

Exodus 20

(Exodus 19:12) You shall set bounds for the people all around, saying, 'Take heed to yourselves *that* you do *not* go up to the mountain or touch its base. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death.

Before the Law was given, there was a hedge set around the Holy Mountain of God. The message was clear: God is Infinitely Holy and is separated from his Creation because of their sin:

(Isaiah 59:2) But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden *His* face from you, So that He will not hear.

Implicit in this is a lesson that will come in the form of a law: The Uncreated God cannot be fashioned into any idol made by the hands of man – it is an affront to His Holiness and Glory!

(Exodus 19:16-19) Then it came to pass on the third day, in the morning, that there were thunderings and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain; and the sound of the trumpet was very loud, so that all the people who *were* in the camp trembled. (17) And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. (18) Now Mount Sinai *was* completely in smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire. Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. (19) And when the blast of the trumpet sounded long and became louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him by voice.

If there was no fanfare, then the people would not have understood that this God was incredibly different than anything else they experienced. And the smoke would have shield Him from human eyes.

Exodus 19:20-25 Then the LORD came down upon Mount Sinai, on the top of the mountain. And the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. (21) And the LORD said to Moses, "Go down and warn the people, lest they break through to gaze at the LORD, and many of them perish. (22) Also let the priests who come near the LORD consecrate themselves, lest the LORD break out against them." (23) But Moses said to the LORD, "The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai; for You warned us, saying, 'Set bounds around the mountain and consecrate it.'" (24) Then the LORD said to him, "Away! Get down and then come up, you and Aaron with you. But do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the LORD, lest He break out against them." (25) So Moses went down to the people and spoke to them.

This was the last thing God spoke to Moses before declaring the Law to the people. God knew the minds and hearts of the people, so He told Moses to go back down and make sure that the priests were clean and the people were separated by the hedge. Moses reminded Him that He had already warned the people and built a hedge as instructed. I think Moses was perhaps a bit naïve in trusting the people!

(Exodus 20:1) And God **spoke** all these words, saying:

(Exodus 20:2) "I *am* the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house

of bondage.

The LORD sets up the initial understanding that the Children of Israel must have in order to accept His word. You were ransomed, you were redeemed and you are mine. I brought you out of Egypt and out of the house of bondage! I did this for the sake of My covenant with your Fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob! You once belonged to Pharaoh, the cruel taskmaster who had no love or compassion towards you. But their God was not like the gods of Egypt or the gods of Canaan!

Deuteronomy 7:7-9 The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; (8) but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. (9) "Therefore know that the LORD your God, He *is* God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments;

(Exodus 20:3) "You shall have no other gods before Me. **(Exodus 20:4)** "You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness *of anything* that *is* in heaven above, or that *is* in the earth beneath, or that *is* in the water under the earth;

The first of 4 commands regarding God. He is the Only God; He is the Creator of universe -- the heavens and the earth and all it contains.

This command should be life-changing in itself. If we would only understand that we are created beings and not some random creation of impersonal and lifeless particles, it would go a long way in changing our attitude towards our Maker. No matter how much people are anti-evolution, they still have difficulty understanding that they are not the products of reproduction of their parents but the gracious Father who declared that you are "fearfully and wonderfully" made by the One who formed you in the womb and knew you before you were born! (Psalm 139:14; Jeremiah 1:5); Therefore, does He as a creator have the right to your life as the potter to the clay? The issue is, we say we are children of God but at like we are independent of Him and what He desires for our lives. This is a deep humility and is not easily obtained!

This is why Scriptures are so critical to our "right" thinking!

Isaiah 40:22-26 *It is* He who sits above the circle of the earth, And its inhabitants *are* like grasshoppers, Who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, And spreads them out like a tent to dwell in. (23) He brings the princes to nothing; He makes the judges of the earth useless. (24) Scarcely shall they be planted, Scarcely shall they be sown, Scarcely shall their stock take root in the earth, When He will also blow on them, And they will wither, And the whirlwind will take them away like stubble. (25) "To whom then will you liken Me, Or *to whom* shall I be equal?" says the Holy One. (26) Lift up your eyes on high, And see who has created these *things*, Who brings out their host by number; He calls them all by name, By the greatness of His might And the strength of *His* power; Not one is missing.

Luke 12:6-7 "Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God. (7) But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

Let this command sink deep into your hearts. Let it break up the fallow and hard ground. Let it humble you. No other so called god, formed in the imagination of the mind for with the hands of men can bring and sustain life.

Acts 17:24-29 God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. (25) Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. (26) And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, (27) so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; (28) for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.' (29) Therefore, since **we are the offspring of God**, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and **man's devising**.

(Exodus 20:5) you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth *generations* of those who hate Me, (Exodus 20:6) but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

We don't relate well to the idea of bowing down to an idol. It seems foreign to the modern mind. But idolatry has not been eradicated from the earth and will not be until the New Heaven and New Earth are created by God. And while we might not bow the knee of our hearts to a stone idol, have we done so to other things we hold in high esteem? Like our wisdom, intelligence, our spirituality, our money, our successes, and our pet doctrines? Have any of us bowed down to alcohol, drugs, food and other addictions? Have any of us felt so defeated by our own sin that we allowed it to direct our paths because we believed that our weaknesses were too powerful for God?

These are questions to ask ourselves and hopefully, we will understand that we have forsaken our God for things or attitudes or thoughts or feelings we experience in this fallen world – instead of the God of Life who is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow! The God whose mercy endures forever; the God whose grace and love are part of the very essence of Who He is and not just what He does; the God of Forgiveness but Justice who provided a perfect salvation to all who call on His Name!

(Exodus 20:7) "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold *him* guiltless who takes His name in vain.

Because of Who He is, we should never use His Holy Name for any other purpose than for praise and worship. We should not use His name in any oath or vow. The idea behind the word "vain" is idolatry. We don't use God's Name as if His Name were a common thing. It's an

exalted, glorious, and almighty Name.

(Exodus 20:8) “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. (Exodus 20:9) Six days you shall labor and do all your work, (Exodus 20:10) but the seventh day *is* the Sabbath of the LORD your God. *In it* you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who *is* within your gates. (Exodus 20:11) For *in* six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that *is* in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.

God asked that we all take 1 day a week to rest from our labors and in effect, trust Him for our provisions and to worship and praise Him for Who He is. Traditionally, the Sabbath is Friday at sundown to Saturday at sundown. Traditional Jews and even many Messianic Jews treat this as a sacred Commandment never to be violated.

So, we know where the idea of a 7-day week came from: Genesis 1. But how do we know exactly what day was the Sabbath, that is, how did Saturday become the Sabbath?

I asked various forms of this question to no avail. It seems that from our modern, historical perspective, the first calendar may have been put together by the Sumerians about 2000BC and the Babylonians adopting it about the 1600 BC. But ALL dates are suspect.

How did the Jews know in the time of Moses how to determine which was the 7th day? Did they believe that God created the Heavens and Earth on a Sunday, called the 1st day? There's a better understanding of the Seventh Day from Exodus:

We were first commanded to keep Shabbat in the desert shortly after we left Egypt. How did we know when to keep it? In Exodus 16, we are told that during our journey in the desert, manna fell every day except for one—the Shabbat.

Exodus 16:22-23 And so it was, on the sixth day, *that* they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for each one. And all the rulers of the congregation came and told Moses. (23) Then he said to them, "This *is what* the LORD has said: 'Tomorrow *is* a Sabbath rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD. Bake what you will bake *today*, and boil what you will boil; and lay up for yourselves all that remains, to be kept until morning.' "

So what did we eat then? A double portion fell every on the 6th so that we would have what to eat the next day as well. On that day, the people were surprised to see so much manna—double that which they had received on each of the past five days. When they came to ask Moses about this phenomenon, he revealed that the next day would be the Shabbat (day of rest) and that no manna would fall at all. They had 40 years in the desert to practice this cycle. It would be many years before names would be assigned to each day.

It's been noted that the 7-day week seems to be ingrained in every culture and not just the Jewish Culture. It appears that this *natural rhythm is one that G-d built into the world He created in seven days. According to Jewish tradition, seven is the number relating to the natural order of the world. There are seven musical notes, seven Noahide Laws for all of humanity, seven days of wedding celebrations; seven days of mourning, seven-day holidays of Sukkot and Passover and, of course, seven days of the week. The world was programmed with the number seven, for which reason all societies have universally accepted this system.*

(for those who like numbers, the 1st 5 books of the OT contain about ½ of the total number of times the word “seven” [or a word based on seven] is used. In the NT, the same ratio holds true in that the Book of Revelation contains nearly ½ of the total times the word seven is used.)

In Judaism, we are in the year 5781 which is about 219 years from the 7th millennium. They believe that it will be at this time that we are guaranteed to have achieved the redemption with the Messiah. They also believe that this 7th millennium will be a permanent Shabbat for all of creation, when we will find true rest and peace in G-d’s Presence. My editorial comment is “Oops!”.

Next set of commandments focuses on our relationships with others.

(Exodus 20:12) "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you.

This command was given here and repeated in Deuteronomy 5:16. It is repeated 6 times in the NT (2 in Matt; 2 in Mark and once in Luke; and Ephesians 6:1-3);

What does it mean to honor your mother and father? This is, given all of the tragedies seen in families, one of the most misunderstood commandments.

(Exodus 20:13) "You shall not murder. **(Exodus 20:14)** "You shall not commit adultery. **(Exodus 20:15)** "You shall not steal. **(Exodus 20:16)** "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

When it comes to others, the above 4 are obvious but considering the rates of them being performed, you’d think God just didn’t get it. But, murder, adultery, stealing, and lying have caused immeasurable grief, sadness, fear and anxiety. This has caused much strife within a family and between families.

These are the “easy” commandments that people count on when asked if they have sinned against God or anyone else. The answer for the majority is “Nope, I’m generally a good person”.

Any level of analysis of the data will quickly show that we are in trouble as a country and a world. The amount of rationalizations that are put forth to excuse oneself from doing these things range from “I had to” to “these are crimes not sins” to “shut up and don’t judge me”.

But God gave these to Israel to give to the world. Most civilized countries have their laws derived from these 4 because these are the things that cause breakdowns in families and communities and led to disorder and even anarchy when taken to extreme.

Exodus 20:17 "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that *is* your neighbor's."

Whether in the OT or NT, coveting or covetousness is nearly always presented as a very negative thing. Synonyms include: avarice, fraud, greed, extortion, love of money, lust, envy and jealousy to name a few.

In the OT-economy, you might get away with saying, “I never killed, stole, bore false witness or cheated on my wife”. But the “catch-all” commandment is “do not covet”. In a fallen world with fallen mankind, you’d be hard-pressed to say that you never desired something that wasn’t yours. Add to that the lengths you’d go to get your lust satisfied: you’d end up breaking every one of the previous 9!

There’s a certain symmetry to the order in which the laws were given. We saw that there were some laws related to our relationship with God and then there were laws related to our relationships with each other.

But there’s another symmetry that I like:

- The First Law: there are to be no other gods than the LORD GOD
- The Last Law of Coveting which in effect says, “I’m God and I’ll do what I think is right in my own eyes to get what I desire”. This, in turn, is a violation of the First Law.

Next week, we will return to discuss why the Law was given from several perspectives and certainly understand it in the New Covenant/Church Age. Why did Paul write that we were not under the law but under grace? Are we still held to the “moral Law” (the 10 commandments)? What is the Law of Christ? And a lot more questions and answers!