrews' ancient tradition, God originally gave humanity six Commandments, and the ordinances that accompany them, by inscribing them on the hearts of Adam and Eve. Ten generations later, He initiated the famous Rainbow Covenant of the Bible's Book of Genesis. See Genesis 9. He gave all Seven Commandments, including a commandment forbidding certain vile crimes against the natural world, to Noah and Noah's family.¹

Noah's descendants failed to completely transmit the Law to later generations. Slavery, tribalism, violence, and all the terrible pathologies of paganism degraded the human race.



So Heaven, still holding out hope for humanity, tried a slower but surer revolutionary, text-oriented approach. Ten generations after Noah, God taught these seven Commandments to the prophet Abraham, and six generations after Abraham, to Moses. Moses taught them to his people, Israel, and inscribed them in the Bible with loving care.

The Seven Rainbow Covenant Commandments represent, in essence, a larger Code of detailed, logically implicit moral and ethical statutes, ordinances, and rules.² These laws are, according to Israel's tradition, Divinely revealed. **God gave them to humanity's legendary common ancestors for the good of all mankind, forever.** In fact, taking all Seven Commandments together, they constitute the universal, fundamental code of upright human behavior.³

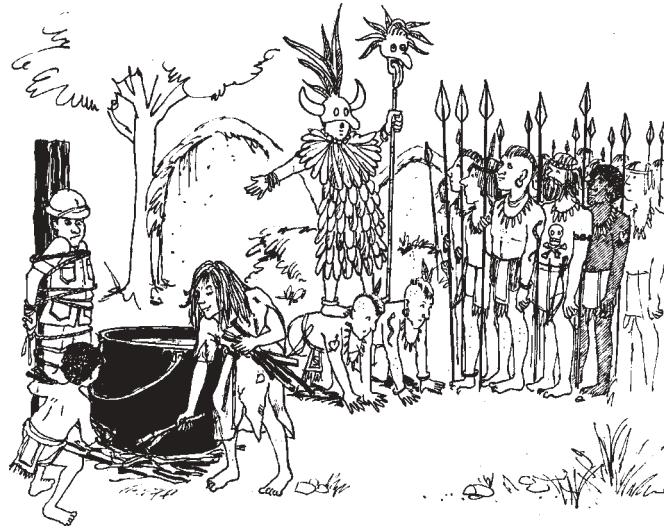
Moses directed his ministry to Israel. From Moses' time to the present, Israel's rabbis⁴ have taught that, through Moses, the Master of the Universe gave the Hebrews Ten Commandments — including a Code of 613 laws, revealed to Israel in the Sinai

desert — and obligated the Jews to serve Him in a unique way.⁵

This Law, Israel's Ten Commandments' Code, makes up the revolutionary constitution — the Torah, the "Guidance," "Teaching" or "Law" — of Moses' so-called "people of priests."⁶ It rules Israel, and Israel alone.⁷ But Moses taught that God calls on everyone, Jew and non-Jew alike, to live up to the equally revolutionary moral standards — His Code of Seven Rainbow Covenant Commandments — that He gave to Noah and his children.

One cannot understand the Bible's total scheme, the nature or purpose of the Ten Commandments, the people of Israel, or, for that matter, of the whole human race, without coming to terms with these Universal commandments.

The study of the Seven Commandments is said to provide great advantages. Scripture promises the student knowledge, understanding, riches and might.⁸ Such study exalts and magnifies a person, according to the Hebrews' ancient law: He⁹ will be called friend, beloved of God, lover of God, and lover of humanity.¹⁰ Every human being who lives what he learns of that moral life, who fulfills the Universal Law, merits eternal and infinite reward.¹¹



As the Christian Scriptures put it, the Jews and their teachers “sit in Moses’ seat” as the “authorized custodians” of God’s Law.¹² Israel’s obligation to transmit His Universal laws to others is much of the reason, Israel’s Sages wrote, for the Jews’ dispersion among the nations.¹³

Every Jew is expected to try to establish the laws and true morality of the Rainbow Covenant wherever possible.¹⁴ Because, if the people of Israel know anything about it at all, nothing less than the basic nature of the future is riding on the outcome. As the Jewish prophets and more than a hundred generations of Hebrew sages and mystics have believed and yearned for it, the nations’ general acceptance of these laws will usher in a new stage in planetary history, a golden era of realized human potential, which Jewish scholars describe as the Messianic Age.¹⁵

NOTES

1. See Genesis 9:8-18 (note the seven separate references to ‘covenant’) and commentaries; *Mishnah Tosefta*, *Avoda Zorah* 9:4; Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 56a, 74b, *Nedarim* 31a; Midrash, *Genesis Rabbah* 16:6, 24:5, 34:8, *Deuteronomy Rabbah* 2:25. For more on these sources see, particularly, Yehuda HaLevi (c. 1075-1141 CE) *HaKuzari* 3:73.

2. Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 57a (near the end), 74b (in the name of Rava), *Avoda Zorah* 14b, *Hullin* 92a; Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki, c. 1040-1105 CE) on *Sanhedrin* 75a; Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon (Maimonides, Rambam, c. 1135-1204 CE), *Mishneh Torah (Yad)*, *Hilchot Melachim* 9:9; Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman (Nachmanides, Ramban, c. 1194-1270 CE), *Pirush al haTorah* (Commentary on the Torah) on Genesis 26:5; Rabbi Menachem ben Shlomo Me’iri, *Beit haBechira* (c. 1270 CE) on *Sanhedrin* 59a; *Sefer HaHinnuch* (c. 1300 CE), Imperative 424; *Encyclopedia Talmudica* (Talmudic Encyclopedia Institute, Jerusalem, Israel, 1992), Vol. 4, “Ben Noah”; Aaron Lichtenstein, *The Seven Laws of Noah* (The Rabbi Jacob Joseph School Press/Z. Berman Books, New York NY, 1981, 2d ed. 1986); Nahum Rakover, “Jewish Law and the Noahide Obligation to Preserve Social Order” with Suzanne Last Stone, “Sinaitic and Noahide Law: Legal Pluralism in Jewish Law,” *12 Cardozo Law Review*, pp. 1073/1137 (New York NY, 1991). That each commandment makes up a representative general category containing many particulars should be obvious: look within, for instance, at the single commandment against sexual immorality, forbidding such various specific sins as adultery, incest, bestiality, etc.

3. Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 56a-56B, 74b, 75a, *Yad Hilchat Malachim* 9:1.
4. “Rabbi” is Hebrew, literally meaning “my master,” “my teacher.” “*Rabbenu*” — “our rabbi,” a term of endearment or special affection.
5. See, e.g., Leviticus 26:42-45; Deuteronomy 7:7-11, Jeremiah 31:33; Psalm 147:19-20. See also Talmud, *Yoma* 4b, *Sanhedrin* 59a, *Shabbat* 87a. “All of the [Torah’s] 613 Commandments are included in the Ten Commandments.” — Rashi (classic commentary) on Exodus 24:12. The Hebrew for commandment is *mitzvah*, from a root meaning “connection.” The Seven Commandments are the *Sheva (7) Mitzvot*; the 613 laws that directly command Israel are known as the *Taryag (613) Mitzvot*.
6. Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 7:6. See Isaiah 2:3, 26:2, 45:22.
7. See, e.g., Deuteronomy 4:8 and 33:4; Psalm 147:19-20; Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 59a.
8. See Proverbs 8.
9. Or she, obviously. ***This book follows the traditional gender conventions of English grammar. No offense intended: “mankind” and “man” both refer inclusively to womankind and women.***
10. Psalm 1:1-2; Mishnah, *Pirke Avot* 6:1.
11. See Genesis 12:3; Psalm 25; *Mishnah Tosefta*, *Sanhedrin* 13:2; Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 105a; *Mishneh Torah* (Maimonides’ *Yad Hazakah*), *Hilchot Melachim* 8:11. Also see Job 19:26; Ecclesiastes 12:7.
12. Matthew 23:2: “Then spoke Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, saying, ‘The scribes and the Pharisees [i.e., Judaism’s mainstream rabbis and religious writers] sit in Moses’ seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, *that* observe and do.’” See Matthew 5:18-19.
13. 1 Kings 8:41-43; Isaiah 56:1-8. See Talmud, *Pesachim* 87b.
14. See Isaiah 2:3; Psalm 96:3,10; *Sifra* (Midrash) on Leviticus 22:32; *Mishneh Torah (Yad)*, *Hilchot Melachim* 8:10. [Maimonides wrote the *Mishneh Torah* (“Repetition of the Torah,” per Deuteronomy 17:18; Joshua 8:32), the *Yad Hazaka* (“Strong Hand,” per Exodus 6:1; Deuteronomy 7:8,19), or simply the *Yad* (“Hand” — this also being the name of the customary pointer, a miniature silver hand, that directs the reader of a Torah scroll). The *Yad*, an immensely authoritative work consisting of fourteen volumes — Hebrew letters have numeric values too; the letters that make up *yad* add up to fourteen — of stupendous Torah erudition, precision, and remarkably reliable authority, shouldn’t be confused with the much larger and much more ancient *Mishnah* (“Teaching”). The *Mishnah*, together with the Gemara, or Talmud, is regarded as the Oral Torah.]
15. See Isaiah 11:9; Daniel 7:27; Zechariah 2:15; Psalm 96:9-10; Hosea 2:25; Talmud, *Berachot* 54b; *Yad*, *Hilchot Melachim* 12:4-5.

