

The Law of Moses Among the Book of Mormon Peoples

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Please read my scripture study titled [Who Is the LORD?](#) before reading this one.

Part One: The Nephites Lived the Law of Moses

The Lord called a man named Lehi to preach repentance to the city of Jerusalem in the first year of the reign of King Zedekiah, king of Judah (1 Nephi 1:4). The people conspired to kill him, and the Lord sent him and his family into the wilderness to lead them to their own land of promise. Lehi sent his sons back to Jerusalem to obtain the record of the law and the prophets, the Lord having to deliver the possessor of the records into their hands. Nephi, Lehi's son, wrote that -

I remembered the words of the Lord which he spake unto me in the wilderness, saying that: Inasmuch as thy seed shall keep my commandments, they shall prosper in the land of promise. Yea, and I also thought that they could not keep the commandments of the Lord according to the law of Moses, save they should have the law. And I also knew that the law was engraven upon the plates of brass. And again, I knew that the Lord had delivered Laban into my hands for this cause—that I might obtain the records according to his commandments. (1 Nephi 4:14–17)

Once in the land the Lord led them to, Nephi wrote:

And we did observe to keep the judgments, and the statutes, and the commandments of the Lord in all things, according to the law of Moses. And the Lord was with us; and we did prosper exceedingly; for we did sow seed, and we did reap again in abundance. And we began to raise flocks, and herds, and animals of every kind. (2 Nephi 5:10–11)

A later record keeper wrote that -

. . . two hundred years had passed away, and the people of Nephi had waxed strong in the land. They observed to keep the law of Moses and the sabbath day holy unto the Lord. And they profaned not; neither did they blaspheme. And the laws of the land were exceedingly strict. (Jarom 1:5)

Later record keepers wrote that -

. . . it came to pass that after Mosiah had done as his father had commanded him, and had made a proclamation throughout all the land, that the people gathered themselves together throughout all the land, that they might go up to the temple to hear the words which king

Benjamin should speak unto them. And there were a great number, even so many that they did not number them; for they had multiplied exceedingly and waxed great in the land. And they also took of the firstlings of their flocks, that they might offer sacrifice and burnt offerings according to the law of Moses; And also that they might give thanks to the Lord their God, who had brought them out of the land of Jerusalem, and who had delivered them out of the hands of their enemies, and had appointed just men to be their teachers, and also a just man to be their king, who had established peace in the land of Zarahemla, and who had taught them to keep the commandments of God, that they might rejoice and be filled with love towards God and all men. (Mosiah 2:1–4)

But they had fallen into great errors, for they would not observe to keep the commandments of God, and his statutes, according to the law of Moses. Neither would they observe the performances of the church, to continue in prayer and supplication to God daily, that they might not enter into temptation. (Alma 31:9–10)

And now it came to pass . . . the Nephites did still remain in wickedness, yea, in great wickedness, while the Lamanites did observe strictly to keep the commandments of God, according to the law of Moses. (Helaman 13:1)

And I would that ye should behold that the more part of them are in the path of their duty, and they do walk circumspectly before God, and they do observe to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments according to the law of Moses. (Helaman 15:5)

Part Two: How Differently Did the Nephites Live the Law of Moses as Compared to the Jews?

The record that became the Book of Mormon was written in the 400's AD – long after the Law was fulfilled and the Gospel of Christ was accepted by the people. Therefore, how they kept the Law of Moses is not detailed. But, we have clues!

There was no Talmud or Jewish rabbinical law among the Nephites, unless they had created an equivalent. Therefore, they did not have the thousands and thousands of laws teaching them “how to” live the Law of Moses. It is of note that the Mortal Jesus never broke the Law of Moses as contained in the Torah; the five books of Moses – but He sure wreaked havoc on the rabbinical law and the Talmud.

The Book of Mormon people had no knowledge of the history of the Babylonian Exile and the Return, as they occurred after Lehi and his company left Jerusalem. Therefore, they had no knowledge of Daniel's courage or of Queen Esther saving her people – therefore they would not have had the festival of Purim to commemorate Esther's courage.

Even though the word *synagogue* is used over twenty times in the Book of Mormon, synagogues as used in the New Testament and as known today had their genesis in Babylon during the Exile; Book

of Mormon synagogues could have been completely different with different purposes and practices.

The Book of Mormon people had no knowledge of the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem after the Exile or of Nehemiah rebuilding the walls of the city and reading the Law to the people. There was no record of the prophet Malachi – all this was after Lehi and his company left for a new world.

The Maccabean Revolt against the Greek occupation would not have been known among the Book of Mormon peoples; hence no festival of Hanukah.

The factions of the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Scribes all formed after the return from Exile; they would have been unknown to the Book of Mormon peoples.

What do we know about how they lived the law? We know they offered sacrifice (Mosiah 2:1–4). We know they kept the Sabbath (Jarom 1:5, Mosiah 13:16–19). We know they were taught to not be profane or to blaspheme (Jarom 1:5). We know they were taught to give thanks to the Lord their God (Mosiah 18:23).

We know that they practiced the ordinance of circumcision (Moroni 8:8) until the Law was fulfilled. Let's discuss this one for a moment to see that their ordinance was different than what we know today.

There are scholars who believe that there has been a change from the circumcision introduced to Abraham as the mark of the covenant. They claim that the token introduced to Abraham - *Milah* - consisted of removing only enough of the foreskin that only the tip of the *glans penis* (commonly referred to, the 'head') showed.¹ According to these scholars, the ordinance remained unchanged until the Hellenic Period in the Holy Land - 300 BC - AD 1 (300 BCE – 1 CE). During this time, the Greeks made a strong push to convert Jews to their lifestyle and gods. Jews who converted to the Hellenistic lifestyle would blister the ends of their foreskin so as to appear uncircumcised – something that would be all but impossible with the complete circumcision known today.

During the Maccabean Revolt, the circumcision we know today - *Periah*; the complete removal of the foreskin - was forced by the Maccabees upon all male Jews upon pain of death. This way there could be no blistering the end of the skin to “erase” the mark of the covenant.

If this is true, then the Book of Mormon peoples would have only known the partial removal of the foreskin as the circumcision the Lord had commanded; they would not have known the complete removal we know today.

Part Three: Where Did the Law of Moses Point them?

Lehi and his son Nephi had visions of the future of their people as well as the future of the House of Israel. Part of this shared vision was the future mission of the Messiah – whom the English translation of the Book of Mormon called by the name of Jesus and the Greek title of Christ. After both this vision and then quoting the prophet Isaiah to his people, Nephi taught that the Law of Moses was given to point the people towards the upcoming mission of Christ to redeem mankind by atoning for the sins of all men and women:

And now I, Nephi, write more of the words of Isaiah, for my soul delighteth in his words.
For I will liken his words unto my people, and I will send them forth unto all my children,

¹ Edward Wallerstein, 'Circumcision: An American Health Fallacy (New York: Springer Publishing CO, 1980) page 158

for he verily saw my Redeemer, even as I have seen him. And my brother, Jacob, also has seen him as I have seen him; wherefore, I will send their words forth unto my children to prove unto them that my words are true. Wherefore, by the words of three, God hath said, I will establish my word. Nevertheless, God sendeth more witnesses, and he proveth all his words. Behold, my soul delighteth in proving unto my people the truth of the coming of Christ; for, for this end hath the law of Moses been given; and all things which have been given of God from the beginning of the world, unto man, are the typifying of him. And also my soul delighteth in the covenants of the Lord which he hath made to our fathers; yea, my soul delighteth in his grace, and in his justice, and power, and mercy in the great and eternal plan of deliverance from death. (2 Nephi 11:2–5)

For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children, and also our brethren, to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God; for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do. And, notwithstanding we believe in Christ, we keep the law of Moses, and look forward with steadfastness unto Christ, until the law shall be fulfilled. For, for this end was the law given And now behold, I say unto you that the right way is to believe in Christ, and deny him not; and Christ is the Holy One of Israel; wherefore ye must bow down before him, and worship him with all your might, mind, and strength, and your whole soul; and if ye do this ye shall in nowise be cast out. And, inasmuch as it shall be expedient, ye must keep the performances and ordinances of God until the law shall be fulfilled which was given unto Moses. (2 Nephi 25:23-25, 29–30)

Jacob, the above-mentioned brother of Nephi and teacher of the people, wrote -

Behold, they believed in Christ and worshiped the Father in his name, and also we worship the Father in his name. And for this intent we keep the law of Moses, it pointing our souls to him; and for this cause it is sanctified unto us for righteousness, even as it was accounted unto Abraham in the wilderness to be obedient unto the commands of God in offering up his son Isaac, which is a similitude of God and his Only Begotten Son. Wherefore, we search the prophets, and we have many revelations and the spirit of prophecy; and having all these witnesses we obtain a hope, and our faith becometh unshaken, insomuch that we truly can command in the name of Jesus and the very trees obey us, or the mountains, or the waves of the sea. (Jacob 4:5–6)

A later record keeper recorded that -

. . . it came to pass that the prophets of the Lord did threaten the people of Nephi, according to the word of God, that if they did not keep the commandments, but should fall into transgression, they should be destroyed from off the face of the land. Wherefore, the prophets, and the priests, and the teachers, did labor diligently, exhorting with all long-suffering the people to diligence; teaching the law of Moses, and the intent for which it was given; persuading them to look forward unto the Messiah, and believe in him to come as though he already was. And after this manner did they teach them. And it came to pass

that by so doing they kept them from being destroyed upon the face of the land; for they did prick their hearts with the word, continually stirring them up unto repentance. (Jarom 1:10–12)

The Book of Mormon teaches that the Law of Moses was given to teach the Children of Israel that salvation would come through the mission of redemption and atonement that would be carried out by the mortal Messiah. The sacrifices for forgiveness and the offerings on the holy days pointed them to the future mission of the Messiah as it was carried out in the final days of Christ's mortal ministry.

And the Lord God hath sent his holy prophets among all the children of men, to declare these things to every kindred, nation, and tongue, that thereby whosoever should believe that Christ should come, the same might receive remission of their sins, and rejoice with exceedingly great joy, even as though he had already come among them. Yet the Lord God saw that his people were a stiffnecked people, and he appointed unto them a law, even the law of Moses. And many signs, and wonders, and types, and shadows showed he unto them, concerning his coming; and also holy prophets spake unto them concerning his coming; and yet they hardened their hearts, and understood not that the law of Moses availeth nothing except it were through the atonement of his [the LORD God's] blood. (Mosiah 3:13–15)

The prophet Abinadi stood before the wicked priests of a wicked king and proclaimed:

. . . Are you priests, and pretend to teach this people, and to understand the spirit of prophesying, and yet desire to know of me what these things mean? I say unto you, wo be unto you for perverting the ways of the Lord! For if ye understand these things ye have not taught them; therefore, ye have perverted the ways of the Lord. Ye have not applied your hearts to understanding; therefore, ye have not been wise. Therefore, what teach ye this people?

And they said: We teach the law of Moses.

And again he said unto them: If ye teach the law of Moses why do ye not keep it? Why do ye set your hearts upon riches? Why do ye commit whoredoms and spend your strength with harlots, yea, and cause this people to commit sin, that the Lord has cause to send me to prophesy against this people, yea, even a great evil against this people? Know ye not that I speak the truth? Yea, ye know that I speak the truth; and you ought to tremble before God.

And it shall come to pass that ye shall be smitten for your iniquities, for ye have said that ye teach the law of Moses. And what know ye concerning the law of Moses? Doth salvation come by the law of Moses? What say ye?

And they answered and said that salvation did come by the law of Moses.

But now Abinadi said unto them: I know if ye keep the commandments of God ye shall be saved; yea, if ye keep the commandments which the Lord delivered unto Moses in the mount of Sinai, saying: I am the Lord thy God, who hath brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other God before me. Thou

shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing in heaven above, or things which are in the earth beneath.

Now Abinadi said unto them, Have ye done all this? I say unto you, Nay, ye have not. And have ye taught this people that they should do all these things? I say unto you, Nay, ye have not. . . .

And now, ye remember that I said unto you: Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of things which are in heaven above, or which are in the earth beneath, or which are in the water under the earth. And again: Thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them; for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generations of them that hate me; And showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work; But the seventh day, the sabbath of the Lord thy God, thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is; wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.

Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee. Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his man-servant, nor his maid-servant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbor's.

And it came to pass that after Abinadi had made an end of these sayings that he said unto them: Have ye taught this people that they should observe to do all these things for to keep these commandments? I say unto you, Nay; for if ye had, the Lord would not have caused me to come forth and to prophesy evil concerning this people.

And now ye have said that salvation cometh by the law of Moses. I say unto you that it is expedient that ye should keep the law of Moses as yet; but I say unto you, that the time shall come when it shall no more be expedient to keep the law of Moses. And moreover, I say unto you, that salvation doth not come by the law alone; and were it not for the atonement, which God [Jehovah, the god of Israel] himself shall make for the sins and iniquities of his people, that they must unavoidably perish, notwithstanding the law of Moses.

And now I say unto you that it was expedient that there should be a law given to the children of Israel, yea, even a very strict law; for they were a stiffnecked people, quick to do iniquity, and slow to remember the Lord [Jehovah] their God; Therefore there was a law given them, yea, a law of performances and of ordinances, a law which they were to observe strictly from day to day, to keep them in remembrance of God and their duty towards him. But behold, I say unto you, that all these things were types of things to come.

And now, did they understand the law? I say unto you, Nay, they did not all

understand the law; and this because of the hardness of their hearts; for they understood not that there could not any man be saved except it were through the redemption of God [the redeeming sacrifice the Lord would perform in mortality]. For behold, did not Moses prophesy unto them concerning the coming of the Messiah, and that God [Jehovah] should redeem his people? Yea, and even all the prophets who have prophesied ever since the world began—have they not spoken more or less concerning these things?

Have they not said that God [Jehovah, the god of Israel] himself should come down among the children of men, and take upon him the form of man, and go forth in mighty power upon the face of the earth? Yea, and have they not said also that he should bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, and that he, himself, should be oppressed and afflicted? (Mosiah 12:25–37; 13:12–35; notes in brackets for clarification)

Therefore, if ye teach the law of Moses, also teach that it is a shadow of those things which are to come - Teach them that redemption cometh through Christ the Lord, who is the very Eternal Father [*father* in the sense that He gave the law, administered it, and fulfilled it]. Amen. (Mosiah 16:14–15; note in brackets for clarification)

Although forgiveness for sins could and would be granted by Deity as His children repented and turned from their sins, redemption and salvation on an eternal scale came only when the Messiah came to earth as a man and offered Himself as the last, great sacrifice – His Father's Passover Lamb; our Father's Lamb of Atonement – to suffer for our sins, errors, and shortcomings; to *cover* for them with His redeeming sacrifice. The sacrifices and ordinances of the Law of Moses all pointed to this one moment in human history when a God came down and gave His life for us.

Yea, and they did keep the law of Moses; for it was expedient that they should keep the law of Moses as yet, for it was not all fulfilled. But notwithstanding the law of Moses, they did look forward to the coming of Christ, considering that the law of Moses was a type of his coming, and believing that they must keep those outward performances until the time that he should be revealed unto them. Now they did not suppose that salvation came by the law of Moses; but the law of Moses did serve to strengthen their faith in Christ; and thus they did retain a hope through faith, unto eternal salvation, relying upon the spirit of prophecy, which spake of those things to come. (Alma 25:15–16)

Yea, and the people did observe to keep the commandments of the Lord; and they were strict in observing the ordinances of God, according to the law of Moses; for they were taught to keep the law of Moses until it should be fulfilled. (Alma 30:3)

Therefore, it is expedient that there should be a great and last sacrifice, and then shall there be, or it is expedient there should be, a stop to the shedding of blood; then shall the law of Moses be fulfilled; yea, it shall be all fulfilled, every jot and tittle, and none shall have passed away. And behold, this is the whole meaning of the law, every whit pointing to that great and last sacrifice; and that great and last sacrifice will be the Son of God, yea, infinite and eternal. (Alma 34:13–14)

Part Four: The Law of Moses was Completed and Fulfilled with Christ's Atonement

Book of Mormon prophets prophesied of the coming of the Messiah. They prophesied of the signs in the heavens that would announce that He was born in the old country – in the 'Land of Jerusalem.' Many believed; many more did not. When this event happened, Many, many were converted. The Book of Mormon tells us that in the wake of this conversion, -

. . . there were no contentions, save it were a few that began to preach, endeavoring to prove by the scriptures that it was no more expedient to observe the law of Moses. Now in this thing they did err, having not understood the scriptures. But it came to pass that they soon became converted, and were convinced of the error which they were in, for it was made known unto them that the law was not yet fulfilled, and that it must be fulfilled in every whit; yea, the word came unto them that it must be fulfilled; yea, that one jot or tittle should not pass away till it should all be fulfilled; therefore in this same year were they brought to a knowledge of their error and did confess their faults. (3 Nephi 1:24–25)

Upon the death of Christ in the 'Land of Jerusalem,' prophesied-of calamities hit the Book of Mormon peoples with all the destruction Nature could throw at them. For three hours, Nature rebelled in a way unparalleled in written history. Following that, there were three days of thick, overpowering darkness. During the darkness, a voice was heard from the heavens. Among other things, that voice proclaimed -

Behold, I am Jesus Christ the Son of God. I created the heavens and the earth, and all things that in them are. I was with the Father from the beginning. I am in the Father, and the Father in me; and in me hath the Father glorified his name. I came unto my own, and my own received me not. And the scriptures concerning my coming are fulfilled. And as many as have received me, to them have I given to become the sons of God; and even so will I to as many as shall believe on my name, for behold, by me redemption cometh, and in me is the law of Moses fulfilled. I am the light and the life of the world. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. And ye shall offer up unto me no more the shedding of blood; yea, your sacrifices and your burnt offerings shall be done away, for I will accept none of your sacrifices and your burnt offerings. And ye shall offer for a sacrifice unto me a broken heart and a contrite spirit. And whoso cometh unto me with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, him will I baptize with fire and with the Holy Ghost, even as the Lamanites, because of their faith in me at the time of their conversion, were baptized with fire and with the Holy Ghost, and they knew it not. Behold, I have come unto the world to bring redemption unto the world, to save the world from sin. Therefore, whoso repenteth and cometh unto me as a little child, him will I receive, for of such is the kingdom of God.

Behold, for such I have laid down my life, and have taken it up again; therefore repent, and come unto me ye ends of the earth, and be saved.(3 Nephi 9:15–22)

At the end of that year, many people were gathered to the temple in the Land of Bountiful. The Resurrected Jesus appeared to them and taught them His gospel. He invited them to come forward to see and feel the nail prints in His hands and feet. He healed their sick. He blessed the children.

The Book of Mormon records:

And now it came to pass that when Jesus had ended these sayings he cast his eyes round about on the multitude, and said unto them: Behold, ye have heard the things which I taught before I ascended to my Father; therefore, whoso remembereth these sayings of mine and doeth them, him will I raise up at the last day.

And it came to pass that when Jesus had said these words he perceived that there were some among them who marveled, and wondered what he would concerning the law of Moses; for they understood not the saying that old things had passed away, and that all things had become new. And he said unto them: Marvel not that I said unto you that old things had passed away, and that all things had become new. Behold, I say unto you that the law is fulfilled that was given unto Moses. Behold, I am he that gave the law, and I am he who covenanted with my people Israel; therefore, the law in me is fulfilled, for I have come to fulfil the law; therefore it hath an end.

Behold, I do not destroy the prophets, for as many as have not been fulfilled in me, verily I say unto you, shall all be fulfilled. And because I said unto you that old things have passed away, I do not destroy that which hath been spoken concerning things which are to come. For behold, the covenant which I have made with my people is not all fulfilled; but the law which was given unto Moses hath an end in me. Behold, I am the law, and the light. Look unto me, and endure to the end, and ye shall live; for unto him that endureth to the end will I give eternal life. Behold, I have given unto you the commandments; therefore keep my commandments. And this is the law and the prophets, for they truly testified of me. (3 Nephi 15:1–10)

And they did not walk any more after the performances and ordinances of the law of Moses; but they did walk after the commandments which they had received from their Lord and their God, continuing in fasting and prayer, and in meeting together oft both to pray and to hear the word of the Lord. (4 Nephi 1:12)

Listen to the words of Christ, your Redeemer, your Lord and your God. Behold, I came into the world not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance; the whole need no physician, but they that are sick; wherefore, little children are whole, for they are not capable of committing sin; wherefore the curse of Adam is taken from them in me, that it hath no power over them; and the law of circumcision is done away in me. (Moroni 8:8)