

THE MOSAIC COVENANT – PART 3

THE NATURE OF THE MOSAIC COVENANT

- “Receiving the Mosaic Covenant at Sinai was a pivotal moment in Israel’s history. This marked a transition from a large family of Hebrews to the distinct nation of Israel. This covenant shaped the nation’s identity and defined how she was to live before God. Through this covenant, God gave Israel a national way of life. It gave them a path marked by holiness and worship. It served as Israel’s national guide until the arrival of the Messiah, who would inaugurate a New Covenant.”¹

It Was a Conditional, Bilateral Covenant

- The MC is not an unconditional, unilateral covenant like the AC is (and the rest of the covenants with Israel)
- The blessings of the MC are conditioned upon the fulfillment of the stipulations...that is why the MC has “if...then” statements within it
- It was a conditional, bilateral covenant that either brought God's direct blessing for obedience or God's direct cursing for disobedience upon the nation of Israel

It Was a Temporary Covenant

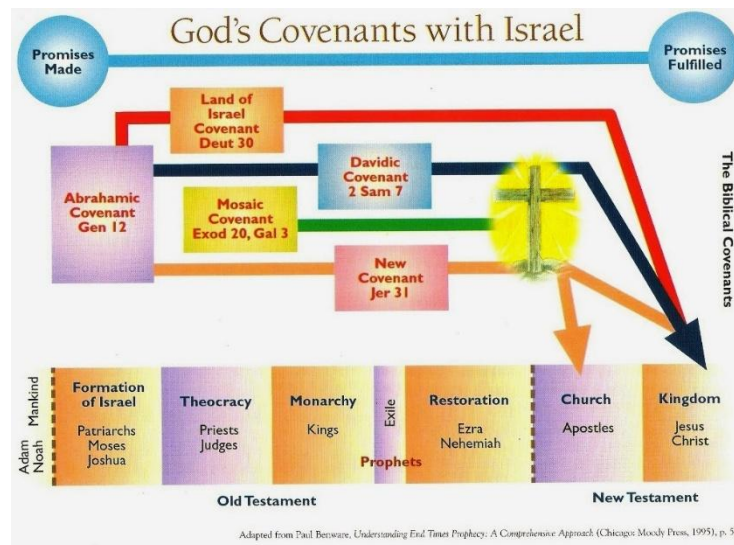
- The MC is not an eternal covenant like the AC is...it ended with Christ
- The covenant with Israel had a built-in obsolescence and focused on Israel as a nation; it did not transform the heart of those who heard the covenant demands.

It Was What Allowed Israel to Stay Connected to the AC

- The MC was the constitution for the nation of Israel, governing the relationship between God and his elect nation...it was the means by which the promises of the AC would be fulfilled
- The Exodus event and the establishing of the MC at Sinai were based on God’s covenant to Abraham and the patriarchs
- Obedience to the MC was the means through which the people of Israel could remain connected to the blessings of the AC
- If they wanted to experience the blessings of the AC, the people needed to obey the commands of the MC
- “At its core, the Mosaic Covenant provided the structure through which Israel could remain connected to the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant. These blessings concern an increase in descendants, prosperity in the land, and the ability to bless the nations. Obedience to the Mosaic Covenant would bring prosperity, security, descendants, and peace in the land (see Deuteronomy 28:1-14). However, disobedience would result in judgment and exile (see Deuteronomy 28:15-68). Yet because of the ultimate triumph of the Abrahamic Covenant, judgment and exile eventually will give way to permanent regathering and restoration. Israel’s failure under the Mosaic Covenant does not cancel the Abrahamic Covenant (see Galatians 3:17-18).”²

¹ Michael Vlach, *The Bible Storyline*, 134.

² Ibid, 137.



- The MC, then, did not replace the AC...it was an extension of it, the means by which the descendants of Abraham could remain in the blessings of the AC

Galatians 3:17 ~ What I am saying is this: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise.

It Was Given Specifically to Israel

- The Mosaic Law was given to Israel alone...not to all mankind

Exodus 19:3 ~ Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the sons of Israel:

Exodus 34:27 ~ Then the LORD said to Moses, “Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.”

It Constitutes the “Law” Described in the NT

- The Pentateuch (the first 5 books of the OT) are often referred to as “law”

Matthew 5:17 ~ Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.

Compare Leviticus 19:18 with Luke 10:26-27

Leviticus 19:18 ~ You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD.

Luke 10:26-27 ~ And He said to him, “What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?” 27 And he answered, “YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND; AND YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.”

Compare Numbers 28:9-10 with Matthew 12:5

Numbers 28:9 ~ Then on the sabbath day two male lambs one year old without defect, and two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering, and its drink offering: 10 ‘This is the burnt offering of every sabbath in addition to the continual burnt offering and its drink offering.

Matthew 12:5 ~ Or have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath and are innocent?

Compare Deuteronomy 25:4 with 1 Corinthians 9:9

Deuteronomy 25:4 ~ You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing.

1 Corinthians 9:9 ~ For it is written in the Law of Moses, "YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING." God is not concerned about oxen, is He?

- When Paul refers to "the law" or the "law of Moses," he usually has in the mind the injunctions contained within the MC

Acts 13:39 ~ and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses.

Romans 5:20 ~ The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,

Galatians 5:3 ~ And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law.

Galatians 6:13 ~ For those who are circumcised do not even keep the Law themselves, but they desire to have you circumcised so that they may boast in your flesh.

It is an Indivisible Unity

- It functioned as an integrated whole in that all 613 commands were in force simultaneously when the covenant was in effect...all commands were binding at all times while the covenant was in operation
- It is common to divide the Mosaic Law into three parts: 1) Moral (Ten Commandments); 2) Ceremonial; 3) Civil
- These divisions, though helpful for study, have no scriptural authority...the Mosaic Law is one Law and is an indivisible unity

James 2:10 ~ For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.

Galatians 5:3 ~ And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law

- "It is common to make a distinction between the ceremonial and the moral parts of the law, and to suppose that, while the former are done away, the latter are still binding upon Christians. But this distinction is recognized neither in the Old Testament nor in the New; it is a modern division of the law which is quite convenient and natural for us to make, but one of which a quite unwarrantable use is commonly made."³
- This is important to understand because the unity of the Mosaic law leaves us only two alternatives: 1) Complete deliverance from the entire system; 2) Complete subjection to the entire system

THE PURPOSE OF THE MOSAIC LAW

It Revealed God's Character to Israel

³ George B. Stevens, *The Theology of the New Testament*, 24.

- God's character is the basis for the entire law...it revealed the holiness of God

Leviticus 11:45 ~ I am the LORD who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy

It Revealed Israel's Special Relationship With God

- It showed that Israel was unique among all the nations of the world

Exodus 19:5-6 ~ Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation

- The giving of the law demonstrated God's graciousness to Israel
- The fact that God had given Israel a set of guidelines for the affairs of life, such as government and worship, constantly reminded them of God's concern for them as His special nation

It Provided Instructions for Living Acceptably Before God

- The law defined the responsibility of the covenant nation to God, marking out the requirement for fellowship and communion with him
- It gave specific instructions to them concerning appropriate behavior within the covenant relationship...the commands of the MC defined how the people were to live morally, socially, and in their worship of God
- This instruction included how to worship God and how the theocracy was to be organized and managed
- Being under the law in the OT era did not mean that salvation was by means of keeping the law (Rom. 3:20)
- "Under law" for OT saints meant they were under it as a rule of life
- They followed the Mosaic Law not for salvation but for sanctification...it was a way for Israel to be separate and holy
- It restrained wrongdoing in order to protect the moral, social, and religious institutions of Israel
- "This covenant contained 613 laws concerning morality, social interactions, and worship that governed Israel's national life. At its center stood the Ten Commandments, summarizing its moral foundation. But the entire covenant shaped how Israel was to walk with God in every aspect of life."⁴

It Revealed and Exposed Sin

- Its purpose was to inform humankind of their sinfulness...to show them they couldn't ultimately keep the law
- The giving of the law is related to man's sinfulness...it reveals to the unrighteous that they are sinners
- It exposed sin for what it really was...it didn't create sin...it made it more evident and accountable

Romans 3:20 ~ because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law *comes* the knowledge of sin.

Romans 5:20 ~ And the Law came in that the transgression might increase.

Galatians 3:19 ~ Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions.

- The Law of God establishes that everyone in the world is not only guilty of sin but deserving of God's wrath because of their sin

Romans 3:19 ~ Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, that every mouth may be, closed, and all the world may become accountable to God.

⁴ Vlach, *Bible Storyline*, 135.

- The Law points to God's standards and illustrates people's inability to live up to them...there is no chance for acquittal since no one can argue in his own defense that he is not under sin
- The Law brings a universal and total indictment by God which forces all people to put their hand over their mouth and say nothing in their defense
- The whole world will be silent as it comes under God's scrutiny knowing they have nothing to say in the judgment
- The law reveals our filthiness...like a mirror shows dirt on our face...the mirror doesn't clean it...it drives us to the soap and water that brings cleansing
- The Mosaic Law is an instrument not of justification but of condemnation...the Law makes us aware of sin...it doesn't remove it
- JB Philips paraphrase of Rom 3:20 ~ it is the straight-edged Law that shows us how crooked we are
- "Only one conclusion is possible therefore. Man is doomed, doomed, doomed. His condition is one of thorough hopelessness and despair. And the law with its demand of nothing less than moral and spiritual perfection, a state to which man, in his power, can never attain, creates in him a dreadful, mortifying sense of sin; hence a presentiment of doom, total and everlasting."⁵
- The law functioned in Paul's own life to force him to come to grips with the ugliness and pervasiveness of sin
- It produced not merely a recognition that he was sinning, but accompanying that knowledge was an inner conviction of sin
- Although the law is good and holy, it not only fails to eliminate sin, it actually stimulates it

Romans 7:7-13 ~ What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, "YOU SHALL NOT COVET." 8 But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead. 9 I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died; 10 and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; 11 for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. 12 So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. 13 Therefore did that which is good become a cause of death for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful.

- Paul shows that people do not see wrongdoing as it really is (sin against God) in the absence of the law (v. 7)
- It takes the law to show the wrongdoing to be sin
- For example, most know that doing 70 mph on a residential street is not wise...but they may not have a sense that it is illegal if there are no speed limit signs...however, once signs are posted saying "Speed Limit 25," it becomes very clear that speeding is a violation of law
- Sin, in a sense, lays dormant in the absence of law...it takes God's Law to demonstrate that our acts of rebellion are actually violations of God's law
- Paul says in Romans 7 that, not only does the Law reveal sin, it provokes and stimulates it (i.e. coveting)
- In our sin we want to do the very thing the law prohibits (v. 8)
- The urge is evident when we see signs: "Do not touch...do not enter...authorized vehicles only"

1 Timothy 1:8-9 ~ But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully, realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous man, but for those who are lawless and rebellious.

⁵ William Hendriksen, *Romans*

- “[The law] was given so Israel and the world would see the seriousness of sin and the need for divine help. The Law didn’t fix the problem. It diagnosed it. Like a spotlight revealing the cracks in the wall, it showed Israel, and the world, just how deep the problem of sin runs.”⁶

It was Meant to Drive Sinners to Christ

- The Mosaic Law didn’t just point out the sin problem...it also pointed to the solution, Christ...it acted as a temporary guardian for Israel until Christ came

Galatians 3:23-25 ~ But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.

- The tutor in Paul's day was the equivalent of a guardian who temporarily took care of all a child's needs... when the child reached maturity the tutor was no longer needed
- Thus, the Mosaic Law would reveal to people their sinfulness and their need for a Savior
- “The Mosaic Covenant functioned as a guardian for Israel, a guide for a particular season. It taught, restrained, and disciplined Israel. But it was never the final destination. Jesus was. With the coming of Christ, the tutor’s role ended. The long journey reached its destination. Like finally arriving at an airport after a long flight, the Mosaic Covenant had served its purpose as national guardian. Its legal authority expired at the appointed time. It had done what it was meant to do, lead Israel to the feet of Jesus the Messiah and His New Covenant.”⁷

It Saved No One!

- The Mosaic Law, with all its detailed laws (613 in all), could save no one
- It was a guide for godly living...not a pathway to salvation or a way to earn eternal life
- “Abraham had already shown, centuries earlier, that salvation comes through faith alone (Genesis 15:6). Each Israelite was called to follow Abraham’s example, trusting God, and His promises so that righteousness would be credited to them. Then, keeping the Mosaic Covenant became the expression of worship and obedience for those already in covenant relationship with Him.”⁸
- It is not that there was any problem with the Law itself, for the Law is perfect and was given by a holy God, but the Law had no power to give people new life, and the people were not able to obey the Law perfectly

Romans 3:20 ~ By the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight

Romans 4:2-3 ~ For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. 3 For what does the Scripture say? “ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.”

Galatians 2:16 ~ By the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified.

Galatians 2:21 ~ If righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly.

Galatians 3:11 ~ Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident.

- This is an important point because some people get confused by thinking that keeping the Law saved people in the Old Testament, but the Bible is clear that salvation has always been by faith alone

⁶ Vlach, *Bible Storyline*, 141-142.

⁷ Ibid., 142.

⁸ Ibid., 135.

It Could Not Ultimately be Kept

- Despite Israel's promise, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do" (Ex 19:8), they failed to obey the MC
- They did not love the Lord with all their heart, soul, and strength
- God even predicted they would do this:

Deuteronomy 29:22-28 ~ Now the generation to come, your sons who rise up after you and the foreigner who comes from a distant land, when they see the plagues of the land and the diseases with which the LORD has afflicted it, will say, 23 'All its land is brimstone and salt, a burning waste, unsown and unproductive, and no grass grows in it, like the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, which the LORD overthrew in His anger and in His wrath.' 24 "All the nations will say, 'Why has the LORD done thus to this land? Why this great outburst of anger?' 25 "Then men will say, 'Because they forsook the covenant of the LORD, the God of their fathers, which He made with them when He brought them out of the land of Egypt. 26 'They went and served other gods and worshiped them, gods whom they have not known and whom He had not allotted to them. 27 'Therefore, the anger of the LORD burned against that land, to bring upon it every curse which is written in this book; 28 and the LORD uprooted them from their land in anger and in fury and in great wrath, and cast them into another land, as it is this day.'

Deuteronomy 31:16, 20 ~ The LORD said to Moses, "Behold, you are about to lie down with your fathers; and this people will arise and play the harlot with the strange gods of the land, into the midst of which they are going, and will forsake Me and break My covenant which I have made with them...20 "For when I bring them into the land flowing with milk and honey, which I swore to their fathers, and they have eaten and are satisfied and become prosperous, then they will turn to other gods and serve them, and spurn Me and break My covenant.

- "The Mosaic Covenant was never meant to guarantee permanence in the land. It was a conditional covenant. There will be blessings for obedience and curses for rebellion. Israel's exile was not a breakdown of God's promises but a fulfillment of His warnings. Failure to obey this covenant did not mean Israel lost its place in God's plans or was no longer chosen as a nation. It also did not mean that individuals who had genuinely believed in the Lord were no longer saved. But it did mean Israel was removed from Abrahamic Covenant blessings, for a time...Israel's long struggle under the law cried out for something better. A covenant not written on stone, but on the heart. That better thing was coming."⁹
- They needed a new heart so they could obey...something that will happen under the New Covenant (Jer 31:31-32)

ARE NT BELIEVERS UNDER THE MOSAIC LAW?

- The MC began at Sinai and ended at the cross...the legal authority of the MC ended when Christ died for sinners and to inaugurate the New Covenant

Ephesians 2:15 ~ by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace,

- Some would argue that we are under the Ten Commandments (the moral law), but not under the civil and ceremonial aspects of the Law
- However, the NT is very clear that the believer is not under any part of the Mosaic Law

Romans 6:14 ~ For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace

Romans 6:15 ~ What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be!

Galatians 5:18 ~ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law

⁹ Ibid., 146.

- Believers have died to the law (all of it...not just the civil and ceremonial parts)

Romans 7:4 ~ Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, that you might be joined to another

Romans 7:6 ~ But now we have been released from the Law.

- That the law Paul has been released from includes the Ten Commandments can be seen by his quote of the tenth commandment in the next verse, "for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, 'YOU SHALL NOT COVET'" (v.7)

Galatians 2:19 ~ For through the Law I died to the Law, that I might live to God

- The reason believers are said to have died to the law is because Christ was the end of the law...he fulfilled it in its entirety
- He is the point of culmination for the Mosaic law...he is its goal in the sense that the law has always anticipated and looked forward to Christ
- Christ abolished the Mosaic law with his death

Romans 10:4 ~ For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

Ephesians 2:15 ~ by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace,

- Paul taught in 2 Cor 3 that the Mosaic law had faded away, giving way to the superior New Covenant
- The New Covenant has made the old MC obsolete as a way of life for the believer...it has been abolished!

2 Corinthians 3:6-11 ~ who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. 7 But if the ministry of death, in letters engraved on stones, came with glory, so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, fading as it was, 8 how will the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory? 9 For if the ministry of condemnation has glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness abound in glory. 10 For indeed what had glory, in this case has no glory because of the glory that surpasses it. 11 For if that which fades away was with glory, much more that which remains is in glory.

- The book of Hebrews also indicates that believers are no longer under the Mosaic Law

Hebrews 7:18-19 ~ For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness (for the Law made nothing perfect), and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.

Hebrews 8:13 ~ When He said, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.

Hebrews 10:1 ~ For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come...

- The Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 declared that Gentile believers did not have to keep the Mosaic law
- The immediate issue before this council was whether Gentiles needed to be circumcised in order to be saved and whether they need to keep the Mosaic Law
- The judgment of the council was that the Gentiles did not have to be circumcised to be saved (v.19)
- They only were to stay away from certain practices that would have been offensive to the Jews
- Nothing was said about them needing to keep the Law
- If there was ever a good opportunity to say that the Gentiles were under the law, this was it

Acts 15

- So is lobster back on the menu? Shrimp? Pork? Can you wear mixed fabrics? Can you get a tattoo? → Yes
- But can you steal? Murder? Commit adultery? → No!
- Because believers are still under law...even though the Mosaic law is not in effect today doesn't mean that the New Testament Christian is free to do whatever he wants
- Believers may be free from the Mosaic Law, but they are now under a different law known as "the law of Christ"
- In the law of Christ are the hundreds of commandments of the New Testament epistles and together these form a new and distinct code of ethics (i.e. the teachings of Christ the writings of the NT authors)

1 Corinthians 9:20-21 ~ And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law, though not being myself under the Law, that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, that I might win those who are without law

- Believers are thus:
 - Not under the law of Moses (v. 20)
 - Not without Law (v. 21a)
 - Under the law of Christ (v. 21b)

Galatians 6:2 ~ Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ

James 1:25 ~ But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.

James 2:8 ~ If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF," you are doing well.

- "There are a number of similarities between Moses' Law and the Law of Christ. In fact nine of the Ten Commandments are repeated as binding on Christians in the New Testament. But the reason we don't murder and don't steal, and yet we can lawfully enjoy playing basketball on a Saturday, is because the New Testament is binding on us as our law code, not because of the Ten Commandments. So homosexual practices are still offensive to God, not because Leviticus tell us that, but because Romans 1 says so. And that shouldn't surprise us because both the laws in Leviticus and in Romans are based on God's character. Adultery is still wrong, not because of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20, but because of Jesus' teaching in Matthew 19. Again, this overlap shouldn't surprise us. And when in doubt the guiding law is 'Love your neighbor as you love yourself.'"¹⁰

THEN HOW SHOULD WE VIEW THE MOSAIC LAW TODAY?

- Although we must realize that the Mosaic Law is not a code of conduct for today, it is still part of the inspired Word of God and, thus, is profitable
- It is still full of valuable doctrine and useful lessons for us today...it has an instructive role

Psalms 119:47, 97, 119, 127, 159 ~ I shall delight in Your commandments, Which I love...O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day...119 I love Your testimonies...127 Therefore I love Your commandments Above gold, yes, above fine gold...159 Consider how I love Your precepts; Revive me, O LORD, according to Your lovingkindness.

1 Corinthians 10:11 ~ Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction.

Romans 15:4 ~ For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of, the Scriptures we might have hope.

¹⁰ Clint Archer, *Lawschool: what law are we under?*, <http://thecripplegate.com/lawschool-what-law-are-we-under/>, accessed November 8, 2017.