

EXODUS

Lesson 17 - Chapter 20

READ CHAPTER 20 all

The content of our study for this week, the next, and probably a few more after that is complex, at times controversial, and not for the feint of heart. But, if you will determine to focus your mind on what we'll discuss, and ask God, through the Holy Spirit, to teach you, I think you'll come away with an even deeper love and understanding of Yehoveh, and His written Word. So, bear with me as we go into a level of detail that I usually try to avoid as being too tedious, and address some subjects that challenge some of our traditional evangelical Christian thinking. My goal is not to turn you into scholars, biblical debate artists, nor Church revolutionaries.....rather it is simply to present to you what Yehoveh has revealed, plainly, and literally, in His written Word, but seems to have become lost in the denominational shuffle.... and let you decide how to respond.

If your Bible has a heading at the beginning of this chapter, it will almost assuredly say "The 10 Commandments". And, indeed, these verses of Exodus chapter 20 are the source of what Christians have for centuries held up as that creed which is the basis for moral and ethical and righteous living. In both Judaism and Christianity, the 10 Commandments are also known in scholarly and theological circles as the Decalogue.

Now, before we move on, I'm curious: how many people here would say they truly believe that the 10 Commandments are real, valid, and indeed God's word to His people? OK. How many of these Commandments are we the Church, the body of Christ, to be obedient to? Are the 10 Commandments a list we can choose from.....pick a few that we like, disregard some that we don't? OK. So, in general, most everyone here is convinced that we should be obedient to ALL of the 10 Commandments, right? OK. Just wanted to know.

Our cherished 10 Commandments are the beginning of the "giving of the Law" as it is often called in both Jewish and Christian circles. Immediately following the giving of the Decalogue (which are the first 10 Laws), more Law is given, and all together this is called the Covenant of Moses, or the Mosaic Covenant, or the Sinaitic Covenant, or as the Church commonly thinks of it, the Old Covenant.

The Covenant of Moses will be the 2nd major covenant God has made with a specific group of people, the Hebrews. The first was with Abraham. Now, there certainly were some pronouncements made by God before Abraham, to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, and another to Noah concerning the Great Flood and God's promise never to destroy the world by flood again. And, some teachers and scholars will refer to those two sets of pronouncements,

at times, as covenants. We don't need to get into some theological debate over this; for the purposes of this class, we'll only be labeling 3 Biblical covenants as "covenants": the Covenants of Abraham, Moses, and Christ.

A couple of salient points will set the stage for our lesson: first, reference to the Mosaic Covenant as the Old Covenant is an unfortunate misnomer; because it paints a picture that the Bible simply contains two covenants of Yehoveh: the old and the new. And, from this thinking, comes the label we give to the two halves of our Bible, the Old Testament and the New Testament. This, of course, leaves out the all-important Covenant of Abraham that is 6 centuries OLDER than the Covenant of Moses. Second, each of these 3 covenants are made to stand alone on their own merits, while at the same time being organically connected. That is, they all work together towards Yehoveh's divine purposes. And, third, these 3 b'rit, Hebrew for covenants, all have a similar form. We talked at length some months back about the nature and form of Biblical covenants, and time doesn't permit me to go over it all again. However, I do want point out that one of the several key elements common among the 3 covenants is that each of them had an associated **sign** given by God, to those who participate in the covenants. The sign for the Abrahamic Covenant was male circumcision. Anyone expecting to be part of that covenant was required, BY GOD, to be circumcised as the outward sign of their acceptance of the terms. The sign of the Covenant of Moses, as we will shortly see in Scripture, will be the Shabbat, the Sabbath. That is, the OBSERVANCE of the Sabbath was the partially inward and partially outward sign of all those who accepted the Law, the 10 Commands plus all the other laws and rulings, that formed the 2nd of God's covenants. If you expected to be a part of God's separate and distinct people, Israel, then observance of the Sabbath was mandatory as a SIGN of accepting Yehoveh's lordship over you life. The 3rd, and newest, of the covenants is the covenant of Yeshua, Christ. The sign for this covenant is the Holy Spirit. That is, this is a covenant whose sign is not outward, but inward, in the person who accepts the terms of, and wishes to participate in, the covenant of Jesus Christ. Let me say it another way: the sign of your salvation is that you are in union with Yeshua HaMashiach by means of the Holy Spirit that has been placed in you by God. Of itself, it is as outwardly invisible as is Yehoveh.

Notice an interesting progression: the sign of the first covenant is in **the flesh**, circumcision. It's a sign that you wear on your body. The sign of the second covenant is in **the soul** (which contains the mind and the will), in the form of one's ongoing obedience to the observance of the Sabbath. It's a sign that you DO. The sign of the third covenant is in **the spirit**; God places within, or alongside, our human spirit, His Holy Spirit. This is a sign that you BECOME.....that is, you **become** a new creation.

We're going to look at chapter 20 very carefully because one of the most difficult challenges the modern Church, collectively and as individuals, face today is untangling centuries of man-ordained doctrine from the God-breathed scriptural truth. What may seem like an insignificant turn of a word or phrase can, over time, lead to serious error.

The creation of the Anglican Church, and then the Protestant Reformation (that occurred about the same type as the invention of the printing press) led to the Believing masses having access, for the first time, to Holy Scripture. Those happenings were watershed moments in the

life of the Church. We today, are also living in an era of sweeping changes within the Church primarily because of access to scholarship that had been hidden deep in the bowels of both Hebrew and Christian religious institutions. Laymen are now able to learn about the structure of the Hebrew language and the nuances of ancient Israelite culture; we have instant access to ancient documents like the Council of Nicea, the Gospel of Thomas, writings of the earliest Church fathers like Origen, Eusebius, and Jerome. No longer is information like this available only in our theological seminaries and private library collections. And, what we are finding out is that there were some hidden agendas at work that colored Scriptural interpretations and teachings. We even find the sources of some Church traditions, which, frankly, need to be removed from our lives. And, chief among those hidden and long forgotten agendas, and much to our shame, was a bias against anything Jewish, and a willingness to compromise Yehoveh's teachings with pagan practices.

As pertains to our lesson today, there are therefore some basic presumptions that almost all of us have lived with our entire Christian lives, if NOT all of our natural lives, about the 10 Commandments that, together with Yeshua, form the foundation for Christian morals and ethics. Armed with some of the knowledge that Yehoveh said we would gain in the end-times, there might be no more appropriate time than now to more carefully examine some of those presumptions about the Decalogue.

Lets begin with the first verse of Chapter 20, where it says in most Bibles, "And (or then) God spoke all these words, saying:"....

The word I'd like to focus on is near the end of that verse; and the word is "word". I want to talk about that a little bit because the word "W-O-R-D" is the term God uses when referring to that which the Church now calls "the 10 Commandments". Yet, you will notice that NOWHERE in Chapter 20 did we see God give the **title** "the 10 Commandments" to what He spoke to Moses. Since the title "10 Commandments" does not appear here, does that make it a doctrine rather than a literal scriptural interpretation; that is, like Eternal Security or the Rapture or the Trinity which are all doctrines, titles and names which do NOT actually appear in Scripture but instead are derived from ideas contained within the scriptures, are the 10 Commandments merely a manmade NAME for a doctrine? Or, rather, does the title "10 Commandments" literally appear somewhere in the Bible under that name? The answer to the last question is a qualified "no", and, we'll look more closely at that in just a minute.

Before that, let's see in the original Hebrew, what the word "word" as is there in Ex 20:1 means; because "word" is what God calls what we have traditionally called the Commandments. The formal academic name "Decalogue" is Greek for "10 Words", NOT 10 Commandments. In Hebrew what we translate into English as "word" is "dabar". Dabar means speech; it means communicating a thought through audible speech. Dabar is an utterance; a movement of vocal chords, or a word just as we think of the word "word", as used in oral communication....speaking a language. Nothing about this term, however, indicates that it is a command. Dabar is rather neutral: that is, it does not characterize the content of the words; the words could be about anything.

So, what is being communicated to us in this first verse of chapter 20 is that Moses did NOT

receive the Decalogue through divine *inspiration*; rather, God actually spoke all these words audibly, in a manner that human ears could hear it. God gave these words by means of oracle, not inspiration. Much of Holy Scripture is accomplished, indeed, through Divine Inspiration: that is, the Holy Spirit moved a man, supernaturally, somehow in conjunction with that man's own mind to write down that which is true and absolute and divine and what Yehoveh deemed He wanted men to know about Him and His plans and His creation. Here, however, in Exodus 20, it was NOT a divine inspiration upon a man that was recorded: rather, it was God *speaking* (which is the meaning of the word "oracle") to Moses and Israel in an audible voice, and what is written down in Scripture is said to be the actual words that God spoke, and the people of Israel heard, that day. Yehoveh wanted that fact to be made so very clear, for all time, that not only did God Himself audibly speak these words, but later with His own "finger" (figuratively speaking) did He also carve those same words into stone tablets that they be preserved throughout the history of mankind. Man had nothing to do with this at any stage. And, again, this is totally unlike most Biblical scripture, which has a peculiar collaboration between God and man involved.

Now, some ancient Jewish Sages would argue, to a degree, with what I just told you about Yehoveh speaking these words. A small minority would say that ONLY the 1st and 2nd commandments were spoken directly by Yehoveh to Moses and Israel, and the rest He just wrote on the tablets of stone. Their reasoning is that in the first two commandments God spoke of Himself in the first person, and He didn't in the remaining 8. Therefore they say Yehoveh only spoke audibly the first 2 commands, and nothing further. There is nothing in scripture that would indicate that....in fact scripture indicates that all the 10 Commandments were spoken out loud..... and the vast bulk of ancient and modern Hebrew scholarship would agree with my position on this.

Turn to Deut. 5:22 READ

That should make it crystal clear that Yehoveh spoke the 10 Words out loud so ALL of Israel could hear them; and that the remainder of the Law, He gave to Moses, but NOT out loud for others to hear.

Now, as to the title that the Church traditionally gives that which follows vs. 1: **The 10 Commandments**. Not until later, in Exodus 34:28, is this speech of God to Israel (vs. 2-17 of Ex. 20) given a formal title; and this formal title, in Hebrew, is "eser dabar". Indeed, eser is a common Hebrew word used for the number 10; but what did we just learn that "dabar" meant? Remember, in verse one of Exodus 20, it reads "And God spoke all these "dabar" (words), saying;". Dabar means "word" or "words". An utterance, speech. That is, where Exodus 34:28 in most of our Bibles says "the 10 Commandments", the true translation, which agrees with Exodus 20, is "the 10 Words". Hence, the more correct Greek translation that Biblical scholars use, "Decalogue"....Deca, 10....logue, words.

Now, you might say, isn't that being just a tad persnickety, or overly technical, because what follows is certainly ten instructions, ten commands of God that we are to follow; so, what's the harm in whatever we choose to call it?

Before I address the reasons why labeling the bulk of Exodus 20 “the Ten Commandments” presents a problem you need to know that after Ex 34:28 there are only TWO other places in the Bible where the title “the 10 Commandments” is used: and that is in Deut. 4:13 and 10:4. And in all cases the phrase that is almost universally translated in our Bibles as “the 10 Commandments”, is actually, in Hebrew “eser dabar”.... literally, the 10 Words.

In order to show you the problem with incorrectly turning the word “dabar” which simply means word or words, into Commands or Commandments, I need to address another issue first. And, that is the numbering of the 10 Commandments, or better, the 10 Words.

If you have a “blue bible”, that is the CJB, and you’re sitting next to a person who doesn’t have one please scoot over a little and share it with them as we look at Exodus chapter 20. You will notice in the left hand margin, preceding each of the ten so-called commandments, a single Hebrew letter. What these are actually representing is numbers, because in the Hebrew writing system the alphabetic letters ALSO are used to represent numbers. The first Hebrew letter you see is an aleph. In addition to being part of the alphabet aleph also represents the number “1”. The second letter you see (below the aleph) is the Hebrew letter “bet”, which also represents the number “2”. And, this pattern continues until we come to the Hebrew letter “yud”, which represents the number “10”. That’s not too hard to figure out.

Now, understand, in the original Hebrew these Hebrew numbers ACTUALLY appeared in the text margin just as you see here in the CJB. In the oldest Hebrew manuscripts we have (including the Dead Sea Scrolls) the 10 commandments, or 10 words, were each given a Hebrew number preceding the actual command. Our modern versions have for the most part decided to delete the numbering of the commands or words.

Now without looking at ANY of your Bibles can anyone remember what we have all learned at some time or another is the very first of the 10 Commandments, or 10 Words? It’s usually taught as “I am the Lord thy God, you shall have no other gods before me”. I have also seen it taught simply as “You shall have no other gods before me”. I’m sure nobody here would disagree with that.

Well, as hard as it is to believe, the problem begins right there. Because, if you’ll look at the CJB bible, you’ll see it as it was done in the original Hebrew; and guess what? What we have always thought is the 1st Commandment is NOT the first commandment. The first commandment is actually “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the abode of slavery”. The “you shall have no other gods before me” is the 2nd commandment.

Even more in the original Hebrew what I am now showing you is the 1st commandment (in our Bibles, this is typically contained in vs.. 2), more correctly reads “I am **Yehoveh** your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the abode of slavery”. That’s right, where just about every bible ever made says “I am the Lord your God”, the original Hebrew is literally translated, “I am Yehoveh your Elohim.....it uses BOTH God’s personal name AND His TITLE in the text.

A few weeks ago I briefly mentioned this anomaly about the first commandment as we know it, NOT being what we are usually taught as the 1st commandment; and in fact the original 1st commandment is deleted from the Christian version of the 10 Commandments (it is NOT deleted from our Bibles, its just not considered the first of the 10 Commandments). And after that class a couple of people came up to me and said: "Well, yeah, but what you call the 1st commandment doesn't even qualify as a commandment because it's just a statement, a kind of preamble, so it doesn't belong in the list of the 10 Commandments". Well, that's pretty sound reasoning, except for one thing; as we just learned, God never EVER calls the content of Exodus 20 "the 10 Commandments". Rather, His title for this is "the 10 Words". Big difference between "words" and "commandments". So, the man-made title of 10 Commandments really mischaracterizes the nature and purpose of the 10 Words. In fact, these are more principles than commandments.

Please understand that the reason that we should include "I am Yehoveh your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt out of the abode of slavery" as a so-called commandment is because it has ALWAYS been there in original Holy Scripture as the first of the ten. It is even assigned the number ONE in the original Hebrew. All modern Hebrew scholarship is unanimous on this.

Yet, I must be forthright and tell you that there was a time, after the Jews' exile in Babylon, when the list of the 10 Commandments indeed dropped the Biblical first commandment, and so looked like our list today. Later, sometime before Jesus, it was revised to re-include the Biblical first commandment. This time period after Babylon saw the corruption and negligence of many of the Biblical institutions like Sabbath observance, ritual washing, observance of the 7 Biblical Feasts, and more.

Today, the Biblical list of the 10 Commandments, as appears in Holy Scripture, is what Jews observe; however Christians use the version that eliminates the very first commandment from our list of 10 Commandments, or as we now know to call it, the first "word".

Now, a question that would be pretty reasonable to ask right about now, would be, 'what would possibly be the motive for early Christian leaders to drop the 1st Commandment, and then for later Christian leaders to continue with that practice.....it doesn't make any sense?' Actually, it makes all kinds of sense.

Let's think for a minute about what we've learned over the last several weeks about the beginnings of Christianity. We know it began as a strictly Jewish movement, because it was all about Judaism looking for a Jewish Messiah. And, indeed, the Jewish Messiah came, He was and is Jewish, born to Jewish parents, in the Holy Land, and all of His first followers were Jewish. But very quickly after Yeshua's death gentiles started to be included in the Jesus movement and in a few more years their numbers swelled primarily due to the work of the Apostle Paul. Yet for several decades after Yeshua's death the Christian movement was still led by Jewish leadership. It wasn't until sometime after 100 AD that the number of gentiles accepting Yeshua as Lord and Savior equaled or exceeded the number of Jews accepting Yeshua as Lord and Savior. And with that gentiles began to gain control over the early church. By the mid 100's AD, gentiles were in powerful positions of authority within the Church, and an

anti-Jewish mindset arose which led to an attempt to minimize Jewish influence within the Church. The FIRST center of Christianity was Jerusalem, because Jerusalem was the center of Jewish worship. Later the center of Christianity became Rome, because Rome was the center of the gentile world.

Early in the 300's AD, the Emperor of Rome, Constantine, not only declared Christianity to be a legal religion for the Roman Empire, but that he himself preferred it. Further, that the Church was to become a gentiles only club and that Jews were now, by law, forbidden to participate unless they renounced their Jewish heritage and quite their Jewish traditions.

It was the Roman Church, now better known as the Catholic Church, which (rightfully so) declared the 10 Commandments to be one of the founding pillars of Christianity. And, what they did in compiling their official list of the 10 Commandments was to exclude the first commandment, the first word as written in Holy Scripture and begin instead with the 2nd commandment. They did what the Jews had done for a time following Babylon: they simply took the Biblical 2nd Commandment, the 2nd Word, and divided it into 2. So, the 1st half of the Biblical 2nd commandment became commandment #1, and the 2nd half of the 2nd Biblical commandment, became commandment #2. So what was in Holy Scripture a single commandment overnight became two commandments. Take a look at the CJB. You'll recall that our traditional 1st commandment is "Thou shall have no other gods before me", and the traditional 2nd commandment is "thou shall not make unto thee any graven image".

But, in original scripture those 2 commands TOGETHER are actually just one long command.....the original 2nd commandment. In essence, what the Church has called the 10 Commandments consists of only NINE!!

Now, why did the Roman Church do this? The Church, by the time of Constantine, wanted absolutely no connection between Jewishness and Christianity. They wanted to sever any relationship between the Jews and the new **gentile** Christian faith. They wanted to destroy any thought, any principle, revise any history that kept any element of Jewishness in what had become, by decree, an exclusively gentile religion. If they had kept the original 1st commandment, 1st word, in the list of the 10, it would have created a problem for their anti-Jewish agenda, by acknowledging that God gave these 10 Commandments, along with hundreds of others, to Israel (not to gentiles) whom He had redeemed from the hand of Egypt. And, since it would be 1000 years before the masses were permitted to even read, let alone own, Holy Scripture, whatever decrees the Church published became the truth. By leaving any reference to Israel OUT of the 10 Commandments this helped to cement the idea that Christianity was NOT for Jews.

So what we need to come away with is this: the term '10 commandments' is a manmade name for the list we find in Exodus 20, and it is also an unfortunate mischaracterization of what that list is all about. And, that we need to slightly revise that list by putting the 1st Word back into our list of 10. We also need to understand that due to an anti-Jewish agenda within the Church, dating back to well before Constantine, some critical scriptural translations have been done in a somewhat biased manner such as substituting "Command" for "Word". Oh, for sure, there is a Hebrew word for command.....and usually it is the word "mitzvah". But,

“command” doesn’t entirely capture the essence of the word “mitzvah”, either. Mitzvah more correctly means a God given ruling. We’ll get into that a little later.

While this is important enough in itself I tell you this because when we hit the next chapter of Exodus, chapter 21, we immediately run into another phrase that is key to our understanding of what is usually called “the Law”, that was about to be given to Moses on Mt. Sinai. And this phrase while not necessarily *mis*translated usually gives us the wrong impression, particularly in Western society, of what the Torah is all about. The result is a generally negative view by the Church of the Torah and what is commonly called “The Law”. And sadly this negative view even extends, to a degree, to the whole of the OT.

So Exodus Chapter 20 gives us a record of the 10 Words given to Moses on Mt. Sinai. These 10 Words set the stage for all the so-called “LAW” that was going to be given to Moses and Israel..... yet.....these 10 Words were also, decidedly, set apart and held up higher from all the rest. So if we need to kind of re-think the notion of these 10 Words as being 10 “commandments”, then how can we more properly characterize them?

I suggest we think of it as we think of our Declaration of Independence or our Constitution. Contained within those 2 documents are several concrete, inviolable assertions and principles that set up the framework for our nation and the system of government that would follow. Yet, none of us would think of calling what is contained in those two documents “Commandments”. I think there are 2 phrases, therefore, in common use in our American culture which express pretty well the nature of these 10 Words given to Moses, and that are closer to what is meant than “commandments”: and those phrases are “declarations” and “principles”. That is, the 10 Words are the founding principles for all the “Law” that will follow. The 613 Laws (the first 10 being the Decalogue, the Ten Words) that God will give Israel are, in essence, how you live-out the principles set down in the 10 Words. It’s almost as though the following 603 Laws are but extensions of the 10 declarations, the 10 founding principles, that God just gave Moses here in Exodus 20. The 613 Laws all operate within the boundaries of the 10 Words, just as all of our civil and criminal laws in America MUST operate within the framework of the principles declared in our Constitution in order to be valid.

In fact, it was a common understanding in Yeshua’s day that not only did all Law, all true Torah, operate within the principles of the 10 Words of Exodus 20 but that the 10 Words **themselves** operated subject to an even higher, more basic, principle. Does anyone remember what that higher principle is? (Love your God with all you heart, mind, and strength; and love your neighbor as yourself).

Look at Matthew 22:35-40. READ.

So, the principle of “love your God with all your heart, mind, and strength” becomes the basis for the 10 Words. And, out of the founding principles of the 10 words comes the 613 Laws. Yeshua Himself confirmed this. And, BTW, that highest principle (Love your God with all you heart....) is not a principle formulated in the NT: rather it’s just repeated; it was first given to us in that form, in the Torah in Deut.6:5. In fact, more than half of the NT is simply quotes from the OT.

With that as a background, starting next week we'll begin to work our way through the 10 Words of Exodus 20, which are the 10 founding principles that will be used for all the 603 laws that will come after.