

EXODUS

Lesson 20 - Chapter 20 Conclusion

As we move forward in our study of the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments, we have finally moved past the more controversial parts and get into areas that are a bit more comfortable. So, you can relax.

RE-READ Ex.20:12

The 5th Word enjoins children to show proper respect, and give proper care, to their parents. It also gives us the reason we should be obedient to this principle: that our days in the land may be prolonged. Now, depending on your translation, you may say, well, that's REALLY Jewish, because God is obviously referring to the land of Israel when He says "land". And, certainly that is one aspect of the meaning here. But, as we are now (hopefully) coming to understand, that even though Yehoveh gave these principles in the Covenant of Moses to Israel, these principles aren't JUST for Israel; in reality they are about how the universe that God created is intended to operate. To sharpen the point just a bit more, these are the principles by which REDEEMED humans are to live. Let us never forget that Israel was God's choice, by His grace, to be the receiver and keeper of God's Word for all mankind.....not just for themselves.

The word used here in vs. 12 for land, in Hebrew, is Adamah. And, yes, it is related to the name of the first created man, Adam. Most often Adamah simply means earth, as in soil, or ground, dirt, but can mean earth as in our planet. Sometimes it has been translated into country or land, (like in the **land** of Canaan), but that really gives us the wrong impression of the meaning. For instance, when the bible tells us Moses was standing on Holy ground, in Hebrew it was standing on Holy Adamah. The idea is that, generally, adamah is NOT to be taken as a reference to a specific region or country. Often we'll see Israelites in the Bible refer to the land of Israel as just "the land". But an entirely different Hebrew word is used in that instance: eretz.

What I'm trying to demonstrate is that Yehoveh is saying that we will receive the blessing of a longer and more abundant life on earth by treating our parents with the love and respect and care God expects of us. In fact, this is our duty.

Part of the reason for this principle is the centrality of family in the Lord's plan for mankind. Family stability is maintained by the proper observance of the authority structure that God set up for families, with the parents at the top of that hierarchy. The violation of this command brings family disintegration; the violation of this command as becoming a society norm brings **national** disintegration. In the book of Ezekiel (22:7) Ezekiel blames the breakdown of the family as one of the prime reasons that the Lord allowed Judah to be exiled to Babylon.

RE-READ Ex.20:13

The 6th Word is a prohibition against the killing of human beings. But, to understand the rather narrow sense this commandment is to be taken, underline the word “murder”. This commandment is not about the general sense of killing. In Hebrew the word used here is “ratsach”. It refers to unjust killing and ONLY unjust killing..... whether intentional or unintentional. It does not mean to “execute” as in carrying out a completely lawful judicial sentence. It does not mean killing an enemy in battle, or killing an intruder in defense of yourself or another. Murder is a very good translation for the word ratsach, and the way the Western world of today thinks of Murder or manslaughter is exactly as this verse intends.

Now, the next question is, what exactly is just versus unjust killing of a human being? Well, that’s one of the many topics that Yehoveh is going to explain beginning in Chapter 21, in the regulations and ordinances that will follow.....what is commonly referred to as the Law, the 613 laws of the Hebrew civil code. We’ll discuss that when we get to it.

Here’s the thing about murder: God says that ONLY He has the right to take human life. However, the Torah specifically gives human government the task of determining the guilt or innocence of a person accused of this crime, AND He delegates the task of extracting the blood for blood penalty. Genesis 9 sets up this dynamic as concerns the Lord’s rationale for capital punishment: “Whoever sheds the blood of a man, by man shall the guilty party’s blood be shed”. Why is the unjust killing of a human so serious? Again in Genesis 9 we are told, “In God’s image did God make man”. Man is derived from God so for a man to be killed is very serious and God’s justice requires the ultimate penalty.

What is so ironic is that as history moves along mankind thinks of himself as becoming more civilized and humane, and so most societies have now abolished the death penalty. This is a direct rebellion against God’s laws and principles and in fact by NOT taking the murderer’s life according to the Lord’s justice system human life is CHEAPENED. Let me make something clear: the Bible gives man absolutely no latitude to commute a murderer’s death sentence.

But this practice of commuting death sentences to imprisonment (or even the payment of ransom to the victims family), or abolishing capital punishment altogether is not a modern phenomenon; during the 2nd Temple period (at the same time Yeshua was alive) imposition of the death penalty by the Sanhedrin was rare. It is popular in Christian circles to say it was because the Romans had taken away the right of the Jews to carry out executions; but that is too simplistic. In reality records show that all the Jewish court had to do was to go to the local Roman authority with their decision in a capital offense, the Roman governor would review the case and unless he had serious reservations (and as we see with Jesus’ execution sometimes it didn’t matter if he DID have serious reservations), the Romans would approve it and then carry out the execution for the Jewish religious authorities. In other words the Jews were absolutely able to order the death sentence; it’s just that the Romans had to concur on the decision and be the agents to carry out the penalty.

The Jews had for a long time decided that mercy was the better avenue and often commuted death sentences for murderers. In the Mishnah tractate Makkot we’ll find a statement that the

opinion of the Sanhedrin was that to hand down a death sentence even once every 7 years was too much. A Rabbi who commented on that statement (Rabbi Ben Azariah) says that once in 70 years was too much. Rabbi Akiva says had he been on the Sanhedrin he never would have allowed ANY death sentence under any circumstance.

Rabbi Gamaliel responded to this perverted mindset that had the Sanhedrin adopted the view of those most radical Rabbis and NEVER gave out the death sentence, the amount of innocent blood shed in Israel would have increased dramatically. Is that not what we've seen in the US where the death penalty has been abolished in many states and the legal system makes extracting it almost impossible in states where it is allowed? Bloodshed has not decreased by commuting death penalties, it has increased.

The Lord's principle is that to take the life of a murderer is to actually PROTECT life, innocent life.

RE-READ Ex.20:14

Now, depending on your version the 7th commandment is either verse 14 or it is part of verse 13.

The 7th Word that a married person should not commit adultery. Now, while we won't go into depth with this (although we probably should), I do want to talk about this commandment for a bit, because it sets up a God-principle that most of us don't entirely grasp. The first thing to understand is that the entire concept of adultery, by definition, ONLY occurs within the institution of a marriage; outside of a marriage, adultery has no meaning. And, marriage is not only an important element of God's plan **for** mankind, but it plays a role in God's relationship **with** mankind.

The whole concept of a marriage is that a "union" occurs; as concerns human-to-human relationships, scripturally, this marriage union is between a man and a woman. While we too often think of marriage as a physical or sexual matter, or in our American society as a financial or legal matter, in fact the union God is talking about in the 7th Commandment is PRIMARILY a spiritual union. Certainly, in the present world the physical aspects of marriage exist, and not the least reason for it being the propagation of the human race. But that will end in the not too distant future. The reason I say this, is that from Yehoveh's perspective, the sin of adultery is less about a husband or a wife having a physical sexual union outside of their marriage than it is about our **spirits** entering into an unauthorized union with another. God has authorized that a man and a woman, before Him, may be joined in every level of union between themselves; but ONLY between themselves. The only other union allowed within that marriage is with God, through Christ (One could argue that a kind of 3rd union is permitted, that between the married couple and the **body** of Christ, the true church. But, that union is NOT quite the same thing, which is why it is spoken of in terms of **unity**, not union.)

You've probably noticed that our union with Christ is often spoken of in the Bible using marriage terminology; and the use of that marriage terminology is NOT an analogy NOR is it an illustration. It is absolutely real, and that fact should also help us to be more aware of how

we are to consider the essence of marriage from Yehoveh's point of view, and how we are to consider the nature of our relationship with Christ. Just as earthly marriage IS a man and a woman coming into union with one another, Salvation IS our being in union with Christ.

Now let me flesh that out just a little more. In the future there is going to be a glorious marriage feast, often called The Marriage Feast of the Lamb, in which Christ's bride, the Church (meaning all believers), will enter into marriage with Him. This tells us that even though we are immediately in union with Christ upon our acceptance of His Lordship (i.e., when we are Saved), we are not yet FULLY into a FORMAL and COMPLETED marriage-like union with Him. So our union and unity with Christ is going to someday become even MORE complete at the end of this present age than it is today. At first that statement may sound like double-talk. How can it be that we're kinda married but kinda not to Yeshua right now, with the marriage becoming fully complete later? While that concept might bother us a little, it would have made perfect sense to the Hebrews of Christ's day. Because just as today where there is FIRST an engagement to be married, a betrothal before the actual wedding ceremony occurs, so it was then. Back then betrothal carried with it a far more serious and tangible promise when the engagement occurred than it does now. As the right situation arises, we'll study more in depth all the ceremonial aspects of Hebrew marriage, which are not just interesting but quite instructive. For now just understand that at the moment of betrothal a Hebrew man and woman were treated as though they were married; that is, the union, to a degree, began upon engagement. A Chethubah, a legal marriage contract, was drawn up and agreed to and it was immediately effective upon betrothal; and an engaged couple could not become UNengaged without a formal legal divorce decree. Unfaithfulness during the betrothal period was considered adultery; upon betrothal even the property of the woman was considered to belong to her fiancée unless he renounced the rights to it. All that remained after betrothal for the marriage to be 100% completed was the consummation of marriage, physical union, which occurred AFTER the ceremonial wedding feast.

We who are Christ's are currently in a state of betrothal to Him. We are in the marriage PROCESS. Right now, Christ is with us in Spirit, and so we are in union with Him in spirit; but upon the Marriage Feast of the Lamb He will be with us in PERSON, and so we will be in union with him, in person. So even during our CURRENT, earthly time of betrothal to Christ for us to come into union with something that is forbidden, for us to come into a state of unfaithfulness to Christ, puts us in a state of adultery in our relationship to Christ in Yehoveh's eyes.

The NT Greek word "moichos" (moy-kos) which is typically correctly translated "adultery", MUST be understood in its OT Hebrew sense in order for us to fully understand what God is telling us about adultery. When the Hebrews spoke of adultery, they meant faithlessness to your union partner. It did NOT have to be an overt act of having sex with another to be considered adultery, although most often that is what occurred. What constituted adultery, and the proper proofs and punishments for it, changed considerably over time. During the time of the Patriarchs, adultery required the wife to have had sex with another man. No proof other than the husband's suspicions were needed, and he himself could put her to death. The Laws of Moses brought the requirement for conviction to a minimum of two witnesses. By the time of Christ much proof was needed, a court of law would rule on the matter, and death was still one of a range of possible punishments, but more often a public humiliation of some kind was the

penalty. Not long AFTER Christ, the death penalty was removed for the sin of adultery because it had become so rampant that it was almost impossible to police; and the number of women that would have been executed was so huge as to make carrying out the death sentence unthinkable. During ALL Biblical times, adultery was considered a PURELY female crime and sin....men were not subject to it. Of course, Christ made clear that that most certainly was NOT God's view of it and in Leviticus we see that men and women were subject to the same consequences.

Faithlessness of a women to her union partner in the form of fraternizing with another man, or taking another man's side in a disagreement against her husband, was at times adultery in Biblical times. So adultery as concerns God, carries with it this broad sense of one's faithlessness to Yehoveh on a spiritual level; and even includes the idea of drawing another person along with you into this faithlessness, because it takes two to tango, doesn't it?

The thing is there are certain unions available to mankind that we are prohibited from entering into, especially if we wish to also be in union with Christ. In other words there are some unions that are mutually exclusive. The Scriptures explain that in essence WHAT or WHO we are in union with, defines how God sees us. So an obvious example would be that if we come into spiritual union with Satan, we could not also be in spiritual union with Christ....those two unions being mutually exclusive. There are other forbidden unions, all of them destructive, and Paul provides a list of them in 1 Cor.6, but that's not our purpose so we won't be dealing with each of those. The point is that our union with Christ is MOST similar to our union in human marriage, from God's viewpoint. Therefore, for a Believer to join into a forbidden union **while in union with Christ**, or for a husband or wife to enter into a union outside of their marriage, the bible will use the same term for both: "adultery". So, we need to understand the serious nature of this particular sin in a MUCH larger context than we typically think of it.

Now, I'm sure some here would like to discuss a little about the modern "adultery" aspects of divorce and remarriage. I really don't think this is the appropriate lesson for that, but I would like to make just a couple of brief comments about it. First, committing adultery, whether by being unfaithful to a spouse, or perhaps (depending on your theology) by getting a divorce and then remarrying, is in neither case an unforgivable sin. There isn't a sin that we can commit that Yeshua hasn't already paid the price for. And, also please grasp that in the common meaning of the state of adultery in the Bible, it had to do with a married woman living with a man other than her husband.....which was looked down upon by society. That is, she had never obtained a legal divorce, typically because it was the husband's prerogative to grant her a divorce or not. Men, on the other hand, commonly divorced their wives for the purpose of being with another woman..... that is, they simply tired of the woman that was their wife and sought another. While this **was** socially acceptable in those days, it was NOT acceptable to Yehoveh, and Yeshua spoke at length on this, trying to make that quite clear.

Second, the Bible struggles greatly with divorce and remarriage. Paul goes to some length to deal with the matter, and provides certain guidelines for it.... Some of which He says is from Christ, the remainder being his personal opinion. Yet, He (and Jesus) makes it clear that the reason for even addressing the issue of divorce and remarriage is that Yehoveh is well aware of the current hardness of mankind's heart, and that while He is in no way excusing divorce,

He has made provisions so that we do not sin even further should our marriage go into the ditch.

See, this is the context in which Paul made his statement about how it is better in some ways that, IF you can, to not be married..... because there is this conundrum that the present corrupt state of mankind faces in which single people may be unable to remain celibate (to avoid fornication), yet married people may be unable to remain faithful to each other (to avoid adultery), or even to be able to get along well enough to attain sufficient peace to stay married. And, in both cases, when we fail, it affects our relationship with Yehoveh, which is what Paul is so concerned about. The problems we face today in this regard are NO different than in Christ's day.

And, finally, we should see the grace of God in all this. For Pete's sake don't think that if you are divorced and now remarried that you are in an unauthorized union and, in order to get right with God, you should end it. Was it sin that put us in that situation in the first place? Oh, yeah. And, that is what both Christ and Paul were getting at, because many divorcees, men in particular, felt no remorse at all over divorce. Their thought was that under the laws of Moses (and some later Traditions) there were legal procedures established for couples to divorce. So if they scrupulously followed those legal procedures it was all fine and well with Yehoveh. Wrong. If you are divorced and remarried, have you sought God's forgiveness for it, and all that led to it? If you have, then accept His forgiveness, and acknowledge Christ's complete payment on your behalf for that transgression, and move forward with gratitude for the wonderful mercy he has shown by giving you a new union, within which you can operate the way men and women were designed and meant to operate, even though His intent was that we should never need another other than the original union. Man, THAT is God's love. THAT is why we NEED Christ.

The bottom line is that while on the surface the way we typically think of adultery is as an issue of the flesh, which it most certainly is, in reality it is also a very important spiritual issue.....here's that duality again, the physical and the spiritual existing simultaneously... and adultery revolves all around forbidden "unions". So we must be clear that this 7th commandment deals not only with our human marriage relationships but also our relationship with Yehoveh, and more specifically Yeshua, to whom every Believer is betrothed.

RE-READ Ex.20:15

This is another one that may show up as verse 13 in your Bible. The 8th Word about stealing is pretty straightforward, so there's no need to dwell here. It means exactly what it says. Yet, the Hebrew word for stealing, **ganab**, also carries with it the idea of stealth.....sneakiness. So the idea here is that getting something that does not rightfully belong to you by means of being sneaky or deceptive is just as much stealing as it is walking into a 7-11 and sticking a Twinkie into your pocket. Obviously, putting that food into your pocket is a crime. But in God's economy obtaining something by means of deception, even if it is technically LEGAL and therefore not a prosecutable crime, is also stealing.

RE-READ Ex.20:16

The 9th Word: Now, this is often just presented as “do not lie”. And, certainly, that is part of this Commandment’s meaning. But, this Word is written with a legal/judicial sense to it, and speaks primarily to the idea of saying something falsely against someone in a court of law. And that fits very well with the framework of the Torah, the Law. That is, that all of the ancient Hebrew Sages saw the Torah as being about God’s justice. So, the context of this Word is very much the same thing as perjury. That is, in a trial if you give false answers, or you accuse someone falsely, knowing full well that the accusation is not true, then it is YOU that is guilty. Just as we are to be VERY careful when we occasion to use God’s name, we must also be very careful what it is we say about other people..... particularly if it is negative in nature. When we gossip, or accuse someone of something that we have no firsthand knowledge of, we are in danger of violating the principle of this 9th Word.

RE-READ Ex.20:17

The 10th Word is that “you shall not covet your neighbor’s house”, or his wife or his servant or his animals or anything else that belongs to him. Now, in plain language, to covet means to want something REALLY bad. That you’d do just about anything to get it. Or, that someone has it and you don’t makes you so envious you can hardly stand it, it makes you bitter. Or, even more commonly, that someone has something that you don’t, is **unfair** to you.....because you deserve it more than they do. Now, the list of items in this Word that one might be tempted to covet, while completely literal, is also very much in the context of ancient Hebrew life and culture. In tribal cultures, like Israel, the typical PAGAN way someone gained (which BTW Yehoveh was trying to move Israel away from) was by taking what belonged to someone else. Usually it was from outside your own tribe that you took, but not necessarily. The reference to slaves, or man and maidservants, is mostly about property and wealth. Servants were generally purchased, or they had willingly indentured themselves (sometimes called bond-servant) to you for a period of time, in order that they might pay off a family debt, or to learn a trade, or because they were so poor it was one of the few ways they could survive. But, the taking, the kidnapping, of someone’s wife, children, and slaves was also a common pagan method of increasing your own personal power by increasing the size of your family or tribe. And, BTW, this practice is not a dead one; we’ll find it still occurring today within tribal cultures of Africa and Asia.

The mention of the animals is again about wealth. Since the Israelites were primarily herdsmen, now, the animals represented whatever wealth they owned. The more animals you had, the wealthier you were.

And, in all fairness to these 3 million wandering Hebrews, what else did they have to occupy their thoughts, day and night, than wanting what someone else might have that they didn’t? They didn’t pack up and wander every day. After Mt. Sinai, they only moved a few more times. During their 40 years in the Wilderness, they stayed several months in one spot, until pasture or water gave out, or by God’s direction they moved. Once settled, there would have been an awful lot of idle hours to just sit and think. And, people being people, especially as dissatisfaction of their situation would creep in, what else did they have to WANT out there in the barren desert, other than what one of their neighbors had? We are well aware, or at least we should be, that in a welfare society, where there is much idleness, coveting what others

have become a national pastime.

Well, that completes our look at the 10 Words, which are the 10 **principles** upon which God will base all other commands and instructions that He will give to mankind. So, this is just the preparation for what is about to come.

RE-READ EXODUS 20:15-23 (some Bibles may be 18-26)

What a day it had been for Israel! The mind-bending physical phenomena that had been shaking the mountain, smoke billowing upwards from its summit, the thundering sound of Yehoveh's voice as He presented the principles of His justice system for ALL of Israel to hear, and the shofar notes echoing off the valley floor all served to put a reverent fear of God into the people. Could it have been that just as Peter felt he could not possibly stand in the presence of God when he finally understood whom Yeshua was, so it was for the Hebrews..... that their legs were barely able to hold them upright long enough for them to back away from the Holy mountain?

So, the people asked Moses to speak to God FOR them, and for God to speak to Moses, and then Moses to relay to them what God had said. Unfortunately, this was not entirely a spiritual "fear" that caused them to ask Moses to intervene. And, Moses instantly recognized this and told the people in vs. 17 not to be afraid; for there were three reasons Yehoveh had come to them in this awesome display of power and glory: 1) to test, or to try, them.... To put Israel on trial. Here the Hebrew word for trial is *nacah*, and it imparts the idea of the Hebrews as being the objects of Yehoveh's justice system. Too much we get the mental picture of the phrase "being tested" or "trial" as a series of challenges or obstacles thrown in our path by God, seeing how we react to them; and then, depending on how we do, we are judged. While there are, at times, challenges and difficulties in our lives that Yehoveh allows us to contend with, that's not the primary thrust of this idea; rather, it is that the Lord is steadily teaching His way of justice to His people: both how to live it and how to administer it. The 2nd reason is that the people should have an AWE of God, not a dread of God. The idea is to have a reverence for His Holiness. Those that love God NEVER need to have a horror of God.....but those that do NOT love God, most certainly should be afraid. And, 3rd that the Hebrews learn not to sin. God, through the 10 Words He just gave them and the coming series of 600+ "laws", is teaching the people just what His Holy nature is all about, what His standard of justice and righteousness is..... not just so they can develop a philosophy about life like their pagan neighbors, or to make religious doctrines, or to have intellectual discussions about it. Rather, that the people He sets apart for Himself do not offend, do not transgress against, the Most Holy One who does the setting apart according to His grace.

Next, Yehoveh tells Moses to remind the people (and frankly, I think this was more for the benefit of future generations and not those who were there) that it was God Himself that spoke these words, and NOT just to Moses. ALL heard it. It was done most publicly so that there could be no doubt that this was God's way, not Moses'.

Yehoveh seems to once again be addressing the matter of "other gods", and making images. Is He just repeating Himself.....repeating the 2nd Commandment? I don't think so. The 2nd

Word certainly said “no other gods”, but then went on to talk about making symbols and images and representations.....of HIM. And, this fits very well with the earliest Hebrew thought on the matter, and was confirmed in the building of the Wilderness Tabernacle that NO images of His person did He instruct to be built, and certainly none were made.

He goes on to institute another important principle: Yehoveh will determine just where altars to Him are to be built, and HOW they are to be constructed. There is ONLY one purpose for an altar: sacrifice. An altar is NOT a simple monument, a remembrance of a person or an event. It's not a podium where someone speaks or performs. Whether of the heathen or of the Godly, an altar is a place where worship of a deity takes place and sacrifice to that deity occurs. And wherever it is that God decides an altar shall be placed, there, presumably in conjunction with a proper sacrifice, God will bless His people. But ONLY there, not just any place the people should choose. And, He doesn't want an altar site built in a grand fashion; because we ALL understand, deep down, what really happens when we attempt to build fabulous edifices to Yehoveh.....we wind up building fabulous edifices to ourselves....our own efforts.... our own talents and gifts....our own prosperity.....surroundings that please US. Yehoveh says here to simply pile up some dirt to sacrifice upon. And He also gives the Israelites permission to build an altar of stone, if they choose. But it must be simply stacked stones, just as they pick them up from off the ground. Because to take a tool to that rock to attempt to make it better than it occurs naturally, in God's eyes, PROFANES that altar. Well, if EVER there was an instruction from God that has been ignored by Hebrew and Christian alike, it is this one. Don't we build the most wonderful, fabulous cathedrals, churches, and synagogues FOR Yehoveh.....we decorate them with the finest materials and do our best to keep them immaculate. And let's not confuse the Wilderness Tabernacle that would be built with expensive materials, and later the Temple (which was just the permanent version of the Tabernacle), with what God is talking about here. The Tabernacle was built as a teaching tool and place where God would dwell with man. Everything about the Tabernacle would have great significance; prophetic significance....it was even in some ways modeled after Yehoveh's heavenly abode. In our day, God no longer wants temples of stone and wood and gold and silver. WE are His temple. Just as all He wanted here in Exodus was the dust of the ground as the place of sacrifice, so He wants the simple dust of the ground from which WE were created as the place where His Spirit lives with man. The places where we gather to have fellowship and communal worship are NOT modern day equivalents of the Tabernacle or the Temple.....God didn't even want a permanent Temple to be built.....He only did so because King David was so insistent that he build one. No, I think I can say unequivocally that Yehoveh would rather we serve Him with our obedience than with magnificent structures; that we would use all that money and time it takes to build and maintain beautiful buildings instead to feed the hungry, heal the sick, bless His people Israel, and take the gospel to the world.