Exodus Chapter Twenty

Overview of Exodus 20

Chapter 20 of the book of Exodus contains the record of one of the greatest events in Israel’s history, namely God giving of the Ten Commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai. They are referred to in Exodus 34:28 as הַדְּבָרִֽים, which literally means “the ten words.”

Douglas Stuart has an excellent comment, he writes, “Nothing in Exodus 20 is described as ‘commandment’ or ‘law’ or the like. To be sure, the words presented here by God do indeed command his people most solemnly to act in ways that are basic to his covenant, but their significance goes beyond that of routine ‘laws.’ What the chapter contains—in particular, the Ten ‘Words’ (דֶבָרִים)—is more like the content of a national constitution than merely the content of one section of codified law or another. If the American legal corpus is used as an analogy, it could be said that the ten ‘words’ of Exod 20 are somewhat like the Constitution of the United States (legally binding in a most basic, foundational way but more than a mere set of individual laws) and the laws that follow (cf. 21:1, ‘These are the laws you are to set before them’) somewhat analogous to the various sections of federal law dealing with all sorts of particular matters that have been enacted legislatively over time. The one group is absolutely ‘constitutional’ or ‘foundational’; the other is specifically regulatory, following from the principles articulated in the more basic ‘constitution.’ It is both traditional and convenient to call them ‘the Ten Commandments,’ as long as their special nature is recognized. Indeed, in the comment Moses spoke following the repeat of the Ten Commandments in Deut 5:6–21, he explicitly again called them ‘words’ (lit., ‘These are the words [דֶבָרִים]; NIV, inexplicably, ‘commandments’) the LORD proclaimed in a loud voice to your whole assembly there on the mountain,’ Deut 5:22). The biblical commandments occur in three levels of specificity. At the most comprehensive level are the ‘two great commandments’ of Deut 6:5 (‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength’) and Lev 19:18b (‘love your neighbor as yourself’). The first of these commands requires in broad terms a loyal, covenantal obedience to God, who is put first above all other relationships. The second requires loving (loyal) treatment of other human beings. Jesus gave his approval to what had become in Judaism an understanding of the importance of the two great commandments as summations of all the others. He also specifically indicated that the rest of the commandments ‘hang on’ these two (Matt 22:40). How so? The first four of the Ten Commandments hang on the command to love God since they describe ways to show covenant loyalty directly to him. The final six hang on the command to love
neighbor as self, which Jesus also explained as doing to others as you would have them do to you (Matt 7:12). Thus the first four ‘vertical’ commandments are balanced by the final six ‘horizontal commandments.’ Then, in order of hierarchy, follow all the others. The order is, then, the two, the ten, and the six hundred and one. Some of the large group of six hundred and one remaining commandments address ‘vertical’ concerns; others speak of the ‘horizontal.’”

John Hannah writes “The Ten Commandments (in 34:28 ‘Ten Commandments’ is lit., ‘Ten Words’), the hub of all of Israel’s religious and civil laws, has two parts. The first four commandments pertain to the relationship of the Israelites with God, and the other six deal with social relationships within the covenant community. Before giving these 10 stipulations, God in the preamble spoke of His unique relationship with His people (I am the LORD your God, 20:2a) and in the historical prologue He briefly summarized what He had done for them (brought you out of Egypt … the land of slavery, v. 2b; cf. 13:3, 14; Deut. 5:6; 6:12; 7:8; 8:14; 13:5, 10). Centuries before, God had led Abraham out of Ur (Gen. 15:7); now He led Abraham’s descendants out of Egypt. The Ten Commandments are an excellent summary of 10 divine rules for human conduct. They might be called rules of (1) religion, (2) worship, (3) reverence, (4) time, (5) authority, (6) life, (7) purity, (8) property, (9) tongue, and (10) contentment.”

The NET Bible has the following comment “This chapter is the heart of the Law of Israel, and as such is well known throughout the world. There is so much literature on it that it is almost impossible to say anything briefly and do justice to the subject. But the exposition of the book must point out that this is the charter of the new nation of Israel. These ten commands (words) form the preamble; they will be followed by the decisions (judgments). And then in chap. 24 the covenant will be inaugurated. So when Israel entered into covenant with God, they entered into a theocracy by expressing their willingness to submit to his authority. The Law was the binding constitution for the nation of Israel under Yahweh their God. It was specifically given to them at a certain time and in a certain place. The Law legislated how Israel was to live in order to be blessed by God and used by him as a kingdom of priests. In the process of legislating their conduct and their ritual for worship, the Law revealed God. It revealed the holiness of Yahweh as the standard for all worship and service, and in revealing that it revealed or uncovered sin. But what the Law condemned, the Law (Leviticus) also made provision for in the laws of the sacrifice and the feasts intended for atonement. The NT teaches that the Law was good, and perfect, and holy. But it also teaches that Christ was the end (goal) of the Law, that it ultimately led to him. It was a pedagogue, Paul said, to bring

---

people to Christ. And when the fulfillment of the promise came in him, believers were not to go back under the Law. What this means for Christians is that what the Law of Israel revealed about God and his will is timeless and still authoritative over faith and conduct, but what the Law regulated for Israel in their existence as the people of God has been done away with in Christ. The Ten Commandments reveal the essence of the Law; the ten for the most part are reiterated in the NT because they reflect the holy and righteous nature of God. The NT often raises them to a higher standard, to guard the spirit of the Law as well as the letter.”

Now, it is common to divide the Mosaic Law into three parts as we noted earlier, but though this is helpful for analysis and the study of the Mosaic Law and the way it functions, such a division is never stated as such in Scripture but rather it is seen as a unit.

Part 1: The Moral Law or the Ten Commandments. This part of the Law governed the moral life giving guidance to Israel in principles of right and wrong in relation to God and man (Exodus 20:1-17).

Part 2: The Ordinances or the Ceremonial Law. This was the spiritual portion of Law, which guided and provided for Israel in her worship and spiritual relationship and fellowship with God. It included the priesthood, tabernacle and sacrifices (Exodus 25-31: Leviticus).

Part 3: The Judgments, or the Social Law. This part of the Law governed Israel in her secular, social, political, and economic life (Exodus 21:1 – 23:13).

The Mosaic Law was an indivisible unit, and is that which was terminated by the Lord Jesus. Though the Law is usually divided into three parts, as described above, it is important to see that it was an indivisible unit. Thus, when Paul stated that we are not under the Law, this included all three parts, including the Ten Commandments.

Some will agree that parts of the Old Testament Law have been done away, but assert the Ten Commandments are supposedly still in force today. But all three parts of the Law were designed to function as a unit to guide Israel in all of its life.

The Ten Commandments cannot be separated from the rest. Further, even though most recognize this three-fold division, the Jews so numbered all the commands that they approached the Law as a unit. The Jews did not view the Law as having a three-fold division but rather they divided the 613 commandments of the Law into twelve families of commands which were then subdivided into twelve additional families of positive and twelve additional families of negative commands. Further, that it is a unit is evident by the fact that the recognition of any of its features, i.e., as a meritorious system of righteousness with God, obligates

---

the person to fulfill the entire Law, as we are taught by both Paul and James (cf. Galatians 3:10, 12; 5:3; James 2:8-11).

Further evidence that the Law is a unit is the penalty of death for disobedience is attached to all three parts of the Law. Noticing the penalties attached to certain commands further emphasizes the unitized character of the Law. When the command to keep the Sabbath (one of the “commandments”) was violated by a man who gathered sticks on that day, the penalty was death by stoning (Num. 15:32-36).

When the people of Israel violated the command concerning the Sabbatical Year for the land (one of the “judgments”), God sent them into captivity where many died (Jer. 25:11). When Nadab and Abihu offered strange fire before the Lord (one of the “ordinances”), they immediately died (Lev. 10:1-7). Clearly these commands from various parts of the Law were equally binding and the punishment equally severe. Therefore, the Law was an indivisible unit.

Now, we must emphasize that the moral principles contained in the Mosaic Law given at Mount Sinai were merely the codified expression of the eternal moral law of God as it was given to Israel to govern her life as a nation in order to experience God’s blessing under the Abrahamic covenant. There are obviously various forms of human laws, those prescribed by man through human government or custom (see Luke 20:22; Acts 19:38).

While human government is an institution ordained by God’s will or law, some of the laws of man are direct expressions of the will of God, but still constitute laws by which men are often bound by the governmental system in which they live (Romans 13:1-7). Of course, where such laws conflict with God's laws, then we are obligated to obey God instead (Acts 4:19-20).

The fact that the Mosaic Law has been terminated does not mean that there is no law in this age of grace even though the nature of this law is quite different from the standpoint of incentive, motivation, and means. In fact, the epistles speak of “the perfect law of liberty” (Jam. 1:25), “the royal law” (Jam. 2:8), “the Law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2), and “the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:2). This consists of the many commands found throughout the epistles, which comprise this law. These too cover all areas of the believer’s life to direct him in the will of God in today’s world.

The moral principles embodied in the law of Moses Paul identifies as “the righteousness of the law” (Romans 8:4), and demonstrates that such principles are the goal of the Spirit-directed life in the same context in which he teaches the believer is not under the Mosaic law (Romans 6–8).

The Mosaic Law and not just the Ten Commandments stand in contrast to the grace of God as now manifested in the coming of Christ (Romans 6:14; 7:6; 8:3; Galatians 3:12). Though given to Israel to govern her life in the promise land for
blessing instead of cursing, there was an attendant purpose in the giving of the Mosaic Law to Israel, and which purpose still stands to this day. Namely, the Law was designed to demonstrate to men their total helpless and hopeless condition before a holy and righteous and just God and to lead him to the Savior.

The Mosaic Law was given only to Israel (Exodus 19:3; Leviticus 26:46; Romans 3:19; 9:4) and was not given to the Gentiles of the Old Testament or the Church (Acts 15:5; 15:24; Romans 8:14; Galatians 2:19). The Mosaic Law cannot justify an individual before God (Romans 3:20-28; Galatians 2:16) and could not provide eternal salvation for men (Galatians 3:21-26).

The Mosaic Law could not provide the Holy Spirit and could not solve the problems of the old sin nature (Romans 8:2-3) and it could not make perfect, or permanently deal with sin (Hebrews 7:19) nor could it sanctify (Galatians 3:21; 5:5; Romans 8:3). Therefore, as Paul says in Galatians 3:19-24, the Law was designed to be a temporary guardian until the coming of Christ, the Suffering Messiah Savior. However, Israel approached the Law as a system of merit, shifting from a faith basis to a works basis (Exodus 19:8; Romans 10:3).

Even today, people often try to use the Law as a means of establishing their own standing before God. But the Word of God emphatically teaches us that the Law brings a curse (Galatians 3:10-12), brings death, it is a killer (2 Corinthians 3:6-7; Romans 7:9-10), brings condemnation (2 Corinthians 3:9), makes offenses abound (Romans 5:10; 7:7-13), declares all men guilty (Romans 3:19), and holds men in bondage to sin and death (Galatians 4:3-5, 9, 24; Romans 7:10-14). This is because man possesses an old Adamic sin nature that can never fulfill the righteousness of the Law, especially in the spirit of the Law. Therefore, mankind always falls short as Romans 3:23 tells us, and becomes condemned or guilty before a Holy God (Romans 3:19).

Paul taught that the law is weak through the human flesh since it contains the sin nature (8:3). Paul teaches outside of the book of Romans that the law never justifies people (Gal. 2:16; 3:11). He teaches that the law is sin’s strength (1 Cor. 15:56).

Both the Lord Jesus Christ taught that the entire Law and Prophets are dependent upon the obeying the commands to love God with one’s entire being and strength and one’s neighbor as oneself.

Matthew 22:40, “On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”

Paul taught that loving one’s neighbor fulfills the Law.

Romans 13:8 Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. 9 For this, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, “You shall
love your neighbor as yourself.” 10 Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. (NASB95)

Now, the first four of the Ten Commandments are all related to one’s relationship with God: (1) Exodus 20:3, You shall have no other gods before me. (NET) (2) Exodus 20:4-6 You shall not make for yourself a carved image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above or that is on the earth beneath or that is in the water below. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I, the Lord, your God, am a jealous God, responding to the transgression of fathers by dealing with children to the third and fourth generations of those who reject me, and showing covenant faithfulness to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments. (NET) (3) Exodus 20:7 You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold guiltless anyone who takes his name in vain. (NET) (4) Exodus 20:8-11 Remember the Sabbath day to set it apart as holy. For six days you may labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; on it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, or your male servant, or your female servant, or your cattle, or the resident foreigner who is in your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth and the sea and all that is in them, and he rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and set it apart as holy. (NET)

The last six commandments address one’s conduct in relation to one’s fellow human being: (5) Exodus 20:12 Honor your father and your mother, that you may live a long time in the land the Lord your God is giving to you. (NET) (6) Exodus 20:13 You shall not murder. (NET) (7) Exodus 20:14 You shall not commit adultery. (NET) (8) Exodus 20:15 You shall not steal. (NET) (9) Exodus 20:16 You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor. (NET) (10) Exodus 20:17 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 belongs to your neighbor. (NET)

The last five commandments were applicable to not only believers in Israel but also applied to unbelievers and governed the social life of Israel: (1) “You shall not murder.” (Exodus 20:13) (2) You shall not commit adultery.” (Exodus 20:14) (3) You shall not steal.” (Exodus 20:15) (4) “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.” (Exodus 20:16) (5) “You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor.” (Exodus 20:17).

The content of the Ten Commandments is not really new since the book of Genesis reveals the fact that these formalized laws were already followed, or
assumed as a moral standard. All Ten Commandments had been part of the Law of
God previously written on hearts instead of stone, for all ten appear, in one way or
another, in Genesis.

They are as follows: (1) Genesis 35:2, “Get rid of the foreign gods.” (2) 
Genesis 31:39, “Laban to Jacob, ‘But why did you steal my gods?’” (3) 
Genesis 24:3, “I want you to swear by the Lord.” (4) Genesis 2:3, “God
blessed the seventh day and made it holy.” (5) Genesis 27:41, “The days of
mourning my father are near.” (6) Genesis 4:9, “Where is your brother
Abel?” (7) Genesis 39:9, “How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin
against God?” (8) Genesis 44:4-7, “Why have you stolen my silver cup?” (9)
Genesis 39:17, “[Joseph] came to me to make sport of me … but … he ran.
…” (10) Genesis 12:18; 20:3, “You are as good as dead because of the woman
you have taken; she is a married woman.”

Exodus 20:1-2: Preamble to the Decalogue

Exodus 20:1 Then God spoke all these words, saying, 2 “I am the Lord
your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of
slavery.” (NASB95)

Verse 2 serves as a preamble and a prologue to “the Ten Words” or “Ten
Commandments.” They present the motivation for the Israelites to obey the Ten
Commandments, which was that God delivered them out of the house of slavery in
Egypt. This statement is designed to produce in the Israelites a love for God that is
based upon what He had done for them. Thus, the basis for their relationship was
love for each other and a love that was to be loyal. It was based upon who the Lord
is and what He had done for the Israelites by delivering them from slavery in
Egypt.

This verse also expresses the uniqueness of what Yahweh had done for the
Israelites in the sense that no other god had rescued such a large group of people
from such a powerful nation as Egypt.

The NET Bible writes “By this announcement Yahweh declared what he had
done for Israel by freeing them from slavery. Now they are free to serve him. He
has a claim on them for gratitude and obedience. But this will not be a covenant of
cruel slavery and oppression; it is a covenant of love, as God is saying ‘I am yours,
and you are mine.’ This was the sovereign Lord of creation and of history
speaking, declaring that he was their savior.”

Notice that for the first time in the narrative, God is speaking directly to the
Israelites and not through the intermediation of Moses. Therefore, all of the

---

Israelites were being spoken to directly by God just as He spoke with Moses directly at the burning bush and with Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. For the first time they were all hearing the voice of God speak to them directly. The Lord’s voice is accompanied by both audio and visual displays (cf. Exodus 19:16-19; 20:18-21). This would convince the Israelites that they were indeed in the presence of God.

Exodus 20:3: The First Commandment

**Exodus 20:3 “You shall have no other gods before Me.”** (NASB95)

This commandment addresses the Israelites relationship with Yahweh. In the Hebrew text, this first commandment means “You must never have other gods over or against Me.” This commandment appears in Deuteronomy 5:7 as well. The term ’elōhîm, “gods” which refers to either angels or men since it can refer to either human rulers (cf. Psalm 82; John 10:34-36) or angelic beings. This commandment is an implicit acknowledgement that there are men who are worshipped as gods as well as angels.

Therefore, this first commandment prohibits the Israelites from practicing idolatry and worshipping angels or men rather than God who is their Creator and Redeemer. It denotes the uniqueness of God in that He is the only being in creation who is to be worshipped by the Israelites. It expresses God’s claim upon the Israelites and demands their absolute loyalty and allegiance to Him.

Thomas Constable writes “This was a call to monotheism and faithfulness to the Lord. Israel was to have no other gods besides Yahweh. He was not just to be the first among several but the only One (cf. 1 Cor. 10:31; 1 Tim. 2:5; Acts 14:15; James 2:19; 1 John 5:20-21).” (Notes on Exodus, 2003 Edition, Dr. Thomas Constable; page 102; Published by Sonic Light; www.soniclight.com/)

Exodus 20:4-6: The Second Commandment

**Exodus 20:4 “You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth.”** (NASB95)

This commandment also addresses the Israelites’ relationship with Yahweh. It is a prohibition against the practice of idolatry. In the Hebrew, it means “You must never make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water beneath the earth.” This prohibition denotes that nothing in creation must ever be copied and used as an object of worship by the Israelites. It prohibited the Israelites from making images or likenesses of Yahweh.
In Romans 1:18-23, Paul describes the entire human race as involved in idolatry. Deuteronomy 32:17 and 1 Corinthians 10:20 teach that the worship of idols is connected to the worship of demons since the sacrificing to idols is in reality sacrificing to demons who promote the worship of idols.

Idolatry is the worship of something created as opposed to the worship of the Creator Himself. Scores of references to idolatry appear in the Old Testament.

Joshua 24:2 states that Abraham’s father served idols. The most noteworthy instance of idolatry in the history of Israel was Aaron’s making of the golden calf at the foot of Mount Sinai (Ex 32:1-4). Idolatry originally meant the worship of idols, or the worship of false gods by means of idols, but came to mean among the Old Testament Hebrews any worship of false gods, whether by images or otherwise or the worship of the Lord through visible symbols (Hos 8:5-6; 10:5).

Idolatry is not only the giving to any creature or human creation the honor or devotion, which belongs to God alone, but also is putting anything ahead of your relationship with God and which would prevent you from doing His will (1 Cor 10:14; Gal 5:20; Col 3:5; 1 Peter 4:3).

Ultimately in the New Testament idolatry came to mean, not only the giving to any creature or human creation the honor or devotion which belonged to God alone, but the giving to any human desire a precedence over God's will (1 Cor 10:14; Gal 5:20; Col 3:5; 1 Peter 4:3).

Exodus 20:5 “You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, 6 but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.” (NASB95)

These verses serve to explain the second commandment. The Israelites were prohibited from worshipping other gods because Yahweh was a jealous God who tolerates no rivals, which is justified of course since He is the Creator and Redeemer and not a political ruler or angel.

God’s jealousy is not the same as the jealousy of men, which is a sin. But rather it refers to God having the Israelites best interests in mind always. It denotes His intense desire to protect the Israelites as well as His honor.

The statement “visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations” does not mean that God punishes an innocent generation for the sins of the previous generation since Deuteronomy 24:16 rejects this.

Deuteronomy 24:16 “Fathers shall not be put to death for their sons, nor shall sons be put to death for their fathers; everyone shall be put to death for his own sin.” (NASB95)
Rather this statement teaches God’s determination to punish successive generations for committing the same sins they learned from their parents. God will punish generation after generation if successive generations keep practicing the sins of previous generations. In other words, children will be punished by God if they grow up to practice the same sins of their parents who are punished for their sinful acts.

Verse 6 stands in direct contrast to the promise in verse 5 to punish successive generations for practicing the sins of a predecessor generation. The former presents God’s desire to bless the Israelites. His desire is that the Israelites remain loyal to Him by obeying Him in order that He might bless them.

To love God is to obey Him (John 14:15), thus to hate God is to disobey Him. Verse 5 speaks of the latter and verse 6 speaks of the former. Love and hate in these two verses are not a reference to human emotions but rather to being loyal to God (love) and disloyal to Him (hate).

Exodus 20:7: The Third Commandment

Exodus 20:7 “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain.” (NASB95)

This third commandment, like the previous two, addresses the Israelites’ proper conduct with regards to their relationship with God. Like the previous two, it too is a prohibition. Like the second, it also guarantees the Israelites will be punished by God for disobedience.

“The name” of the Lord has a four-fold sense: (1) It signifies the “personality” of God distinguishing Him from the heathen gods. (2) It signifies the “character” of God representing who He is. (3) It signifies God’s “work” in creation and for the salvation of men. (4) It signifies the “reputation” of God before men.

To take the Lord’s name in vain meant that the Israelites were not to use His name for any idle, frivolous or insincere purpose such as speaking His name when taking an oath with no intention of keeping it (see Leviticus 19:12). It speaks of not using the Lord’s name for selfish or evil purposes (see Psalm 139:20), which would as a result undermine His authority.

Douglas Stuart has an excellent comment with regards to the meaning of taking the Lord’s name in vain, he writes “Three sorts of questions arise in connection with this commandment: (1) What exactly is involved in taking God’s name in vain/misusing his name? (2) Why is his name so important that protecting it is one of the ten foundational commandments to Israel? (3) What kind of punishment might ensue for breaking this commandment? The primary meaning of ‘misuse the name of the LORD’ (nāšāh šēm yahweh, lit., ‘raise up Yahweh’s name for no
good’) 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,’ or giving legal testimony with the meaning of ‘I swear that my testimony in this legal matter/before this court is true with the guarantee that Yahweh may kill me or otherwise punish me if it isn’t.’ In other words, the most basic, core idea behind this commandment is the prohibition of perjury. We must remember, however, that the commandment is worded generally enough to encompass any misuse of Yahweh’s name—from making light of it or overtly mocking it, to speaking about Yahweh in any way disrespectfully, to using it as the theophoric element in a personal name under social pressure to have one’s family ‘look orthodox’ when in fact their beliefs were pagan/idolatrous. Yahweh’s name signified his essence. In any culture, modern or ancient, a name is a verbal symbol for a person or thing, and the ancients in particular obviously appreciated the way names connoted the very value, character, and influence of a person or thing. To speak Yahweh’s name was to recognize his awesome power and holiness and even to invite his response to one’s particular situation at the moment. Those who had not obeyed Yahweh might well fear even to mention his name out loud lest he respond by appearing in some fashion among them. Thus Amos 6:10 describes those wishing no contact with Yahweh’s judgment against them as saying, ‘Hush! We must not mention the name of the LORD.’ Jesus reinforced and clarified this commandment with regard to making false promises (swearing falsely/uttering false oaths) that invoked God’s name by banning the practice of invoking anything as a guarantor of honesty altogether, including any substitution for the divine name in an oath (Matt 5:33–37; 23:16–22; cf. Jas 5:12), thus virtually eliminating any kind of oathtaking and requiring one’s word to be one’s bond in any promise. The punishment for breaking this commandment remains unspecified and therefore could in theory take any form of God’s choosing, from something relatively minor to death. Jeremiah provides examples of serious punishments when, for instance, a prophet speaks lies in Yahweh’s name (a severe example of misusing Yahweh’s name), including death for both the dishonest prophets and those who by believing their dishonest words also participate in the profanation of the divine name (Jer 14:14–16), banishment and death (Jer 27:15), or death at the hand of captors in exile (Jer 29:21). To ‘hold guiltless’ (yēnaqqeh) connotes ‘letting someone get away without punishment.’ That is expressly what Yahweh will not do if his name is misused.”

Exodus 20:8-11: The Fourth Commandment


©2012 William E. Wenstrom, Jr. Bible Ministries
Exodus 20:8 “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a sabbath of the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. 11 For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and made it holy.” (NASB95)

“Sabbath” is the noun šāḇāt (שַׁבָּת), which means “rest period” referring to the seventh day of the week which is called “Saturday.” This is the Bible’s first mention of the Sabbath. Genesis 2:2-3 teaches that God rested or ceased from His creative and restorative activity on the seventh day. The Hebrew words for “seventh” and “rested” are similar.

The observance of the Sabbath is an ordinance given to the nation of Israel and not the church. Although the church was not given the ordinance to observe the Sabbath, they are commanded to enter into God’s Sabbath rest meaning to rest in the promises of God and one’s union with Christ (cf. Hebrews 4).

Now, Exodus 20:8-11 makes clear that the observance of the Sabbath is connected to the fact that God Himself rested on the seventh day after six days of work (Genesis 2:2-3). The Sabbath is thus an invitation to rejoice in God’s creation and to acknowledge that He is sovereign.

Deuteronomy 5:15 gives another reason for observing the Sabbath. This verse connects the Sabbath with Israel’s deliverance from Egypt. Therefore, every Sabbath the Israelites were to bring into remembrance that the Lord delivered them from Egyptian bondage by means of His omnipotence.

Exodus 20:10, Deuteronomy 5:14-15 and Exodus 23:12 teach that the Sabbath was for the benefit of both man and animal in Israel. Exodus 31:13, 17, Ezekiel 20:12 and 20 teach that it was a sign of the covenant between the Lord and Israel. Thus, those in Israel who failed to keep the Sabbath were put to death (Exodus 31:14; Numbers 15:32-36; Jeremiah 17:19-27). The keeping of the Sabbath would affirm one’s loyalty to the Lord and would guarantee His presence and deliverance.

“To keep it holy” denotes that the Israelites must keep Saturday as a day set aside exclusively for God, i.e. worshipped Him. This day should be set aside exclusively by the Israelites as a day to bring into remembrance who God is and what He has done for them resulting in worshipped Him, i.e. giving thanks to Him.

Verses 9 and 10 present the explanation for the commandment in verse 8.

Stuart writes “What this explanation portion of the word/commandment prohibits is not any sort of exertion, or the preparing of food, or the feeding or watering of animals, or anything else necessary to get through the day in an
agrarian culture. Rather, it prohibits duplicating on the Sabbath any of the usual labors of the other six days that can possibly be stopped without actually causing someone or something harm. People and animals would still need to be fed; lactating animals would still need to be milked; priests would still work within the sanctuary. But to the extent possible, all workers were to receive a day of rest.”

The observance of the Sabbath was designed to be a benefit for people in that it would contribute to making them spiritually stronger and draw them closer to God. The Sabbath day would bring about a change in one’s weekly routine, which would be a day of refreshment. It was a day to focus upon His will.

Exodus 20:11 teaches the Israelites that the basis for the Sabbath day observance is God creating the time, matter, space continuum as well as mankind and restoring the heavens and the earth which was judged by God due to Satan’s rebellion against God.

The fact that God is said to have “ceased” from His activity does not mean that He was tired but simply that He was satisfied with His work, which He had brought to completion by the seventh day. It means that there was nothing He could add to what He already accomplished during the six days, thus, it was perfect in every detail.

Exodus 20:12: The Fifth Commandment

Exodus 20:12 “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the Lord your God gives you.” (NASB95)

This is the first commandment that is related to the Israelites proper conduct with regards to their fellow human beings.

Honoring your father and mother involves not only financial support if necessary but also care and concern and personal involvement with them. Honor of parents involves providing for parents when they can no longer provide for themselves.

Just as parents spend twenty or so years taking care of and providing for their children, so their children are to spend whatever time and money necessary to care and provide for their parents should the parents be no longer able to do so for themselves.

Paul quotes this commandment in Ephesians 6:3 and says that it is “the first commandment with a promise” which does not mean first in the sense of the order in which it was given but rather it means “first in importance for children.”

The phrase “that you may live on long on the earth” means that God enriches the life of the obedient child no matter how long he may live on the earth. Sin


©2012 William E. Wenstrom, Jr. Bible Ministries
always robs us and obedience always enriches us. This does not mean that people who have died young dishonored their parents.

To honor and obey one’s parents is to honor and obey God who commanded obey and honor your father and mother.

Stuart commenting on this commandment writes “This commandment is thus like the one that precedes it in linking the requirement to an action of God: As God rested on the creation Sabbath, so individual Israelis must do so each week in their own families; as God promises to take care of his dependents, Israel, for a long time in the promised land, so individual Israelis must take care of their dependent parents for a long time, as necessary, in their own families. The prior commandment looks back on the creation Sabbath, whereas the present commandment looks forward to the nation’s tenure in the land of promise. There is not promise here of individually long life spans. Rather the promise refers to God’s protection of his covenant people if and as long as they keep his covenant.”

Exodus 20:13: The Sixth Commandment

Exodus 20:13 “You shall not murder.” (NASB95)

This commandment also appears in Deuteronomy 5:17. Paul quotes this verse in Romans 13:9.

The Bible prohibits murder. However, it does not prohibit the killing of the enemy by a soldier in battle or the execution of a murderer through capital punishment.

Genesis 9:5-6 records for us the establishment of the fourth and final divine institution as well as the institution of capital punishment.

Genesis 9:5 “Surely I will require your lifeblood; from every beast I will require it. And from every man, from every man's brother I will require the life of man. 6 Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man.” (NASB95)

The Word of God prohibits murder according to Exodus 20:13 and is one of the sins that God hates according to Proverbs 6:16-19 and according to Genesis 9:6 is to be punished through capital punishment.

“I will require” is the verb dā·rāš (דָּרַשׁ) (daw-rash), which is a judicial term used with reference to both men and animals and expresses the fact God seeks “restitution” for murder by the execution of the murderer or the animal who has taken a human life.

---

As a result of the total depravity of mankind, God instituted capital punishment in order to protect both animal and human life and to curb violence and be a deterrent to crime.

The reason why this provision is given is found in the phrase “for in the image of God, He (the Lord) made (‘asah, “modeled”) (the soul of) man.”

The emphasis of this stipulation recorded in Genesis 9:5-6 does “not” refer to vengeance but rather justice and the careful recognition of the sacredness of the divine image in man, though marred by sin.

Murder is a shocking affront to God and a terrible crime against one’s fellow man. Before the Flood the lack of capital punishment led to blood vendettas (Gen. 4) and without instinctive fear, the animals corrupted their behavior.

Genesis 9:5-6 records the institution of human government where God delegated authority to mankind as His agents in exacting retribution by capital punishment upon those who take a human life indicating as well that this is not a personal matter but a social obligation. Before the Flood, there was no formal arrangement of human government and thus no formal punishment of crime or of crime prevention, even for the capital crime of murder, as evident in the individual histories of Cain and Lamech (Genesis 4). The absence of human government and the total depravity of mankind led to a universal state of violence and anarchy, which resulted in the judgment of the Flood. God established capital punishment and thereby human government in order to prevent the conditions of the antediluvian period from developing again.

Numbers 35:30-34, Deuteronomy 17:6-7 and 19:15 teach that capital punishment “cannot” take place unless there are two or more witnesses to the crime and that they all agree in their testimony after being individually interviewed. Capital punishment is taught in the Old Testament (Ex. 21:12, 15-17; 22:2, 18-20; Num. 35:6-34; Deut. 19:1-13; 24:7) and in the New Testament (Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:13). The fact that capital punishment was instituted does “not” mean that there is never to be an exception to the punishment of execution for the crime of murder.

With God, justice may be tempered with mercy, in response to repentance. For example, David was guilty of the capital crimes of murder and adultery in the case of Uriah and Bathsheba respectively and God forgave David when he confessed his sin and thus David instead of dying by stoning or the sword as he deserved, “died in a good old age, full of days, riches and honor (1 Chron. 29:28).

Also, the woman caught in the act of adultery was guilty by the Mosaic Law of a crime punishable by death (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22) and the Lord Jesus seeing her heart of repentance, was moved to forgive her and to see that she was set free (Jn. 8:3-11). In like manner, a judge or a governor is warranted in taking such
mitigating factors as may exist in a given situation into consideration in determining a sentence, legal penalty of capital punishment.

The essential point is that man was delegated authority and responsibility of human government by God and that this responsibility first entails the recognition of the sacredness of human life and that man is created in the image of God and the recognition of capital punishment as the just and legal penalty for murder. It is clear that the authority for capital punishment implies also the authority to establish laws governing human activities and personal relationships, which if unregulated would lead to murder, robbery, adultery, thus this instruction to Noah is the fundamental basis for all human legal and governmental institutions.

Exodus 20:14: The Seventh Commandment

Exodus 20:14 “You shall not commit adultery.” (NASB95)
Marriage was established by God in the Garden of Eden when He brought the Woman to Adam to be his helpmate (See Genesis 2:18-25). Therefore, committing adultery would be sin against God because it would violate the divine institution of marriage. Of course, as we have noted the Word of God prohibits adultery.

Adultery begins in the heart (Mark 7:21-23). The act of adultery takes place when the thought of adultery is acted upon (James 1:13-15). Committing adultery is a manifestation of not loving your neighbor as yourself (Romans 13:9-10).

Under the Mosaic Law, both the adulterer and the adulteress received the death penalty (Leviticus 20:10).

Stuart writes “Adultery was known in the ancient world as ‘the great sin.’ Marriage is foundational to the creation order and to human society; husbands and wives can hardly function fully as one flesh if they do not trust each other. Sexual relations are the virtual seal of a marriage covenant, and adultery betrays the emotional-psychological intimacy that specially connects adult men and women within marriage.”

Hannah writes “This commandment is directed toward protecting the sanctity of the home (Heb. 13:4; see comments on Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:1-12), the fundamental building block of society. The marital vow is a holy commitment that should not be violated by sexual unfaithfulness under any circumstances. Adultery (nā’ap) refers to infidelity on the part of either men or women (Lev. 20:10).”

In Matthew 5:27-28, the Lord Jesus Christ taught if you look lustfully at another man’s wife, you have already committed adultery with her in your heart.

---

In James 2:10-11, James teaches those Jewish Christians who succumbed to the Judaizers and sought to live under the Mosaic economy taught that if you do not commit adultery but commit murder, you have transgressed the Law since whoever stumbles in one point has become guilty of transgressing all that is taught in the Law.


God has ordained sex within the boundaries of marriage in order to perpetuate and protect the human race from disease and emotional trauma, which is brought on by adultery.

Adultery was a problem throughout Israel’s history (Jeremiah 7:9-11; 9:1-6; Ezekiel 22:1-16).

In the first century, the Jews were divorcing their women without legitimate Biblical reasons and were thus committing adultery.

There are three legitimate grounds for divorce: (1) Failure to be faithful to the marriage partner (Deuteronomy 24:1-5) (2) Failure to provide emotional support in the form of sex (Exodus 21:10-11) (3) Failure to provide material support (Exodus 21:10-11). Therefore, adultery was grounds for divorce since it was the failure to be faithful to the marriage contract.

The refusal to have sex with your marriage partner is grounds for divorce since it is a failure to provide sex for your marriage partner under the marriage contract. Physical abuse is grounds for divorce since it is the failure to provide emotional support under the marriage contract. Physical neglect is grounds for divorce since it is the failure to provide material support under the terms of the marriage contract.

During our Lord’s First Advent, many Jewish men tried to circumvent the Mosaic Law command against adultery by divorcing their wives and marrying another woman to whom they were attracted. This practice of divorcing their wives for simply any reason came about because of misinterpreting the meaning of the phrase “indecency” in Deuteronomy 24:1-5.

In first century Israel, there were two schools of interpretation concerning Deuteronomy 24:1. There was the “Shammai” school, which was conservative in that they took the word “indecency” literally referring to some form of sexual immorality such as adultery. The second was the “Hillel” school, which was liberal in that they took the word “indecency” and added to it, saying that the word meant “any indecency at all,” thus teaching that a Jewish man could divorce his wife for anything that he didn’t like about her such as she burned the bacon at breakfast.

In Matthew 19:1-12, the Lord Jesus Christ condemned this practice of divorcing without a legitimate reason. In this passage, the “certificate of divorce” enabled the divorcees to remarry.
The directive will of God is that marriage was originally designed to be a lifelong commitment (Gen. 2:24; Matthew 19:5-6), but the permissive will of God has permitted divorce because of the fallen nature of man and negative volition to the Word of God on the part of one or both partners (Matt. 19:7-8).

The victim of adultery has two legitimate choices, forgiveness or divorce (Ephesians 4:31-32).

Recovering from the sin of adultery demands the confession of the sin to the Father and then bringing one’s thoughts in obedience to Christ, which constitutes obeying the commands of Ephesians 5:18 to be influenced by means of the Spirit and Colossians 3:16 to let the Word of Christ richly dwell in your soul.

The believer’s love for the Lord is to motivate him to obey God’s will, which prohibits adultery. His love and gratitude to the Lord for all that He had done for him is the secret to withstanding the temptation to commit sin and not just adultery since his love for the Lord and gratitude towards Him will motivate him to obey the laws of God pertaining to adultery. Obedience to the will of God, motivated by his love for God, enables the believer to withstand temptation from the old Adamic sin nature and the cosmic system of Satan. Obedience to the will of God demonstrates our love for God.

Obedience to the Word of God is motivated by the believer’s love for the Lord and the believer’s love for the Lord is simply the response of the believer to the love God has demonstrated towards the believer through His Son Jesus Christ on the Cross and raising him up and seated him with Christ (See Ephesians 2:1-10). This is why the apostle Paul prayed that the Philippians love for the Lord would continue to grow since love for the Lord serves as a protection from sin and motivation to resist the temptation to sin.

**Philippians 1:9** Now, this I make it a habit to pray that your divine-love might continue to flourish yet more and more by means of a total discerning experiential knowledge (of the love of God manifested in Christ by the Holy Spirit in the pages of Scripture). (Author’s translation)

Therefore, the believer receives the capacity to withstand committing the sin of adultery and all sin by means of his love for the Lord and if the believer loves the Lord it is only because the Lord loved him first (1 John 4:19).

The believer’s love for the Lord is demonstrated by his obedience to the Lord’s commands and his obedience to the Lord’s commands is the response in his soul to the love, which the Lord exercised towards him. Also, the believer’s awareness that God had a plan for his life and his personal sense of destiny will further motivate him to withstand the lusts of the old Adamic sin nature.

**Exodus 20:15: The Eighth Commandment**
Exodus 20:15 “You shall not steal.” (NASB95)

This prohibition demands that the Israelites respect each other’s property, which ignored creates instability in society. Stealing is taking something that does not belong to you without permission. This sin undermines the social order. Those who steal food causes someone to go hungry. The one who steals an animal hinders another’s ability to farm. The stealing of clothing can cause another to suffer from the elements.

Disobedience to this prohibition is a manifestation of not loving one’s neighbor as oneself. This prohibition appears in other places in the Old Testament (Leviticus 19:11; Deuteronomy 5:19). It is reinforced many times in the New Testament (Matthew 19:18; Romans 2:21; 13:9; 1 Corinthians 6:10; Ephesians 4:28; Titus 2:10; 1 Peter 4:15). By way of contrast, instead of stealing believers are to work with their own hands so that they might be able to share with someone who is in need (2 Thessalonians 3:6-12).

Exodus 20:16: The Ninth Commandment

Exodus 20:16 “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.” (NASB95)

This prohibition is reinforced in Leviticus 5:1 and Deuteronomy 19:18. The immediate concern with this prohibition is justice and honesty toward those with whom the Israelites may appear in court or legal investigation of any kind. It of course involves maintaining integrity before the Lord, who because He is omniscience knows the truth about everything. The Lord will ultimately hold accountable those who have resorted to lies to protect themselves from harm or in order to maliciously injure the other person in the court action.

This prohibition emphasizes personal integrity in all interpersonal relationships. To resort to false accusation and testimony is to dishonor God and support Satan who is the father of lies.

Stuart writes “A decent society requires a reliable court system and court processes. Because crimes and disputes do occur, it must be the case that they can be adjudicated and the criminal behavior or unfairness thereby stopped. If witnesses in a trial, whether civil or criminal, do not tell the truth, it is extremely difficult for judges to render proper decisions. In other words, the court system of a nation depends on the honesty of its people.”

Exodus 20:17: The Tenth Commandment

Exodus 20:17 “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor.” (NASB95)

This prohibition appears in Deuteronomy 5:21 and Paul quotes from it in Romans 13:9. To covet is to desire inordinately or without due regard for the rights of others. Therefore, the Lord is emphatically prohibiting the Israelites from desiring inordinately or without due regard for the rights of their fellow citizens. Failure to observe this prohibition is a failure to love one’s neighbor as oneself and produces an unstable society.

Hannah writes “This is a general safeguard against many other sins, particularly commandments six through nine. Israelites were not to long for, desire earnestly, or lust after what legitimately belonged to others.”

Exodus 20:18-21: The Israelites Response

Exodus 20:18 All the people perceived the thunder and the lightning flashes and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood at a distance. 19 Then they said to Moses, “Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, or we will die.” 20 Moses said to the people, “Do not be afraid; for God has come in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may remain with you, so that you may not sin.” 21 So the people stood at a distance, while Moses approached the thick cloud where God was. (NASB95)

This passage reveals that the Israelites were terrified by hearing God speak audibly and directly to them. They demanded that in the future Moses would speak to them rather than God. The Scriptures make clear that God’s voice is deafeningly loud. Moses was able to endure it because God gave him grace to do so. However, the Israelites were terrified by the sound of God’s voice. Accompanied by the thunder and lightening, the voice of God struck great fear in the hearts of every Israelite.

These verses teach that God’s presence is extremely threatening to those who are not as holy as God. He must limit manifesting Himself so as to not overwhelm human beings. God’s presence also manifests God’s holiness and for a person who is a sinner by nature and practice, it would be a terrifying experience since God’s holiness demands that sin and sinners be judged. Thus, the need for the Savior, Jesus Christ, who has made it possible for sinners to come into the presence of God without fear.

---

Moses tells the people to not be afraid because God was testing them to see if they really would be afraid of disobeying Him by sinning. Thus, Moses was telling them it was good that they had this response to God’s voice and commandments since it indicated that they would be afraid of offending Him by committing sin. Consequently, their fear of God would serve as a deterrent to sinning. To be afraid of the consequences of disobeying God is very important attitude for a believer to possess since it promotes experiential sanctification and experiencing the holiness of God in one’s life.

Verse 21 tells the reader that Moses approached God by climbing the mountain where God’s glory resided but the Israelites stayed at a distance. Thus, we see Moses alone with God on the mountain while the people stayed at the base of the mountain. This reveals that Moses was on intimate terms with God while the Israelites were not. This sets up a pattern that appears in future passages where God speaks to Moses directly and indirectly to the Israelites through Moses.

The reason why Moses was on intimate terms with God and the Israelites were not is that the former was occupied with pursuing holiness whereas the latter was not but rather pursued happiness on their own terms. The former loved God with his entire being whereas the latter did not. Therefore, only those who love God with their entire being and pursue holiness are on intimate terms with God.

Exodus 20:22-26: Laws About the Construction of Altars

Exodus 20:22 Then the Lord said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘You yourselves have seen that I have spoken to you from heaven. 23 You shall not make other gods besides Me; gods of silver or gods of gold, you shall not make for yourselves. 24 You shall make an altar of earth for Me, and you shall sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen; in every place where I cause My name to be remembered, I will come to you and bless you. 25 If you make an altar of stone for Me, you shall not build it of cut stones, for if you wield your tool on it, you will profane it. 26 And you shall not go up by steps to My altar, so that your nakedness will not be exposed on it.”’ (NASB95)

These verses present to Israel regulations with regards to the worship of the Lord. The proper worship of the Lord required proper regulations or in other words things that were to be done and not to be done.

Verse 22 is a reminder to the Israelites of what they have seen and heard for themselves. It tells them that God Himself has spoken to them from heaven in a localized place, namely Mount Sinai. This verse teaches that on the basis of God’s revelation on the mountain, the Israelites were obligated to obey Him as instructed.
in verses 24-26. Verse 23 summarizes the first two commandments, which prohibit the practice of idolatry.

In verses 24-26, the Lord gives the Israelites a brief overview of the construction of altars, which are to be used to worship Him. The point of this section is that those who worship a holy God must maintain holiness by the manner in which they worship. The Israelites are to worship in the manner prescribed by God.

If you recall, in Exodus 17:15, we have the record of Moses building an altar and naming it “The Lord is My Banner.” The fact that Moses builds an altar recalls the patriarchs building altars to memorialize theophanies and covenant promises. Noah started the practice (Genesis 8:20) and it continued with Abraham (Genesis 12:1-7) and his son and grandson (Genesis 26:25; 35:7). These altars were to worship the Lord in the sense of expressing gratitude for what the Lord has done or promised to do in the future. Therefore, Moses was carrying on a tradition of God’s people in expressing thanksgiving to God for delivering the Israelites.

In Exodus 27:1-8, we will see the Israelites receiving detailed instructions with regards to the construction of altars. The initial altar here in Exodus 20:24-26 is simple made of dirt or stone that was not cut by men. The reason for this simplicity is to reflect God’s holiness and His abhorrence of idolatry. It emphasizes that God only accepts that which He has created and provided. Thus, the altar could not be something in which human beings could take pride in it or ownership of it. This altar could not have steps. In the ancient world, most people did not wear underwear. Even though Levitical priests eventually wore undergarments (Exodus 28:42), there was always the risk of the worshipper or priest’s genitals being exposed as he walked up steps, which would insult God. Thus, the Lord instructs the Israelites to construct their altars with no steps.

“Burnt offering” is the noun ʿō·lā(h) (עֹלָה o-law), which portrays or typifies that aspect of Jesus Christ’s spiritual and physical deaths on the Cross, which would propitiate the Father (1 John 2:2; 4:10). The burnt offering in Leviticus 1:2-17 depicts the doctrine of propitiation with emphasis on the work of Christ.

“Propitiation” is the Godward side of salvation whereby the voluntary substitutionary spiritual death of the impeccable humanity of Christ in hypostatic union satisfied the righteous demands of a holy God that the sins of the entire world-past, present and future be judged (1 John 2:2; 4:10).

“Peace offerings” is the noun šē·lēm (שֶׁלֶם sheh´-lem), which called for the shedding of blood and taught the doctrine of reconciliation (Lev. 3). The peace offering sets forth God as propitiated and the sinner reconciled.

The peace offering emphasizes the person of Christ who is described in the Scriptures by the following: (1) “our peace” (Eph. 2:14). (2) “Made peace” (Col. 1:20). (3) “Preached peace” (Eph. 2:17). (4) “Prince of peace” (Isa. 9:6).
The peace offering is found in Leviticus 3 and always followed the other offerings. Categories of Peace offerings: (1) Thank offering (zebah hattoda, “sacrifice of thanksgiving,” Lev. 7:12; 22:29) (2) Votive offering (zebah neder, “sacrifice of a vow,” Num. 6:2; 15:3, 8) (3) Freewill offering (zebah nedaba, Lev. 7:16; 22:18, 21).

Peace offerings took place on: (1) Public occasions (2) Private occasions. Public: (1) Customary on festive inauguration (Ex. 24:5; 2 Sam. 6:17-18; 1 Kings 8:63) (2) Election of kings (1 Sam. 11: 15) (3) Joyous occasions (Deut. 27:7; Josh. 8:31) (4) Prescribed for the feast of Pentecost (Lev. 23:19) (5) Festivals were observed with them (Num. 10:10; 2 Chron. 30:22).

Solomon arranged three times a year a sacrificial festival of burnt and peace offerings (1 Kings 9:25). Private: (1) Result of free impulse or fulfillment of a vow (Lev. 7:16; 22:21; Num. 15:8) (2) Recognition of a special favor from Jehovah (Lev. 7:12; 22:29) (3) Regularly employed at the expiration of a Nazarite vow (Num. 6:14).

The peace offering had two sources: (1) “Of the herd” (Lev. 3:1-5) (2) “From the flock” (Lev. 3:6-17). Types of animals were offered: (1) Bull (Lev. 3:1-5) (2) Lamb (Lev. 3:6-11) (3) Goat (Lev. 3:12-16).

Qualification for the animals: (1) Must be unblemished which speaks of the impeccability of the person of Christ. (2) The animal could be either male or female which represents the offerer and what he or she sees in Christ.

The fire in the peace offering represents the total commitment of Christ to God the Father’s plan and His human testings and sufferings. The peace offering placed on top of the burnt offering represents the fact that the person and work of our Lord go together (Lev. 3:5). The sinner can come to God and have communion and fellowship with Him on the basis of the person and work of Christ. The peace offering sets forth God as propitiated and the sinner reconciled.

Bull (Lev. 3:1-5): (1) Sets forth the servant side of our Lord (Mark 10:45). (2) Domesticated animal used to “bear” burdens and to plow fields. (3) Represented transportation and commerce in the ancient world.

Our Lord served man by paying the ransom price, which delivered all of humanity from the slave market of sin. He served all of mankind by propitiating God the Father’s justice at the Cross with His substitutionary spiritual death. Our Lord served God by doing His will. God the Father’s will was for His Son to die on the Cross as a propitiation for our sins.

Lamb (Lev. 3:6-11): (1) represents Christ in His complete identification with man in life and death. (2) Pictured Christ as the qualified sin-bearer or His quality and ability to take the place of man in bearing the sins of the world. John 1:29 speaks of the Lamb’s, i.e., the Lord Jesus Christ, work on the Cross. John 1:36 speaks of the Person of our Lord. Isaiah 53 portrays our Lord as a Lamb who
becomes our Substitute. Our Substitute is called a lamb in His resurrection (Rev. 5:6). He is the Lamb in His return at the Second Advent (Rev. 6:16-17).

The “entire fat tail” refers to a special breed of sheep peculiar to Palestine. They were found in Palestine, Syria, North Africa and Egypt. They often weighed 15 lbs. or more and consisted of marrow and fat. All the sheep in Palestine were “broad-tailed.” The broad part of the tail is abnormal projection or outgrowth of fat from which the true tail hangs down. This is the rump or tailbone, which passes over into the vertebrae of the tail. This was the Lord’s portion.

Goat (Lev. 3:12-16): (1) represents the complete identification of Christ as adequate to take away the sins of the world. (2) Represents that aspect of Christ’s work, which propitiated God the Father. In Lev. 16:10, the scapegoat was sent into the wilderness on the Day of Atonement and represented that aspect of Christ’s work, which puts away our sins (John 1:29). The Lord Jesus Christ is the propitiation for our sins. God no longer remembers our sins (Psa. 103:12).

The Ritual for the Peace Offering (shelem): (1) Offerer led the animal to the altar and laid his hand upon its head and killed it. (2) The priest caught the blood and sprinkled it upon the altar. (3) The fat of the intestines was taken from the animal and burned upon the altar on top of the burnt offering (Lev. 3:3-5, 9-11, 14-16; 9:18-20). (4) The breast and right shoulder were separated from each other. (5) The shoulder was laid aside for the priest. (6) The breast was waved, i.e., symbolically presented to the Lord, from whom the priests received it for their use. (7) The priest’s part may be eaten by him, either boiled or roasted in some clean place (Lev. 7:30-34; 10:13-14). (8) All the flesh of public peace offering belonged to the priests (Lev. 23:20). (9) The rest of the flesh belonged to the offerer and was to be shared with his family and guests. (10) Whatever remained after 3 days was burned.

The Law of the Peace Offering (Lev. 7:11-38): (1) Freewill offering for the purpose of thanksgiving (Lev. 7:11-12; cf. Heb. 13:15) (2) Unleavened cakes and wafers speak of the impeccability of Christ, or the lack of evil or sin in His life. (3) The unleavened cakes mixed with oil speak of the presence of the Holy Spirit in our Lord’s life and ministry. (4) The leavened cakes speak of the evil and sin still present in the offerer. (5) The leavened cakes were elevated toward heaven, which speaks of occupation with the Person of Christ.

Leviticus 7:15-18 teaches: (1) Offering was to be eaten that same day without delay in order to teach the importance of staying close to Christ for peace of conscience and for power over temptation. (2) The sacrifice was to be burned on 3rd day in order to guard against the desecration of the sacrificial meal, which was holy. (3) Flesh putrefies on the 3rd day if it is not preserved artificially. Communion and fellowship with God’s people was cut off if any flesh was eaten.
on the 3rd day. The one who offered the sacrifice would not be accepted by God if the flesh was eaten on the 3rd day.

Leviticus 7:19-21: (1) Speaks of the importance of confession of sin for there is no fellowship and communion without confession of sin. (2) Fellowship and communion was cut off if the offer came in contact with anything unclean which speaks of residence in the Cosmic System of Satan.

Leviticus 7:23-27: (1) The fat of animals that were not commanded to be sacrifice was unacceptable and could not be eaten because it was unclean. (2) The fat of animals that had been torn to pieces by other animals was an unacceptable or unclean sacrifice and defiled the eater, but could be used for the common purposes of ordinary life. (3) Fellowship and communion was cut off if the individual offered any of these animals as a sacrifice to God. (4) Fellowship and communion was cut off if the fat portions of the ox, sheep or goat were eaten by the offerer because they were gifts set apart for God. (5) The fat portions of the ox, sheep and goat were considered the best portions of the animal and therefore, belonged to God since He only demands the best. (6) Fellowship and communion with God was cut off if the offerer ate any blood. (7) The soul life of the animal was in the blood and was sanctified as the medium of atonement for the soul of man (Lev. 17:10-16). (8) The blood of the animal represented the spiritual death of our Lord on the Cross.

Leviticus 7:29-34: (1) the offerer of his own free will was to bring a peace offering. (2) This represents the acceptance of the terms of God’s peace treaty, i.e., reconciliation. (3) The breast of the animal belonged to the high priest (Aaron) and his sons. (4) The breast spoke of Christ’s love for us (Rom. 5:8; Gal. 2:20).

The peace offering was performed with the breast-piece, which was called the wave-breast (Lev. 7:34; 10:45; Num. 6:20; Ex. 29:27).

The “waving” of the breast was a private thank offering. The priest placed his own hands underneath and moved the hands of the offerer backwards and forwards in a horizontal direction. The movement forwards in the direction of the altar indicated the presentation of the sacrifice or the symbolic transfer of it to God. The movement backwards meant the reception of it back again as a present, which God handed over to His servants the priests.

The right thigh belonged to the priest and spoke of the power of Christ to save us and keep us saved forever, Christ is our eternal security (John 10:27-30). The right thigh was used as a heave offering and was called the heave offering because it was “lifted” or “heaved off” from the sacrificial animal as a gift of honor for the officiating priest. The heave offering enabled the priests to take part as God’s representatives in the sacrificial meal. The heave offering was not waved like the breast-piece. The wave and heave offerings were gifts to Jehovah and could only be used by the priest and their children (Lev. 22:10; Num. 18:19).
At the moment of his salvation, the church age believer was given a royal ambassadorship in which he is to represent the absent Christ who sits as the right hand of the Father and presents the gospel message of peace with God to the unsaved through faith alone in Christ alone (2 Cor. 5:20a).

So the peace offering illustrated the doctrine of reconciliation, which is the manward side of the Cross. The peace offering in Leviticus 3 is summarized by the apostle Paul in Ephesians 2:14-18. The Jew had peace with God the same way that the Gentile can have peace with God, faith in Jesus Christ. The peace offering sets forth God as propitiated and the sinner reconciled.