

Dr. Elaine Phillips, OT History, Lit., and Theology, Lecture 11

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Prayer and Preliminaries

Introductory Matters

We are going to talk about Torah today, and it doesn't hurt to remind ourselves of what Psalm 119 says. Psalm 119 is a long psalm about the value and the beauty and the efficacy of God's instruction to us. We'll talk about that when we deal with Psalms. But this verse is nice as we start talking about the concept of Torah. I'm going to say more about our transition from narrative to Torah in a moment. "Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your Torah." Now we're going to talk in a minute about what that might involve in terms of the contents of Torah. But may that be our prayer as well as we move into our discussion today and the next couple of days.

Since we weren't able to do this last time, we will just take a brief visual tour from Egypt and the Sea of Reeds on to where traditional Mt. Sinai is located. When we looked at the map last time, I indicated that there are multiple suggestions for the location of Mt. Sinai, but I'm just going to go along with the traditional one.

[brief photo "tour"] We've come across the Sea of Reeds and we are going along the western side of the Sinai Peninsula; you can see a small oasis here. It's the oasis of A-Tur. Otherwise this is a very barren area. Again, keep in mind the challenge that the Israelites faced right from the get-go in terms of water, and when they initially found water, it was bitter water. Here we turn from that area along the coast of the Sinai Peninsula and begin moving inland a little bit, following these broad swaths of valley. Finally, we make our way following a pilgrim's path to what is traditionally Mt. Sinai. The fun part is to get up there at sun rise - and here we are. The ascent to Mt. Sinai is not an easy one. You can see it's pretty rugged, the sun has now come up, and a Greek Orthodox monk is coming up the mountain. I like this picture for a lot of reasons, not the least of which is that this guy has a long white beard so you know he's in his 70's or his

80's and here he is climbing up to the top of Mt. Sinai in the morning. If you read the narrative carefully, that's what Moses was doing as well. Exodus 19 is stunning in the numbers of times that Moses was up and down, and up and down, and up and down the mountain! God gave him instructions and then said, "Go tell the Israelites." And then he had to go back up and bring the Israelite's reply to the LORD. Moses, as we know from reading the text, was 80 years old at that point. So this monk is a wonderful visual aid.

As we continue to look down towards the bottom, you see an area through the cleft there, and that is St. Catherine's monastery. Those of you who are doing anything with art history may know that St. Catherine's has one of the best collections of icons, Greek orthodox icons, in the world. One of the reasons for that is that it is located in the southern part of the Sinai peninsula. It is very isolated, and therefore, the iconoclastic movements - iconoclastic means breaking up the icons because you don't think it's the right thing to have icons - missed St. Catherine's because it was just out of the way; and so there is a phenomenal collection of icons there. This is the library. There have also been some wonderful manuscripts found in that library. Probably the most famous one is the Sinaiticus manuscript which has a long story behind its finding. The sad thing is you can no longer get into the library at all. We used to be able to at least get into the first floor of the library, but that's closed. Nevertheless, you can still visit St. Catherine's and it is a great experience for those who are hoping at some point to go to Sinai as part of your Middle Eastern studies.

Exodus 19 Sets the Stage

As I've said, Exodus 19 does indeed set the stage for us. We want to think a bit about the structure of Exodus. We've had God's remarkable deliverance in chapters 1-15. Then, trekking from the sea all the way to the base of Mt. Sinai, God was with them, providing for them every step of the way. And after that, we're going to have the switch to the Torah itself. Notice what it says here. I'm going to start reading from verse four of chapter 19, "You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt; how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now, if you obey me fully and keep my covenant,

[which is forthcoming,] then out of all the nations, you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” Those are remarkable promises--“Kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” Peter referred to that in chapter 2 as he was talking about the blessed nature of God’s people. So God makes some wonderful promises here, and also reminded them of what he had done on their behalf. And it’s on that basis as their sovereign who rescued them and redeemed them and delivered them, he is now going to establish that sovereign covenant, Suzerain covenant, with them.

Moses was told on one of these trips up the mountain and back again to prepare the people and set boundaries around the mountain. They were supposed to be clean. They were supposed to be pure. They were to abstain from sexual relations. That it is not to say that sexuality and sexual expression is wrong, but when you read Leviticus chapter 15, particularly verse 18, sexual activity makes someone unclean. It’s not a matter of being sinful, but it makes somebody unclean for that day, and so therefor they were to abstain so there would be a state of purity when God’s presence descended on the mountain.

Most people when they’re reading the Old Testament have a grand time with Genesis. It’s full of great stories and they also have a remarkably good time with Exodus, through chapter 19. Starting with 20, however, if we’re not careful, our eyes glaze over a little bit, and they get really glazed over when we get to Leviticus. Don’t let that happen to you. We’ll try and make some of this material come alive. Think in terms of all of these things being part of what God indicated that his covenant people need to do to be pleasing to him. I’ll have more to say about that in a moment.

The Necessity of Torah (Instruction)

The narrative that we’ve just been through demonstrates how desperately they needed the Torah and the Covenant. Some of you have mentioned to me that it seems like every time you turn around in Genesis, somebody is sleeping with somebody else that they shouldn’t be sleeping with. That’s right! As we read Genesis, we see how important

it is to have Torah, because things go awry over and over and over again.

The Torah of Moses encompasses all the way from Genesis through Deuteronomy. That Torah is actually unique in the wider ancient Near Eastern culture in combining both instructions and laws along with narrative. We don't see that in the rest of these documents from the wider culture.

Definitions

First of all covenant - now we are going to talk about the covenant from Sinai. Just as a reminder: it is an arrangement between two parties, it establishes a relationship, and it involves obligations on both sides. As we've said before, God's obligations that he takes upon himself are to keep his word. Our obligations are going to be spelled out in the Torah. And then, the covenant establishes sanctions as well, and we'll have more to say about the sanctions later on.

The Hebrew word "Torah," comes from a verb that means "to teach." And so most properly, Torah means "instruction." Yes, it's often translated "law," but we want to think of it broadly as instruction. And in this case, in the covenant context, we are going to talk about that Torah as the statement of obligations for the humans who receive the covenant.

Two additional terms that you will want to know: Apodictic is the first one, which simply means absolute imperatives. Our classic example of apodictic Torah is the Ten Commandments. And we are going to look at those today. But don't think that that's the only apodictic Torah that we have in these books. Certainly as we get on towards the latter part of Exodus 21, 22, and 23, especially in 23, there is lots of apodictic Torah in there. And Leviticus has it as well. Where does, "Love your neighbor as yourself," come from? Leviticus 19. That's apodictic Torah.

By way of contrast, or another perspective on this, is casuistic Torah. This is case law. It's conditional. If certain conditions are the case, then these are going to be the resulting punishments. If someone performs an infraction in this particular set of

circumstances, then this is what he or she might expect. A classic example of this: If two men are fighting, and as they are fighting they strike a woman who is pregnant, and her children come out (that's a plural term there by the way), then there is going to be a fine. And if there's been particular damage - eye for eye, life for life, so forth and so on. We're going to come back to that measure for measure punishment, Lord willing, on Monday. But at any rate, that is a case of case law - casuistic Torah.

Extra-Biblical Legal Codes and the Hittite Treaties

We have some very early law codes. Shulgi, also called Ur-Nammu, is from the third millennium B.C. We have the Code of Hammurabi, or as some spelling it, Hammurapi. That's coming from the 18th century B.C. Both of those are before the Exodus and the giving the Torah at Sinai.

What's next is relatively contemporaneous with the covenant at Sinai - the Hittite treaties. About three dozen of them have been found. The Hittite empire was that whole area that is modern day Turkey now. The Hittite empire was fairly aggressive at certain points. And as a result of some of these battles, they made treaties with other groups of people, and in these treaties we have a certain pattern. The form parallels that of the covenant in the biblical text. Exodus 21 thru 24 is distinctly parallel to what we have in the Hittite treaties. So is the entirety of the book of Deuteronomy. Here is the basic form. The preamble, "I am the Lord your God," is what you read in Exodus, very short.

Exodus 20 contains the historical prologue: in the Hittite treaties, they go on at length about what the suzerain or the sovereign or the king has done on behalf of these people with whom he's offering a treaty. "I've done this and I've done this and I've done this and I've done this, and therefore, you ought to be grateful and obey me." In Exodus 19, we have the same kind of account: "I carried you on eagles' wings. Therefore obey my covenant." When you get into the actual expression in Exodus 20 it is, "I'm the Lord your God who brought you out of the house of bondage; out of Egypt." That is the historical prologue, very short, but it is supposed to engender a spirit of gratitude on the part of the people. Because God has done this remarkable thing for them, they ought

indeed to be obedient.

And then, we have general stipulations and specific stipulations. The Ten commandments that are in Exodus 20 are the general stipulations--the moral Torah if you will. We are going to come back to them a little bit later on today. In regard to the specific stipulations, starting with Exodus 21 there are laws about how to treat slaves, some gender issues with regards to slavery, there are laws about property, there are strong admonitions not to engage in any actions that are idolatrous or like the pagan cultures around about. So there are lots of specific stipulations, even to the point of, "Don't boil a kid in its mother's milk." That's pretty specific.

After that, we have witnesses. In the Hittite treaties, lots of gods are evoked as witnesses. Since we obviously don't have any polytheistic backgrounds to this, who or what is evoked as witness in this covenant form that we see in the biblical text? It's going to be a really important point as we move on not only through the covenant, but into all the prophets as well later on. Heaven and earth are called on to be witnesses. That's why when you read the prophets, a given prophet is going to say, "I call heaven and earth as my witnesses! The Lord has a case against you! He's got a lawsuit against you, and heaven and earth are the witnesses." This covenant is legal binding. Therefore, if the people have broken the covenant, God has a case; he's got a law suit. So, heaven and earth are called on as witnesses.

Curses and blessings: if they don't keep the covenant, there are some bad things to come. If they do, there are wonderful things to come. Most of them unfold in the context of the land. This is because the land is a land grant to them. These people are given this land by God.

And then finally there is provision for keeping the covenant That means storing it somewhere safe. Every seven years (Deuteronomy 3) at the Feast of Tabernacles, they were to take it out and read it to the people.

All of those things are found in the Hittite treaty form as well. There are a couple more things to keep in mind in terms of this whole covenant business, treaty business. God didn't just drop something out of the sky they had never seen before. God chose to

use a form that was familiar to them. But he infused it with lots of meaning, profound meaning, eternally relevant meaning.

Moses' Preparation in Diplomatic Documents

Here's another reason why it was kind of interesting that Moses grew up in the court of Pharaoh. He would have been familiar with all these political matters and documents. Moses wasn't a dumb shepherd who only got some revelation. God used all the things that were part and parcel of his background. And therefore someone who would spend his first 40 years in the Egyptian context would have been well prepared to do this sort of writing. One other thing that I want to make a note of because if you continue on in this field, one of the things you are going to encounter is a whole set of scholars who say, "Oh well, Moses didn't write any of this stuff. It was written later on during the first millennium," which means somewhere after 900 B.C. And they say, "Look, there are Assyrian treaties as well, and actually when you read the Assyrian treaties, they're kind of like what you see in the Bible." Yes, these Assyrian treaties they are like what you see in the Bible, but there is a distinct difference. That historical prologue, what the rulers have done for the people, is the historical prologue, was supposed to engender some gratitude. That shows up in the second millennium Hittite treaties, the ones we have just been talking about. It's not in the Assyrian treaties and there is a good reason why. The Assyrians, as we're going to see when we start studying the Assyrian empire's impact on our people of God, were brutal! They flayed people! They impaled them on stakes! They did all sorts of torture like this. That doesn't engender a spirit of gratitude on the part of the underlings. At least you can't imagine that it would. And so therefore, we have yet another reason why it's likely that this Pentateuch was possibly written by Moses [with some later editing].

Purposes of Torah

These are not at all an exhaustive listing of the purposes but just the major ones. You can obviously expand them, flesh them out and come out with some others as well.

The first three go together. When we start reading the Torah, we get a good sense of the holiness of God. Or at least we should. Now, how do we get that sense of the holiness of God from reading the Torah? It reveals God's holiness and character of justice and mercy. How do you get any kind of a sense of God's holiness from reading Torah?

[Student Response...] Ok, so you're saying the power that he has, and control, sovereign control. And you're going to embed into those characteristics holiness as well... not a bad idea. But can we get something even more specific? That's a start, that's a good start.

[Student Response...] Yes! The very fact that there are so many stipulations in here, sets the bar pretty high doesn't it? 613 according to traditional Judaism; 613 laws! An analogy: When you have an instructor, a teacher, a professor, whatever you want to call it, who has all sorts of demands that he or she imposes upon you, that says something about the character of that instructor as opposed to someone who gives easy A's and lets you get by with no work. So the very fact that we have an overwhelming number of laws tells us something. And, that brings us to items two and three: Torah reveals how desperately needy we are. How sunk in sin, because every time we turn around, we're looking at that mirror of Torah and it's shining right back at us, and we're finding out, "Oh brother have I fallen short yet again!" As Paul says, it's a schoolmaster to lead us to Christ.

You know, there is another thing that goes on here too in terms of this Torah revealing the holiness of God. It says over and over and over and over again, especially in Leviticus, "Be holy, because I the Lord your God am Holy." It's as simple as that! God declares that he is Holy, he's set apart. And therefore that's part and parcel of what's going on. Well, as I've said, Paul makes it very clear in Romans that the Torah does have this function for us. And then the glory and the beauty of that is that it leads us to Christ. A schoolmaster is the term that Paul uses (Galatians). The Torah is a schoolmaster to lead us to Christ because we are desperately needy. Now I know, you have heard this if you have grown up in the Church. This is probably something that you kind of take for granted, but don't! We tend to take way too much for granted. We need to rethink these things from time to time.

The Torah does other things as well. It presents guidelines for God's people to be set apart. You know one of the interesting things about Judaism through the centuries is that they were recognized by the cultures round about them, most notably because they kept the Sabbath. That was something that set them apart. There were other things as well that set them apart, and set them apart not just to be different and odd and weird, but set apart so they could appropriately love God. The Sabbath has built into it a day so that we focus on God. That was Jesus' point, the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath. That has profound implications for us. So, set apart, and it's not only Sabbath that does that; all these other things do to. If they were obedient, they really were distinct. Unfortunately, most of the time, the Israelites were not particularly obedient and they were sinking to the level of the culture round about them. Of course, that's instructive for us as well since so often we sink to the level of the culture round about us.

There's also a very pragmatic function. Torah is necessary; laws are necessary just to make sure that social systems function appropriately. There are rules at Gordon so that indeed we function appropriately, and don't end up getting into each other's hair all the time. There are rules for driving; there are rules for everything. Obviously, when those standards are broken, there are ways of dealing with it.

Torah is not only dealing with the here and now but, going off of something that the author of Hebrews says (10:10): "The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming." The writer of Hebrews uses that idea shadow quite a bit. We see the system that God has instituted for the way his people are to get on here on earth. Justice, how do we effect justice? How can one be merciful? That just sets our sights on what is coming in the future, when all things will indeed be set right. I've got *shalom* highlighted there. One of the reasons for doing that is that the Hebrew verb form behind this word means "to pay." "To pay;" sometimes, "To pay back." Sometimes it's involved in the whole idea of making restitution. There are some things that need to be set right in the eternal sphere as well, and *shalom* has to do with those things.

Three-fold Division of Torah

I know, when you take other classes elsewhere, you are going to have someone say, “Oh, nobody divides the Torah into three categories anymore...” Well I still do and the reason I do it is because it helps us think through this material. If you simply read through Exodus 20-23 without some sense of conceptual categories, you can get lost in the morass that is God’s Torah. That’s not to say that there aren’t overlaps and porous boundaries between categories. There are and we’re going to see them.

So first of all, as we’re talking about the moral/ethical Torah, we are talking about those instructions that make demands on our hearts, on our wills, and on our very being. Sometimes those never get into a court system. Sometimes nobody except you and God know that they have been broken. But you know and your conscience tells you. The first of the Ten Commandments, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me” is moral Torah. It will never be the object of a court case. I’ll say more about the Ten Commandments and how they represent various aspects of moral Torah in a moment.

Let’s talk about our second category--Civil/Social. This is picking up on that purpose that says we need to have guidelines for helping us function in community. We just do, and so civil/social Torah structures societal conduct. For example, here’s how you’re going to deal with gender issues, here’s how you’re going to deal with those who are slaves, here’s how you’re going to deal with justice, don’t take bribes. It structures societal conduct, and here’s the key; it provides for proper administration of justice so that if someone kills somebody, then you have to go to your civil/social Torah structures to try and figure out, well, was this outright murder? In that case we would have a life for a life punishment. Or was it manslaughter? In which case the person could flee to the city of refuge. There were ways of addressing these things. So that’s all part of our civil/social broad category. But as I note for you, the boundaries are a little porous because obviously moral Torah is going to overlap with civil/social.

Then finally, ritual Torah or ceremonial Torah. Two things are eminently important here. First of all, it directs our attention to God and, as we’re going to flesh that out, it’s going to be the avenue for helping us worship God. Ritual Torah, has

everything to do, in one of these aspects of it, with coming into God's presence. There are designated times and sacred spaces for worshipping God. God's people are supposed to conduct themselves in a certain way. That was true back then when they had priests and the Tabernacle and sacrificial animals; the principles are still true today.

The second thing it does is to remind us that all of life is lived in the presence of God. All of life is lived in the presence of God. And therefore, when you read Leviticus 11-15 and you're reading about mildew and mold and bodily emissions, you're thinking, oh my goodness. Well, that's a reminder that all of life is lived in the presence of God. Nothing is outside of his purview. There is in Judaism a blessing for everything. Do you know that? Everything you do there is a blessing for. There is even a blessing for going to the bathroom. All of life is lived in the presence of God and when the human body functions properly, even in that capacity, that's important. One blesses God for those gifts of proper functioning. Again, these are three categories to help us think conceptually about this whole very complicated issue of Torah.

Overview of the Ten Commandments

We're going to spend the rest of today talking about the Ten Commandments. Memorize them. I have to tell you two stories in this regard and then we will get on to the subject at hand. My husband, as an undergrad went to Beloit college, which is a fairly decent college in Wisconsin. I realized this is eons ago. I know he's old enough to be your grandfather, but this is all right. Beloit college is not a Christian college, but in his English Literature class, his professor made the students memorize the Ten Commandments. Why? Because they're so foundational to who we are as a people. The laws that are there are universal. So they had to memorize the Ten Commandments. And that's all well and good, and that's back in the 1960's sometime.

I attend Park Street Church as some of you know. And about two years ago the senior minister began giving a series of sermons on the Ten Commandments. They are excellent sermons; you can probably download them if you're interested. He has lots to say. But in introducing his series, he said that he decided to make rounds through the

ministerial staff at Park Street. There are about 10 people on the ministerial staff at Park Street. So he went to every door... knock, knock, knock - door opens. "Could you recite the Ten Commandments by memory?" And do you know that not one of them could. They still refer to that incident! In fact two Sundays ago the person who was giving the sermon, who was on the ministerial staff, with chagrin referred back to that embarrassing experience when Gordon Hugenberg knocked on his door and he could not recite the Ten Commandments from memory. So, you know, here's your chance. Take in something that is really foundationally important for you. And hang on to it.

The Ten Commandments are apodictic Torah, based on the absolute authority of God as sovereign King. Notice, as you read the Ten Commandments in conjunction with the wider material that shows up in Exodus 21 through 23, the punishment for many of these things ended up being the death penalty. That's how important they were. Notice as well what Jesus had to say about them, when he was asked what the greatest commandment was. What's the most important law? Well when you're dealing with 613 commandments, what are you going to say? Jesus very wisely responded, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart. Love your neighbor as yourself." He didn't give them one, he gave them two. And then he said, "On all these hang all the law and all the prophets." So, two complementary aspects of human responsibility: loving God with every aspect of our being, and loving our neighbor as ourselves. And Jesus summarized those in a very good way.

There were two tablets to the testimony. Usually we have a picture sort of like this [Rembrandt's *Moses*]. Most of our works of art have these two tablets. First five commandments are on this one; second five commandments on that one. What's wrong with that picture? Anybody know? [student responses] What we've got here, no doubt, is in keeping with the Hittite treaty process with two copies being made. So when it's talking about the two tablets of the Torah, the whole declaration is on one tablet, and the whole thing also on another. One is kept for the people, and one's kept in the sanctuary. Actually, in the Ark of the Covenant is where the one for God was kept.

I know by the way that those of you who come out of a Roman Catholic background have a different system for numbering your commandments. Please memorize them as I have them here. And I'll make a comment as to why that's important in just a minute.

Our first commandment is "You shall have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3). By the way these are also found in Deuteronomy 5. At any rate, this is for a people who have come out of Egypt, where polytheism has been rampant, and here God is saying, "No other gods. Reset your world view. Get rid of all that stuff that tugs at your heart. No other gods before me."

Now, the second one: let's read this one; it's a little bit longer. "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or in earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them." This is not precluding artistic work. It's saying "don't make it to bow down to it. Don't make an idol out of it." That's the distinction there.

If you're coming out of a Roman Catholic background, this is not a separate commandment. But I want you to see it as a separate commandment - not to make idols and not to bow down to them.

And then notice what it goes on to say. "For I the Lord your God am a jealous God". Oh, what's the problem with that? Do you like the prospect of God's being jealous? And then let me read on, "Visiting the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me. But showing love to thousands who love me and keep my commandments." What's this business about God's being jealous? [Student Response...] Good and let me flesh that out just a little bit more. Don't lose sight of the fact that this is a covenant; God, through the prophets later on, will even present it as a marriage covenant. Let me just suggest to you that once you get married, if you're not jealous if your spouse goes out with somebody else of the opposite gender and is starting to mess around... if you're not jealous, something is wrong with you. Something is radically wrong with you. This is a covenant and God has every right to be

jealous when his people are dabbling with other gods... when his people are dabbling with other gods and those gods are enticing them away to break that covenant bond. The jealousy fits.

Idolatry is attributing the power of God to created objects. Basically, you make something and you presume that if you manipulate that just the right way, it's going to do what you want it to do. We no longer make our own idols; we really buy them. They are made for us by somebody else. Colossians chapter 3 tells us that "greed is idolatry." And we all fall prey to that. "Greed is idolatry." Wanting so much to give us some kind of power or whatever trappings go along with that.

Now, let me suggest that this cross-generational punishment, visiting the iniquity to the children to the third and the fourth generation, is a little troubling, too, until we recognize that when fathers and mothers get into patterns that are really deleterious, those things carry on across generations. And you know as well as I do, that those patterns of family dysfunctionality, especially in areas that are really critical areas, go on and on. Of course, the antidote to that is being very concerned not to have the kinds of idols that come from greed and to put God first instead. Then that brings out the counterpart, showing "love to thousands of those who love and keep my commandments." So the commandment against idolatry is an extremely important commandment.

We're going to do more later with the Exodus 32, the golden calf situation. Keep in mind that right after giving the Ten Commandments, Moses went up to Mt. Sinai by himself, and was receiving the instructions on how to build the tabernacle and how to have Aaron function as high priest. At that very time, what's Aaron doing? He was down at the base of the mountain building the calf at the instigation of the people. So a horrible, horrifying, odious expression of idolatry right there in that context. But we'll come back to that when we have that narrative.

This next commandment is a tough one too. Let me read for you. I'm reading verse seven and I'm giving you a painfully literal translation. This is not what your NIV says so get the painfully literal translation. "You shall not lift up the name of the Lord your God to emptiness." You want that again? "You shall not lift up the name of the Lord

your God to emptiness. For the Lord will not hold guiltless anyone who does that.” Now what does that mean? What does it mean to lift up the name of the Lord our God to emptiness? [Student Responses] Let me make two additional suggestions if I may. First of all, some of this may be viewed within a legal context. Jesus may be referring to that when he talks about, “Let your yes be yes and your no be no,” and not taking oaths by the gold of the temple. Part of it may have to do with taking oaths in sacred contexts and taking them lightly. That might be part of it. But I’m going to go back to something that was said earlier which I think is equally and perhaps more important, because it hits home with every one of us here. And again I’m going to direct your attention to contemporary Judaism. If you have Jewish friends who are Orthodox and observant, they will be very careful not to pronounce the name of God. And as they write it they are going to put G-d. And if you go back and read the gospel of Matthew, what does he say over and over? The “Kingdom of Heaven” because he’s not going to say the “Kingdom of God.” It’s that profound concern not to ever be in a position where we’re saying the name of God frivolously, lightly, without profound thought for the power and the person behind that power. Now, all you need to do is walk around Gordon College for 10 minutes, and you hear very light and flippant illusions to, “The man upstairs...God’s going to get you...and so forth.” Those kinds of things I would suggest may be verging on abuse of this particular commandment. We need to watch ourselves in this regard. I need to watch myself. It’s a very easy thing to get into. And so we can’t just say, “Oh this has to do with legal situations, I don’t need to worry about that” or “this has to do with using blasphemous language, I don’t do that!” No, we’re all in the boat of perhaps abusing this particular commandment.

The fourth one is the Sabbath commandment. I’m going to have a lot more to say about the Sabbath when we talk about ritual Torah because this is one of those remarkable boundary crossers. It’s not only ritual but also civil/social. But for now it’s important to note that as you read Exodus 20 in conjunction with Deuteronomy 5, there’s a little bit of a difference in the reasons given. In Exodus 20:11, it says, “In six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them. He rested on the

seventh. Therefore he blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.” If you go over to Deuteronomy chapter 5 the reason, as I said, focuses on not creation, but redemption. Let me read it, “Remember that you were slaves in Egypt when the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord has commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.” Do you get the picture here? Even in the Ten Commandments, we have two very profound reasons for keeping the Sabbath. One is the creation, harking all the way back to God’s creative process. And the second is that God has redeemed you. Those are pretty good reasons for keeping the Sabbath. Now we’re going to add that on top of what we talked about last time in conjunction with Exodus 16. They had been enslaved for generations; to them a day in seven was a gift from God. So put all this together; we’re going to be talking about Sabbath more, Lord willing, next week. In sum, the first set of commandments fit under the, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind.”

As we commence the rest of them, it is going to be in the category of, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” And the first one has to do with honoring your parents. Some people, by the way, see this in a bit of a swing position between loving God and loving neighbor because God has established parents to be, in some ways, his representatives for the family. This brings up another issue because you probably know situations where parents are not exactly admirable. And how do you tell somebody to honor a father and a mother who has been abusive or neglectful or just completely off the scene? It’s not an easy issue, but let me make a suggestion here. The Hebrew word for “honor” has built into it, “to be weighty, to be heavy, to have substance.” And perhaps part of this honoring is simply a matter of providing for your parents. If we can’t emotionally love them, and there are lots of reasons in a dysfunctional fallen world why that’s true, we can still provide for parents, especially when they reach their old age. Built into that idea of honor in the Hebrew word (I’m just repeating myself because it’s important) - built into that is the idea of, “making provision for.” That means giving them the substance and the weight of provisions. In Hebrew culture, it would not be, give them \$10,000 so they can go stay in the nursing home. It would be, give them the substance so that they can indeed

continue to survive. And I would suggest that when Jesus is challenging some rather hypocritical folks in his presence, and he says, “You’re saying ‘let me give all this stuff to the Temple’”—korban, he says, “but you’re ignoring your parents.” Go look it up in Mark chapter 7. I think he’s referring to this particular commandment and the implications of this commandment. He says, “Instead you should be providing for your parents.”

The sixth commandment: Here, the Hebrew word is not “kill.” There’s a garden variety Hebrew word for “kill.” This one reads, “You shall not murder.” It’s a different word. It raises all sorts of interesting issues with regard to the death penalty and war. Just keep in mind that the word here is “murder.” This is the intentional, deliberate taking of human life, therefore obliterating a particular person who bears the image of God. Of course, that’s the directing us all the way back to Genesis 9. Do you remember? After the flood the Lord said, “Someone who sheds the blood of human beings, by human beings that blood will be shed because that person bears the image of God.”

The next commandment addresses adultery - an offense against the marriage covenant. As I said about 20 minutes ago, this is significant because our marriage covenants are reflections of God’s covenant with his people. So again there is some interesting symbolism here.

Theft is kind of a general term. The commandment simply says, “You shall not steal.” That’s going to be unpacked in other contexts, but here’s the interesting thing: if somebody stole people, i.e. kidnapping, that warranted the death penalty too. By the way murder warranted the death penalty. Adultery likewise was punished by the death penalty. If you stole a person - removing that person from his or her ability to be an image bearer of God - the death penalty resulted. Other kinds of theft, as we’re going to see, had other kinds of punishment associated with them.

False testimony: Well, here it’s clearly bearing false witness, but I would suggest to you that this declaration, which has to do with the court system, is probably representative of lying in general. As we look through the rest of the Bible, lying is right

up there in terms of the things that God considers absolutely detestable. The book of Proverbs, over and over and over again, contains God's admonitions against lying. Where do people who are liars land in the book of Revelation? The lake of fire. Lying is utterly reprehensible as well.

And then finally, the root cause of a lot of this other stuff, is coveting. Coveting is an overpowering desire that makes us clutch and grasp at things that don't belong to us--
"Thou shalt not covet."

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