

Session 3

Who Was Required to Do What?

Series: Living The Torah / Dr. Randy White

“The Law was not given to angels, but to men—each according to his station, each according to his duty.”

—*Midrash Rabbah, Exodus 30:9*

1.1 The Principle of Differentiated Obligation

The Law’s Internal Structure

- The Torah assigns distinct commands to different groups within Israel.
- Obligations depend on birth, gender, office, and circumstance.
- No one was expected to obey all laws; each fulfilled a defined sphere of obedience.
- Deuteronomy 29:10–13 demonstrates the inclusion of all classes—men, women, children, servants, and strangers—each with fitting responsibilities.

Functional Diversity within Covenant Life

- Priests: maintain holiness through sacrificial service and instruction.
- Men: lead households, represent families in worship, and serve in civic life.
- Women: preserve purity, nurture family life, and maintain domestic holiness.
- Kings and Judges: uphold justice and govern in accordance with Torah.
- Obedience is both individual and collective; covenant faithfulness is a shared endeavor.

1.2 General Obligations of All Israel

Covenant Loyalty and Exclusive Worship

- Worship the LORD alone (Exodus 20:2–3; Deuteronomy 6:4–5).

- Reject idolatry, blasphemy, and false prophecy (Deuteronomy 13:1–5; Deuteronomy 17:2–7).
- Observe national worship and appointed feasts (Leviticus 23:1–3; Deuteronomy 16:9–15).

Justice and Civic Responsibility

- Establish judges in every city (Deuteronomy 16:18–20).
- Keep moral law: no murder, adultery, theft, false witness, or coveting (Exodus 20:13–17).
- Practice neighborly justice—return lost property, help with burdens, build safe dwellings (Exodus 23:4–5; Deuteronomy 22:1–8).

Social and Humane Conduct

- Show mercy in daily acts: send away the mother bird before taking her young (Deuteronomy 22:6–7).
- Leave field corners for the poor and stranger (Leviticus 19:9–10).
- Maintain honest weights and measures (Deuteronomy 25:13–16).

Ritual Cleanliness in Common Life

- Distinguish between clean and unclean in food and contact (Leviticus 11–15).
- Maintain ceremonial purity in ordinary living as a reminder of God’s holiness.

Sabbath and Sacred Time

- Keep the weekly Sabbath—rest for all, including servants and strangers (Exodus 20:8–11; Deuteronomy 5:12–15).
- Observe feast days and holy convocations with cessation from work (Leviticus 23:3–8, 21, 24–25, 27, 35–36).

Dietary Holiness

- Eat only clean animals (Leviticus 11; Deuteronomy 14:3–21).
- Abstain from blood consumption (Leviticus 17:10–14).

Covenant Accountability

- National blessings and curses tied to obedience (Deuteronomy 27–28).
- Public reading and affirmation of the Law bind all Israel (Deuteronomy 27:11–26).

1.3 Obligations of Men

Headship and Representation

- Teach Torah to household (Deuteronomy 6:6–7; Exodus 13:8–9).

- Attend three annual pilgrimage feasts (Exodus 23:14–17; Deuteronomy 16:16).
- Represent household in sacrificial worship—laying hands on offerings (Leviticus 1:4).
- Redeem firstborn sons and animals (Exodus 13:12–15; Numbers 18:15–16).
- Fulfill vows made to the LORD (Numbers 30:2).
- Participate in covenant assemblies (Exodus 24:1–11; Deuteronomy 29:10–13).

Moral and Civic Integrity

- Serve as witnesses and judges (Deuteronomy 19:15–21; Deuteronomy 16:18–20).
- Conduct legal matters in the city gate (Deuteronomy 21:19; Deuteronomy 25:7–9).
- Uphold justice to prevent corporate guilt (Joshua 7:1–12).
- Enlist for military defense (Numbers 1:2–3; Deuteronomy 20:5–7).
- Conduct business ethically—fair weights, prompt payment, honest lending (Leviticus 19:35–36; Deuteronomy 24:14–15; Deuteronomy 23:19–20).

Agricultural and Vocational Responsibilities

- Observe tithes, firstfruits, and sabbatical rest of the land (Leviticus 19:9–10; Leviticus 25:1–7; Deuteronomy 26:1–11).
- Conduct labor honestly across all trades—farming, commerce, craftsmanship.

1.4 Obligations of Women

Covenant Participation and Distinction

- Included fully under covenant accountability (Deuteronomy 29:10–13).
- Not required but permitted to attend pilgrimage feasts (1 Samuel 1:7–23).
- Central role in maintaining household faithfulness and moral strength.

Domestic and Moral Responsibilities

- Maintain holiness in home and family (Proverbs 31:10–31).
- Uphold moral law equally with men—faithfulness, honesty, purity (Leviticus 20:10–16; Deuteronomy 13:6–10).

Ritual and Purity Regulations

- Offer purification sacrifice after childbirth (Leviticus 12:1–8).
- Observe temporary separation during menstruation (Leviticus 15:19–24).
- Present offerings for irregular discharges (Leviticus 15:25–30).
- Accessible offerings—turtledoves or pigeons—during visits to the sanctuary (Leviticus 12:8).

Vows and Spiritual Commitments

- Women may vow to the LORD, subject to household confirmation (Numbers 30:3–16).
- Widows and unmarried women hold full authority over their vows.

Legal Protections and Economic Rights

- Inherit in absence of sons (Numbers 27:1–8).
- Protected against unjust divorce (Deuteronomy 24:1–4).
- Shielded from slander and exploitation (Exodus 22:16–17; Deuteronomy 22:13–19).
- Widows specially protected by divine warning (Exodus 22:22–24).

1.5 Priests and Levites

The Priestly Vocation

- Restricted to sons of Aaron (Numbers 18:1–7).
- Perform daily offerings and maintain altar fire (Exodus 29:38–42; Leviticus 6:12–13).
- Burn incense and tend lamps (Exodus 30:7–8).
- Maintain showbread continually (Leviticus 24:5–9).
- Observe stricter holiness standards—marriage, mourning, defilement (Leviticus 21:1–12).

The Levitical Duty and Support

- Assist priests and transport sanctuary furnishings (Numbers 4:15–33).
- Receive tithes from Israel and give a tenth to priests (Numbers 18:21–28).
- Inhabit 48 Levitical cities as teachers and judges (Numbers 35:1–8; Deuteronomy 33:10).

Rotations and Service Structure

- Priests serve in twenty-four divisions (1 Chronicles 24:1–19; Luke 1:5,8–9).
- Levites rotate duties as musicians, gatekeepers, and assistants (1 Chronicles 23:28–32).

Distinct Ritual Obligations

- Wear consecrated garments and follow anointing rites (Exodus 28–29).
- Maintain perpetual offerings and temple purity.
- Levites possess no inheritance; the LORD is their inheritance (Deuteronomy 10:8–9; Numbers 18:20).

Economic Realities of the Levites

- Dependent on national tithes (Numbers 18:21–24).
- Economic hardship during national apostasy (Nehemiah 13:10; 2 Chronicles 31:4–5).

- Skilled in music, craftsmanship, and record-keeping (1 Chronicles 26:20–32).

1.6 Kings and Judges

Establishment of Rulers within the Covenant

- Kingship anticipated yet restricted by Torah (Deuteronomy 17:14).
- Judges appointed in every city for just governance (Deuteronomy 16:18–20).
- Kings and judges act as covenantal officers under divine law.

The King’s Unique Legal Obligations

- Must be an Israelite, not a foreigner (Deuteronomy 17:15).
- Forbid accumulation of horses, wives, or gold (Deuteronomy 17:16–17).
- Required to write and read a personal copy of the Law daily (Deuteronomy 17:18–19).
- Govern in humility and obedience (Deuteronomy 17:20).

The Role of Judges and Judicial Structure

- Administer law locally (Deuteronomy 16:18).
- Refer hard cases to priests and higher judges (Deuteronomy 17:8–9).
- Obey judicial rulings as binding covenant decisions.

1.7 Implications

Torah as Ordered Covenant, Not Burden of Impossibility

- Each Israelite fulfilled a limited role within collective obedience.
- Torah organized national holiness through functional distinction.

The “613 Commandments” Misunderstanding

- The 613-count wrongly assumes universal application.
- Many commands are role-specific or mutually exclusive.
- Torah expected faithfulness in one’s sphere, not universal performance.