

Reformation Fellowship Notes • February 26, 2017
Teacher: David Crabtree
Handout #19
Exodus 20:1-17

I. Introduction

- A. So far, we have seen historical narrative.
- B. Next 11 chapters are very different.
 - 1. Laws and instructions
- C. This is one of the reasons I chose to teach Exodus.
 - 1. Look closely at a section of law.
- D. This will require some background information.
- E. What we will do today:
 - 1. Brief review of Exodus up to chapter 20
 - 2. Survey of the ten commandments
 - 3. Discussion of the nature of law

II. Brief review of Exodus up to chapter 20

- A. Famine forced Jacob and his family to move to Egypt.
 - 1. God had prepared the way for them in the person of Joseph.
- B. Conditions of the Israelites in Egypt
 - 1. The Israelites had become enslaved.
 - a) God had been to all appearances inactive for 400 years.
 - b) God suddenly began to move.
 - (1) First, things got worse.
 - (a) They had grown in numbers.
 - (b) This caused Pharaoh to be alarmed.
 - (c) He killed baby boys.
 - (2) Then Moses was born and miraculously preserved.
 - (a) Moses grew up as the grandson of Pharaoh.
 - (3) Moses wanted to use his status to help his people.
 - (a) But they rejected him as their leader.
 - (b) He fled to the desert for 40 years and turned his back on his people.
- C. God called Moses to lead his people out of Egypt.
 - 1. God appeared to Moses in the desert and gave him an assignment.
 - a) He was to lead the Israelites out of Egypt.
 - 2. Moses returned to Egypt and appeared before the Pharaoh.

- a) Moses asked Pharaoh to allow the Israelites to leave Egypt to worship their God.
 - (1) Pharaoh refused.
 - b) God sent ten plagues to force Pharaoh to let the Israelites go.
 - (1) The plagues culminated with the death of the first born.
 - (a) Only those households who had killed a lamb and painted the doorpost with the blood were spared.
3. Pharaoh gave the Israelites permission to leave.
- a) They fled quickly.
 - b) Pharaoh changed his mind and came after them.
 - c) God saved the Israelites by opening the Red Sea and letting the Israelites cross, then closing the waters and drowning the Egyptians.
- D. God led them through the desert.
- 1. The landscape was inhospitable.
 - a) Little food and little water
 - (1) These sometimes ran low.
 - b) Harassed by the Amalekites
 - 2. God acted overtly on their behalf.
 - a) Cloud and pillar of fire
 - b) Miraculously provided water and food
 - 3. People were anxious about their well-being.
 - a) They blamed Moses when they had shortages.
 - (1) The very thing Moses had feared
 - b) At the same time, they are dependent on Moses.
 - (1) He begins the process of institutionalizing his power to prepare for his death.
- E. Moses takes them to Mount Sinai.
- 1. Up to now the relationship had been entirely one-sided. (Sarna, p. 130)

“God’s redemptive acts on Israel’s behalf require a reciprocal response on the part of Israel. The liberated multitude of erstwhile slaves must be united not only by a vital sense of a shared tragedy and a common experience of emancipation, but even more by bonds of perceived ideals—a vision of a new order of life, namely, the establishment of an essentially different kind of society from what had hitherto existed.” (Sarna, p. 130)
 - 2. God offers to make the Israelites his “own possession (special possession) among all the peoples,” “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”
 - a) “Special possession” has political and legal implications. (Cf. Sarna, p. 131 for background on this term.)
 - 3. The people agree.
 - a) “All that the Lord has spoken we will do” (to obey God’s voice and to keep his covenant”).
 - 4. There are three days of preparation.

- a) Only Moses and Aaron are allowed to go onto the mountain.
- 5. What follows is what God requires of the Israelites—the covenant.

III. Old Testament Laws

- A. This is one of the reasons I wanted to teach through Exodus.
- B. I have been surprised to see how similar OT law is to ANE (Ancient Near East) laws.
 - 1. We now have an enormous number of ANE law documents.
 - 2. Civil Laws were very similar.
 - a) Even the same case law
 - b) Clearly huge influence
 - (1) A lot of cultural exchange
- C. OT law and ANE laws are both rooted in natural law.
- D. OT law is a refinement and a recasting of ANE law.
 - 1. OT law tends to be a bit more humane.
 - 2. OT law represents a different kind of God.
 - 3. OT religious law presents a different God and relationship to his people.

IV. Ten Commandments

- A. Prefatory comments
 - 1. Covenantal Code is in two parts.
 - a) Fundamental principles (Ten Commandments)
 - (1) Most basic concepts of what God requires of his people
 - b) Case law
 - (1) Some examples of these precepts applied to specific situations
 - (a) *Mishpatim* (rules)
 - (i) 21:2-22:16
 - (b) *Devarim* (commands)
 - (i) 22:17-23:19
 - 2. Some features of the Ten Commandments
 - a) Short and unadorned
 - b) No punishments given
 - (1) No encouragement for cost benefit analysis
 - c) Constitutes a preface to the law
 - d) Two sets of commandments
 - (1) How we ought to relate to God
 - (2) How we ought to relate to others
- B. Commandments regarding man's relationship to God
 - 1. God is transcendent

“... in the Torah's view there is an absolute barrier between the Creator and the created, which no creature in the world can transcend.” (Cassuto, p. 236)

- a) There is a unique relationship that exists between the one transcendent God (YHWH) and the people of Israel.

“I, the Speaker, am called YHWH, and I am your God specifically. Although I am the God of the whole earth, yet I am your God in the sense that you recognized Me and sanctified your life to My service, and I am also your God in the sense that, in consideration of this sanctification, I have chosen you to be the people of My special possession from among all the peoples of the earth; and it is I who brought you out of the land of Egypt, not just bringing you forth from one place to another, but liberating you from the house of bondage. Hence it behooves you to serve Me not out of fear and dread, in the way that the other peoples are used to worship their gods, but from a sense of love and gratitude.” (Cassuto p. 241)

2. **First Word:** His people are not to have any other gods except him.
 - a) God is a jealous god.
 - b) His right to receive our worship and obedience is his and his alone.
 - c) This is like the position of a man in a marriage.
 - (1) The husband has a unique and exclusive right to his wife’s love and devotion.
3. **Second Word:** Don’t create your own god to worship.
 - a) God will reveal himself.
 - (1) The prophets argued that idols were just the creation of men.
 - (2) Only God can adequately represent himself to us.
 - (3) There is a constant temptation to worship the god of our own creation.
 - (a) Such a god will always be small and tame.
 - (b) Inversion of the master-servant relationship
 - b) God cannot be comprehended.
 - (1) He can be described; he can be imagined.
 - (2) Visual images give the illusion of comprehending.
 - (a) We must not.
 - (3) God can be substantially understood.
 - (a) He wants us to know him.
 - (4) But we cannot understand him completely.
 - (a) We can’t nail him down.
 - (b) He will always surprise.
 - c) God will punish waywardness but reward obedience.
 - (1) He would much rather reward than punish.
4. **Third Word:** Don’t take God lightly.
 - a) This appears to prohibit taking an oath in the name of Yahweh.

“The primary meaning of ‘misuse the name of the LORD’ would appear to be invoking his name as guarantor of one’s words. Examples would include promising someone something ‘by Yahweh,’ meaning: ‘I guarantee you that my promise is true, or Yahweh may kill me or otherwise punish me if I don’t keep my promise.’” (Stuart, p. 455)

- (1) This is indicative of a snowballing disrespect for God.
 - (a) Where people keep their word, swearing by God is not necessary.

- (b) Swearing by God gives the hearer greater assurance that the promise will be kept.
 - (i) Swearer is risking divine punishment for not keeping promise.
 - (c) In an environment where one swears by God and suffers no punishment, he can be emboldened to do it more.
 - (i) So God is promising that such a one will not escape punishment.
 - b) The more fundamental evil is taking God lightly.
 - (1) God is a holy God.
 - (a) He is also very patient and longsuffering.
 - (b) But he will not be toyed with or mocked.
- 5. **Fourth Word:** Commemorate weekly the covenant relationship between the Creator God and the people of Israel.
 - a) Longest commandment
 - b) Establishes the Sabbath
 - (1) Rest days at the end of week were common in ANE.
 - (2) The number seven was full of symbolic significance.
 - (a) Seven people are listed in verse 10.
 - (b) Seven things are listed in verse 17.
 - (3) No other culture had anything quite like the Sabbath.
 - (a) In Mesopotamia, every seventh day was bad luck, so certain activities were forbidden.
 - (b) Sabbath was not tied to astronomical phenomena.
 - (4) The Sabbath commemorates God's creation of the world.
 - (a) He worked for six days and then rested on the seventh day.
 - (b) Sabbath is a practice that imitates that fact.
 - (5) Sabbath is holy.
 - (a) That which is holy has restrictions.
 - (b) Restrictions mark Sabbath—no work.
 - (6) Sabbath is a sign of God's consecration of the people of Israel.
 - (a) It is a reminder that the people of Israel are God's special people.
 - (b) It is a reminder that the God with whom they have a special relationship is the Creator of the universe.
- 6. **Fifth Word:** Honor authority.
 - a) Widely recognized obligation
 - (1) Plato calls honoring parents the most sacred of all our obligations (Laws 717b).
 - b) Our parents worked together with God to create us; therefore, we owe honor to them.
 - c) What about bad parents?
 - (1) These issues can get very complicated.
 - (2) We should be predisposed to honor our parents.
 - d) Basis for recognition of various authorities in society
 - (1) Our parents (collectively) created the cultural world into which we were born.

- (a) We owe a debt to them and the institutions they created.
- e) Take care of parents when they live long in order that you, as a people, might live long in the land.
- 7. Second set of commandments
 - a) The remaining commandments are explanation of how we are to relate to other people (Love your neighbor as yourself).
 - (1) We are all motivated to change or do things to reduce our suffering or discomfort.
 - (2) Some things I could do would be to the detriment of others.
 - (a) I am not allowed to avail myself of those things.
- 8. **Sixth Word:** Don't take human life.
 - a) Human life is uniquely valuable.
 - (1) No comparison with animal life
 - (2) Human beings—all human beings—are valuable in God's eyes.
- 9. **Seventh Word:** Respect the institution of marriage.
 - a) Adultery is the most blatant act undermining marriage.
 - b) The sanctity of the marriage relationship is critical to the stability of the family.
- 10. **Eighth Word:** Do not steal.
 - a) God has allotted to each of us according to his purposes.
 - (1) To steal from another is an illegitimate way for me to enrich myself.
- 11. **Ninth Word:** Do not give false testimony.
 - a) To misrepresent the truth in order to bring ill to another is wrong.
- 12. **Tenth Word:** Do not covet.
 - a) One could look at all the previous commandments as dealing only with external actions.
 - (1) This commandment is clearly addressing an internal condition.
 - b) To desire what is not yours is wrong.
 - (1) Not because of what it might lead to
 - (2) Be content.
 - (a) God allots to each as he sees fit.
 - (i) Are we okay with that?

V. Nature of law

- A. What were the Israelites supposed to do with this?
 - 1. This is not enough information.
 - a) Too much is left unclear to be a guide for conduct in many situations.
 - (1) Example: What is work?
- B. Analogy of parents training children
 - 1. Start with simple commands with little nuance.
 - 2. As the child gains experience and understanding, the commands become more nuanced.

3. When the child is mature, the child is expected to have a complete and accurate model of the parents' worldview.

C. Implications of analogy

1. Laws change over time.
 - a) A parent may want a child to act in direct violation of a command that was given at another time.
 - (1) "Don't cross the street without holding my hand."
 - (a) Changes as child gets older
 - (2) "Don't swing the bat in the house."
 - (a) General principle that can be overridden by higher priorities
2. Apply a worldview not a command.
 - a) Commands have very short shelf lives.
 - (1) Situations change quickly.
 - (2) All commands are situation-based.
 - b) The worldview of the parent is what generates all commands.
 - (1) Only the worldview can be applied to every situation.
 - c) This worldview includes a comprehensive hierarchy of values.
3. The goal of a child who wants to be obedient is to construct a model of the parent's worldview.
 - a) The child uses all sources of information about the parent and the parent's worldview.
 - (1) Instruction, commands, experience, experience of others, etc.
 - (a) Commands and instruction are all useful in constructing a model of the parent's worldview.
 - (i) Even outdated commands and instructions
 - b) A loophole is a completely incompatible notion.
 - (1) But you said, "..."
 - (a) This can only happen in a statutory concept of law.
 - c) A child who wants to be obedient will be dedicated to being a student of the parent.

D. Role of the Ten Commandments

1. Tersely worded foundational concepts
2. Everything needs to be clarified over time.
3. If we want to be obedient to God, we have to take seriously the need to be students of God and his worldview.