

Exodus Chapter 20 Continued

Verses 12-16

See Matt. 19:18-19; Mark 10:19; Luke 18:20.

Commandment Number Five

Exodus 20:12 "Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee."

“Honor thy father and thy mother”:

The key to societal stability is reverence and respect for parents and their authority.

The appended promise primarily related the command to life in the Promised Land and reminded the Israelite of the program God had set up for him and his people.

Within the borders of their territory, God expected them not to tolerate juvenile delinquency, which at heart is overt disrespect for parents and authority.

Severe consequences, namely capital punishment, could apply (Deut. 21:18-21).

One of the reasons for the Babylonian exile was a failure to honor parents (Ezek. 22:7, 15).

The Apostle Paul individualized this national promise when he applied the truth to believers in his day (Matt. 15:4; Mark 7:10; Eph. 6:1-3).

The fifth commandment means to treat one’s “father and ... mother” with dignity and respect.

The idea is the opposite of the term in vain (in 20:7).

Paul notes that this commandment is the first one with a promise (Eph. 6:2):

“That thy days may be long upon the land”:

As such, it ought to inform and encourage God’s people today to respect age and care for the elderly, whether or not they are relatives (21:15, 17; e.g., Lev. 19:3, 32; Deut. 27:16; Prov. 1:8; 16:31; 20:20; 23:22; 23:17).

This is the first Commandment with a promise attached to it.

This promise of long life is on the condition of honoring your mother and father.

In the Old Testament, it was a serious offense to rebel against your parents.

A rebellious child was to be taken to the edge of the city and stoned to death.

You see, to honor parents was very high on God's list of priorities for His people.

Verses 13-15

See Romans 13:9.

Commandment Number Six:

Exodus 20:13 "Thou shalt not kill."

“Kill”:

The irreversible nature of the divinely imposed sentence of death on every manslayer who killed another intentionally (21:12; Num. 35:17-21), stands without parallel in ancient Near Eastern literature and legal codes (Gen. 9:5-6).

Further, the sacredness of human life stands out in the passages dealing with unintentional manslaughter.

The accident of death still carried with it a penalty of banishment to the city of refuge until the death of the High-Priest for the one who killed, but not with intent.

Careful appraisal of the word Moses used (one of 7 different Hebrew words for killing), and one used only 47 times in the Old Testament suggests a broad translation of “to kill, slay”.

But denoting the taking of life under a legal system where he would have to answer to the stipulations of a legal code, no matter whether he killed unintentionally or intentionally.

By this command, men would be reminded and exhorted to strive after carefulness in the affairs of life so that on the person-to-person level no one would die by their hand (see the note on 21:12-14; Matt. 5:21; James 2:11).

The sixth commandment not only prohibits the unlawful taking of human life but honors the sacredness of all innocent life including that of unborn children.

The Law made provisions for self-protection (22:2), and accidental death (21:13-14).

This Commandment is speaking of premeditated murder.

The word translated here, does not mean killing in self-defense or in war, but means we must not murder people to satisfy our greed, jealousy and hate.

We read in Matthew:

Matthew 5:21-22a: "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment:" "But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment:"

1 John 3 we read an even stronger message about hate.

1 John 3:15 "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him."

There is no doubt at all that "kill" in the Sixth Commandment means premeditated or first degree murder.

Commandment Number Seven:

Exodus 20:14 "Thou shalt not commit adultery."

“Adultery”:

Applicable to both men and women, this command protected the sacredness of the marriage relationship.

God had instituted marriage at the creation of man and woman (Gen. 2:24), and had blessed it as the means of filling the earth (Gen. 1:28).

The penalty for infidelity in the marital relationship was death (Lev. 2:10).

Adultery was also referred to as “a great sin” (Gen. 20:9), and a “great evil and sin against God” (Gen. 39:9; Matt. 5:27; James 2:11).

The seventh commandment honors marriage.

“Adultery”:

This is such a serious transgression that it was a capital crime according to the Law (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22).

Jesus taught that even lustful looks may constitute betrayal (Matt. 5:27-30).

One of the meanings of this word "adultery" means apostatize.

This covers physical and spiritual adultery.

Adultery from the physical standpoint includes all sex sin.

Any sex relation (with man or woman), aside from the marriage bed is adultery.

That includes homosexuality, lesbianism, and animalism.

Jesus said, if you look upon a woman to lust after her, you have committed adultery already in your heart.

Matt. 5:28, "But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart."

You see, the heart determines whether we are good or evil as the desires of our hearts are what we are.

Commandment Number Eight:

Exodus 20:15 "Thou shalt not steal."

"Steal":

Any dishonest acquiring of another's goods or assets greatly disturbs the right to ownership of private property, which is an important principle for societal stability.

The eighth commandment respects and validates the sanctity of owning personal property.

"Thou shalt not steal" safeguards individuals as well as entire societies.

Here again we see selfishness and greed as the cause for committing this sin.

Stealing is very close to coveting.

To steal, we have to want something that does not belong to us.

The bad thing about this sin is that you hurt someone else when you commit this sin.

Commandment Number Nine:

Exodus 20:16 "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor."

"False witness":

Justice is not served by any untruthful testimony.

Practically all societies have recognized this principle and adjure all witnesses in courts to tell the truth and nothing but the truth.

The ninth commandment honors truth-telling, even to the point of prohibiting slander (23:1; Prov. 10:18; 12:17; 19:9; 24:28; Titus 3:1-2; James 4:11; 1 Pet. 2:1).

The best opportunity for justice rests on the assumption of truthfulness in sworn “witness”.

Swearing a lie in court is a favorite past time of our people today.

The sad thing about bearing false witness is that we badly damage others.

If only we would keep in mind that all of us are one big family (the family of God), we would not be going around telling things that are not true about our brothers and sisters.

The way to get to the top is not by pushing someone else down.

The way to the top is take your brothers and sisters with you.

Commandment Number Ten:

Exodus 20:17 "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that [is] thy neighbor's."

“Covet”:

The thoughts and desires of the heart do not escape attention.

A strong longing to have what another has is wrong.

This tenth command suggests that none of the previous 9 commandments are only external acts with no relation to internal thoughts (Matt. 15:19; Rom. 7:7; 13:9).

The tenth commandment is about controlling the desires of the heart.

Sinful thoughts beget sinful actions (Matt. 15:19; James 1: 14-15), so it is no surprise that covetous people often break the commandments in order to satisfy their greed.

One terrible error that is being taught today in some of our churches is picking out something that belongs to someone else and wishing it for yourself, this is coveting.

We could take a lesson from Paul in this.

Paul said, whatever condition he found himself in, he would be content.

He learned to be abased and to abound.

Phil. 4:11-13. "Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, [therewith] to be content." "I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need." "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

This coveting covers everything thy neighbor has.

Keeping up with the Joneses requires coveting.

Don't want (covet), anything that belongs to anyone else.

Verses 18-21

A fear of God motivates a desire to both obey and honor Him.

Tragically, Israel would soon lose their reverence for the LORD.

Exodus 20:18 "And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw [it], they removed, and stood afar off."

“Removed, and stood afar off”:

The people fearfully withdrew from the cluster of phenomena accompanying this theophany, this appearance of God on the mountain.

They instinctively place Moses in the position of mediator between them and God, because such was the gap between them and their holy God that they feared they were not fit to live in His presence (verse 19).

You can imagine how terrified they were at the awesomeness of God.

They were probably in a state of shock after seeing all of this and hearing a voice come from the midst of it laying down ten basic laws that they were to follow.

It was time to move back away from this mountain in fear that they might touch it and die.

Exodus 20:19 "And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die."

“Let not God speak”:

Fearing for their lives, the nation asked Moses to be their mediator (Heb. 12:18-21).

Before they were questioning whether the messages Moses gave them were truly from God or not.

Now they were so frightened by the terribleness of God, that they feared for their lives and requested Moses to represent them to God from then on.

Their opinion was: if anyone was to be killed, let it be Moses.

No more would they doubt that Moses was from God.

Exodus 20:20 "And Moses said unto the people, Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not."

Instructed not to respond to the phenomena with fear, they were also told that proper fear, i.e., awe and reverence of God, deterred sin.

Moses was telling them that a reverent fear of God was the beginning of wisdom.

This reverent fear of God would keep them from sinning.

Had they not seen this awesomeness of God on this mountain and heard His voice, they would not have been so careful not to displease Him.

Fear of God is a healthy condition.

Exodus 20:21 "And the people stood afar off, and Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God [was]."

The people still kept their distance in their camp and tents; or the heads and elders of the people having had this conversation with Moses, returned to their tents as they were bid (Deut. 5:30), and to the people in the camp, and there they continued while Moses went up to God with their request.

"And Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was":

The thick cloud (Exodus 19:9), as Jarchi interprets it, and who observes from their doctors that there were three enclosures about the divine Majesty: darkness, a cloud, and thick darkness.

And so, Moses passed through the darkness, and the cloud, to the thick darkness where Jehovah was, and where he is said to dwell when the temple was built (1 Kings 8:8).

Verses 22-26: These instructions about the fashioning of any “Altar” were not only to ensure proper worship but to prevent anything being built to look like an alluring idol.

Sacrifices, offerings, and altars were not unknown to Israel and were already part of certain worship ceremonies.

Neither the earthen nor stone altars would have even a hint of being shaped to represent something more specific.

So the restrictions on the form and the method of building would ensure the appropriateness and propriety of their worship (Leviticus Chapters 1-7 outline the Mosaic sacrifices).

Exodus 20:22 "And the LORD said unto Moses, Thus thou shalt say unto the children of Israel, Ye have seen that I have talked with you from heaven."

This is when Moses came near the thick darkness where God was.

"Thus thou shalt say unto the children of Israel":

At his return unto them, and which he was to deliver in the name of God, and as his words.

"Ye have seen that I have talked with you from heaven":

Descending from heaven on Mount Sinai in a cloud and fire, he talked with them out of the cloud and fire, and delivered to them with an audible voice the above ten commands.

The cloud and fire they saw with their eyes, and the words expressed from thence they heard with their ears.

“From heaven” may mean the air on the top of Sinai, from whence Jehovah spoke.

Moses was to remind the people that it was God who talked with them from heaven and gave them their laws to live by.

We see also, that Moses had a closeness with God that allowed him to enter the dark cloud and talk to God.

Not just this one time, but many times.

Exodus 20:23 "Ye shall not make with me gods of silver, neither shall ye make unto you gods of gold."

The expression “make with me” is unusual, but does not seem to have any peculiar force.

Gods of silver and gods of gold are specially forbidden, because it was to idolatry of this kind that the Israelites were specially inclined.

The golden calf is no isolated phenomenon.

Molten images of gods, generally of silver, sometimes of gold, were objects of worship to Israel throughout the ages which preceded the Captivity.

Jeroboam set up molten images at Dan and Bethel (1 Kings 14:9; 2 Kings 17:16).

Baal was worshipped under the semblance of a molten image (2 Chron. 28:2), as were probably Ashteroth, Chemosh, and Moloch.

The animal worship of the Egyptians had no attractions for the Hebrews; they did not offer to images of stone or marble, like the Assyrians or the Greeks.

Much less was it their habit to “bow down to stocks,” like so many of the heathen nations around them.

The “molten image,” generally completed by a certain amount of graving, was the form of idol which had most charms for them, and the more precious the material the more satisfied were they to worship it (compare Isa. 30:22; 42:17; Jer. 10:14; Hosea 13:2).

Occasionally indeed they overlaid wood or stone with plates of gold or silver, to produce an idol (Hab. 2:19).

But such images were at once less common and held in less account.

Here, we see the making of gods made of silver and gold specifically forbidden.

The children of Israel soon forgot.

Not long after this, they did this very thing that God forbade.

They made a golden calf.

Exodus 20:24-25 "An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings, and thy peace offerings, thy sheep, and thine oxen: in all places where I record my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee." "And if thou wilt make me an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stone: for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it."

“An altar of earth ... an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stone: for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it”:

At Tell Arad an Israelite temple or sanctuary or sacred precinct, much like that of the tabernacle, was discovered, dating to the tenth or eleventh century B.C.

In the outer courtyard stood an altar for burnt offerings, five cubits square (like that of the tabernacle; 27:1).

And built of earth or rubble and unhewn field stones or bricks (as here).

This tabernacle has been more specifically identified as probably a Kenites sanctuary, whose priest traced their priestly heritage back to Moses' father-in-law, Jethro (Judges 1:16).

Who was a priest of Midian and had at least some knowledge of Yahweh (18:10-12).

Finally, since it is apparently patterned after the Exodus tabernacle, this would argue for the antiquity of the Exodus tabernacle.

No markings were allowed, probably to prevent the making of images in connection with the altar itself.

The altar that the offering was made on was holy unto the LORD.

We do know that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob built an altar wherever they went and they ordinarily used stones piled one upon another.

Carvings on the stones might have caused them to get into some type of false worship.

In the building of the tabernacle we know that there was not to be the sound of a hammer, so probably noise is irreverent.

We know also, that the sacrifice of animals was already being practiced, so these people understood about sacrifice even though they had probably not practiced sacrifice while they were in Egypt.

If they worshipped God the way they should, God would be in all their places of worship.

This tells me also, if we worship God in a pleasing way, he will dwell in our churches today that carry the name of Christian.

Exodus 20:26 "Neither shalt thou go up by steps unto mine altar, that thy nakedness be not discovered thereon."

He seems to mean the steps of ladders, or others of the same nature, which could suddenly be made, and were proper for their present condition, where there was danger of the following inconvenience.

For afterwards God appointed an altar ten cubits high (2 Chron. 4:1); though some conceive they went not up to that by steps, but by an insensible ascent upon the ground raised by degrees for that purpose.

But if the priests did go up to it by steps, God provided against the indecency here mentioned, by prescribing linen breeches to them in that service.

"That thy nakedness be not discovered thereon":

For these linen breeches were not yet appointed, and the manner then and there was for men to wear long coats or gowns like women.

God would remove all appearance or occasion of immodesty, especially in sacred persons and things.

And the rather, to show his detestation of that impudence and filthiness which was very usual in some of the solemnities and worships of the heathen.

This altar it seems was to be built on the ground.

This probably had to do with modesty of the one who was carrying out the sacrifice unto the LORD.

Modesty should always be the rule whether men or women of God are involved.

They should wear modest clothing all the time, but especially in church.

Exodus Chapter 20 Continued Questions

1. What was the fifth Commandment?
2. What reward would come from keeping this Commandment?
3. What was the penalty in the Old Testament of rebellion against your parents?
4. What was the sixth Commandment?
5. What does the word "kill" mean, here?
6. Whosoever shall kill, shall be in danger of _____.
7. Those who hateth their brothers are _____.
8. What was the seventh Commandment?
9. What did this include?
10. If you look upon a woman to lust, you have committed _____.
11. What was the eighth Commandment?

12. What was the ninth Commandment?
13. If we remembered what, we would not covet?
14. What were the things we should not covet in the tenth Commandment?
15. What is a false teaching in the church today that is really coveting?
16. What was a good lesson Paul taught about coveting?
17. All the people saw the _____, _____, and the noise of the _____.
18. What did the people feel, when they saw the awesomeness of God?
19. What did they ask of Moses, because they were afraid of God?
20. Why does God want them to fear Him?
21. What is the beginning of wisdom?
22. Where did Moses draw near to, where he could talk with God?
23. Ye shalt not make ye _____ of _____ neither shall ye make unto you _____ of _____.
24. How did the children of Israel quickly sin?
25. What was the altar to be made of?
26. What kind of offerings were to be made there?
27. If they follow God's instruction, what would God do?
28. If they make the altar of stone, what kind of stone are they to use?
29. Why was it not to have steps?