

Tuesday Morning Bible Study with Ted

Exodus 20:1-20

April 6, 2021

Exodus 20:1-2. I am Yahweh your god

1. God spoke all these words, saying, 2. "I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

1. "God spoke all these words"

The emphasis of this verse is that God is the one who speaks these words, not Moses
DO YOU THINK THEY ACTUALLY HEARD THE VOICE OF GOD?

2. "I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage"

Jews regard this as the "First Word of Ten Words," because it establishes the foundation on which all the other words/commandments are based.

Christians acknowledge the foundational character of this verse, but view it as prologue and regard verse 3 as the first commandment.

In this verse, Yahweh establishes his identity and reminds them of their recent salvation history—he brought them out of Egyptian slavery.

Exodus 20:3-6. You shall have no other gods before me

3. "You shall have no other gods before me. 4. "You shall not make for yourselves an idol, nor any image of anything that is in the heavens above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: 5. you shall not bow yourself down to them, nor serve them, for I, Yahweh your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and on the fourth generation of those who hate me, 6. and showing loving kindness to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments."

3. "You shall have no other gods before me"

-- Commentaries say this does not assume monotheism.

-- The Israelites only recently left Egypt, where Egyptians worshiped many gods (Anat, Isis, Osirus, Ra, and others).

-- This commandment does not require the Israelites to believe in only one God, but requires that they put no other gods before, or in addition to Yahweh.

-- It establishes Yahweh's exclusive claim on Israel

4-5a. “You shall not make for yourselves an idol, nor any image of anything that is in the heavens above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: you shall not bow yourself down to them, nor serve them”

The combination of these two words, *idol* and *image*, make it clear that the Israelites are not to make any image of any kind that might become an object of worship.

Remember the Egyptians had images for each of their many gods, and regarded these images as objects of worship. It was something the Jews witnessed regularly.

A QUESTION FOR YOUR INPUT: Does this verse prohibit images of Yahweh?

5b. “for I, Yahweh your God, am a jealous God”

This is the first of the “for” clauses that state the reason for a particular word/commandment.

The word “jealous” might not be the best word to use here, because we usually use that word to describe an insecure person who is fearful of losing something. Yahweh is not insecure, but has intense feelings for Israel that cannot abide unfaithfulness.

YOUR THOUGHTS?

5c. “visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and on the fourth generation of those who hate me”

Some of us may find it offensive that God would punish innocent children for the sins of their parents. You can read the opposite in Ezekiel 18:2-4, where God responds to people who say that God is punishing them for their parents’ sins. God replied, “the soul who sins, he shall die.”

I believe the principle in this verse is that the actions of parents affect their children. Ungodly parents may produce ungodly children, and those ungodly children can expect to be punished for their sins.

LET’S DISCUSS THIS IN LIGHT OF ACTIONS OF PARENTS AFFECTING CHILDREN...AND VICE VERSA...

6. “and showing loving kindness to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments”

The Hebrew word for “kindness” has a variety of meanings—kindness, lovingkindness, mercy, goodness, faithfulness, or love. “

I encourage us to notice the contrast between “on the third and on the fourth generation” of verse 5c and “a thousand generations” of this verse. I think it. Implies the curse is for a relatively short time, but the blessing is for a very long time.

The connection between “love me” and “keep my commandments” suggests that the keeping of the commandments is the outward sign of our inward affection.

Exodus 20:7. You shall not take the name of Yahweh in vain

7. "You shall not take the name of Yahweh your God in vain, for Yahweh will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain."

7a. "You shall not take the name of Yahweh your God in vain"

God's character and identity are tied up in the Hebrew name "Yahweh", so using Yahweh's name to do something dishonorable would be irreverent to God's name. People are not to use Yahweh's name to give assurances that they don't intend to honor.

The Renn commentary notes, "This would include using Yahweh's name in connection with an oath sworn falsely, or using Yahweh's name in connection with any sort of deception or dishonorable activity."

I really struggle with the TV Evangelist Clergy who, I believe, use God's name in ways intended to manipulate other people.

YOUR THOUGHTS

7b. "for Yahweh will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain"

This is the second of three "for" clauses in these verses. These clauses give the reason why a person should obey the commandment. In this instance, Yahweh warns that he will not acquit anyone (or leave anyone unpunished) who misuses his name.

Exodus 20:8-11. Remember the sabbath day

*8. "Remember the Sabbath (Hebrew: *shabat*) day, to keep it holy (Hebrew: *qadosh*). 9. You shall labor six days, and do all your work, 10. but the seventh day is a Sabbath to Yahweh your God. You shall not do any work in it, you, nor your son, nor your daughter, your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your livestock, nor your stranger who is within your gates; 11. for in six days Yahweh made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day; therefore Yahweh blessed the Sabbath day, and made it holy.*

ABOUT THESE VERSES: In all three numbering systems (Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant), verses 8-11 count as one word/commandment. It is the longest of the commandments.

8a. "Remember the Sabbath day"

The Hebrew word *shabat* has more to do with stopping or ceasing than it does with resting. It has come to mean resting because the cessation of work implies resting.

8b. "to keep it holy"

The Hebrew translated here as "holy" means holy in the sense that God has set aside something or someone for a holy purpose. The sabbath is holy, because God established the sabbath as a day of rest and worship.

All holiness is derived from the holiness of God. The sabbath is holy because God made it so.

9. "You shall labor six days, and do all your work"

This verse lays the foundation for verse 10. It says there are six days to work. This implies that Yahweh has established six work days as part of the created order of things. I think it simply restricts them from working more than six days a week.

WHAT'S YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH WORK WEEKS IN AMERICA AND GLOBALLY?

10. "but the seventh day is a Sabbath to Yahweh your God. You shall not do any work in it, you, nor your son, nor your daughter, your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your livestock, nor your stranger who is within your gates"

This verse defines what is involved in remembering the sabbath day and keeping it holy. That requires refraining from working on the sabbath.

The commandment not only applies to adult Israelites, but also applies to their children, their slaves, their livestock, and any alien residents who happen to be living among them. These provisions are intended to eliminate loopholes (I think there may have been a lawyer involved in this writing.)

The Mishnah (oral law) specified thirty-nine types of work that were prohibited on the sabbath, and rabbis rendered judgments with regard to particular cases. Certain exceptions were allowed, such as acting to preserve life or to save a life.

Jesus was involved with six sabbath controversies in which he was accused of working on the sabbath. Five of these involved healings, and one involved his disciples picking grain on the sabbath.

- Luke 14:1-6. John 7:21-24).
- This is the one Jesus controversy that I like for its effect on our culture (I love Jesus for a lot of reasons, but being a Rule Breaker for common sense is my favorite).

It goes like this: When the Pharisees criticized Jesus for allowing his disciples to pick grain on the sabbath, Jesus reminded them that David "entered the house of God...and ate the show bread, which is not lawful to eat except for the priests, and gave also to those who were with him" (Mark 2:26). And then he added this principle: "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27-28).

YOUR THOUGHTS.

SEE WHAT PAUL HAD TO SAY ABOUT THIS ISSUE IN Romans 14:5-6.

11. "for in six days Yahweh made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day; therefore Yahweh blessed the Sabbath day, and made it holy"

Genesis 2:1-4 concludes the first account of the creation, and says that God rested on the seventh day "and made it holy, because he rested in it from all his work which he had created and made" (2:3).

I don't think God did this because he was exhausted, but to serve as a model for the Israelites, whom he would require to keep the sabbath day as a holy day.

Exodus 20:12. Honor your father and your mother

12. "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land which Yahweh your God gives you."

The earlier commandments were all focused on giving honor to God. This is the first of the commandments that are focused on relationships with other humans. Because the family is the building block of society and the bond between children and parents is so fundamental, God chose honoring parents as the first human-directed commandment.

12a. "Honor your father and your mother"

Note the equal status accorded fathers and mothers, a remarkable bit of legislation in the patriarchal society of that day.

Most scholars agree that this commandment was intended for adults rather than children.

Jesus called attention to the fact that some children would sidestep this requirement by declaring that they had given to God whatever support the parent would have received from the child. Jesus denounced this practice, saying that those who practiced it made void God's law in favor of their own traditions (Mark 7:11-13).

12b. "that your days may be long in the land which Yahweh your God gives you"

In Ephesians, Paul calls this commandment "the first commandment with a promise" (Ephesians 6:2)

Exodus 20:13. You shall not murder

13. "You shall not murder."

This commandment was intended to protect the covenant-community, Israel, against excessive killing. It was not intended to proscribe capital punishment or killing in war.

The earlier translation of this verse, "Thou shalt not kill!" created confusion, because it appeared to prohibit all kinds of killing—or at least all taking of human life. That was not the intent. The Hebrew word has to do with killing without legal authorization, or killing that results from hatred. I was killing that we label as murder. That some killing is permitted is attested by two facts:

- Jewish law prescribes capital punishment for a number of offenses (Exodus 22:19; Leviticus 18:22; 20:13-16; 20:11-14; Numbers 35:16-21, 30-33; Deuteronomy 17:6; 22:20-24, etc.).
- Also Yahweh commanded the Israelites to enter the Promised Land and to put the inhabitants to death (Joshua 6:17, etc.).

Exodus 20:14. You shall not commit adultery

14. "You shall not commit adultery."

In its original patriarchal context, it seems to have meant only sexual intercourse between a man and a woman who married to another man. It did not prohibit men from having more than one sexual partner.

The Renn commentary tells us that the “culture was polygamous, so men were permitted to have multiple wives and/or concubines” (a concubine being a woman in an acknowledged relationship with a man whose status was less than that of the man’s wife).

DO YOU HAVE ANY EXAMPLES FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT SCRIPTURE?

Other Jewish laws limited the sexual relationships in other ways. A man was forbidden from several relations: WANT TO KNOW THEM? Read Leviticus 19:29 and 20:12-20. Deuteronomy chimes in this sex to avoid in Chapter 22:23-30 and chapter 25:5-6.

The fact that the sin of adultery was the one sexual sin singled out for mention in these Ten Words/Commandments shows how seriously it was regarded.

Exodus 20:15. You shall not steal

15. “You shall not steal.”

Some scholars consider this word/commandment to prohibit only taking another person’s belongings by stealth. However, there is no reason to limit it in that manner.

For additional provisions in Jewish law that flesh out how to deal with the crime of stealing, see Exodus 22:1-16 and Leviticus 6:1-7; 19:11-13. The New Testament also includes mentions stealing (Matthew 19:18; Romans 2:21; 13:9; 1 Corinthians 6:10; Ephesians 4:28; 1 Peter 4:15).

Exodus 20:16. You shall not give false testimony

16 “You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.”

This commandment has to do primarily with the bearing of false testimony against a neighbor—i.e., the law required that the community impose the same punishment on the false witness that the false witness intended to impose on the other party (Deuteronomy 19:16-20).

Exodus 20:17. You shall not covet anything that is your neighbor’s

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.”

As noted above, Catholics (and some Protestants) split verse 17 into the ninth and tenth commandments—one a prohibition against coveting a neighbor’s house and the other a prohibition against coveting a neighbor’s wife, slave, livestock, or anything else that belongs to the neighbor.

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”

The first question to address is what is meant by the word translated as “covet.” Does this commandment proscribe simple desire or does it proscribe only desire that is sufficiently intense to

tempt the one doing the coveting to act on his/her desire—to take by stealth or force that which is desired?

18. All the people perceived the thunderings, the lightnings, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking. When the people saw it, they trembled, and stayed at a distance. 19. They said to Moses, “Speak with us yourself, and we will listen; but don’t let God speak with us, lest we die.” 20. Moses said to the people, “Don’t be afraid, for God has come to test you, and that his fear may be before you, that you won’t sin.”

18. “All the people perceived the thunderings, the lightnings, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking. When the people saw it, they trembled, and stayed at a distance”

Fear in the presence of the Almighty is common. These people have reason to be afraid. Yahweh has already warned them not to come too close to the mountain lest he “break forth on them” (19:24). These sights and sounds—thunder, lightning, trumpet blasts, and a smoking mountain—would intimidate me. HOW ABOUT YOU?

19. “They said to Moses, “Speak with us yourself, and we will listen; but don’t let God speak with us, lest we die”

The people appeal to Moses to serve as a buffer between them and God. They prefer to get the word from God second-hand. WHY DO YOU THINK THIS IS TRUE?

20. “Moses said to the people, ‘Don’t be afraid, for God has come to test you, and that his fear may be before you, that you won’t sin’”

Moses reassures the people that God has come to test or prove them rather than to destroy them. This reverence or fear was likely intended to help them to avoid sinning.

YOUR THOUGHTS?

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Brueggemann, Walter, *The New Interpreter’s Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus*, Vol. 1 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994)

Durham, John I., *Word Biblical Commentary: Exodus*, Vol. 3 (Dallas, Word Books, 1987)

Renn, Stephen D., *Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words: Word Studies for Key English Bible Words Based on the Hebrew and Greek Texts*(Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2005)

Stuart, Douglas K., *The New American Commentary: Exodus*, Vol. 2 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006)