

God's Gracious Love Expressed: Exodus 20:1-17

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The past fifty years have witnessed the discovery of a wealth of material from the ancient Near East which has illuminated many of the customs of the Old Testament. Of particular interest to this study is the large amount of material which has shed light on our understanding of law and covenant in the Old Testament. The need has arisen to revise many earlier conclusions. The purpose of this study is to take another look at the ten commandments. Within this century alone, a large corpus of material has been written on the Decalogues in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5.¹ In view of the new insights, an attempt will be made to exegete Exodus 20:1-17. In the process of evaluating the role of the ten commandments in today's world, the first step must be to understand the demands of the Decalogue in the original historical context. This paper is limited to the first step.

The general context in which the events of chapter 20 had their roots must first be reviewed. Having crossed the Red Sea, the Israelites entered the wilderness of Shur (Exodus 15:22). The story of God's people during the wilderness period was one of discontent, murmuring, strife, rebellion, and a general lack of faith. Throughout the difficult journey, however, God continued to care for the people, providing them with manna and quail (16:1-36) and deliverance from the Amalekites (17:13). On the third new moon after the people had escaped Egypt, they came into the

¹ The bibliography gathered by H. H. Rowley, "Moses and the Decalogue," *Men of God* (Great Britain: Nelson, 1963), pp. 1-36, is quite extensive.

wilderness of Sinai (19:1). In Sinai, God extended His great promise to the people. "If you will obey my voice and keep my covenant you shall be my own possession among all peoples" (19:5). The people affirmed their decision to follow the LORD's word. In preparation for the great theophany, they consecrated themselves and washed their garments (19:14). The descension of God upon Sinai was to allow the people to hear God's speech with Moses and to instill in them a trust in Moses (19:9).

On the morning of the third day, the great cosmic scene evolved. Thundering, lightning, and a thick cloud surrounding the mountain provided the backdrop for the presence of Yahweh. The people were not permitted to ascend or to touch the border of the mountain. All the camp trembled (19:16). After Moses received further instructions from the LORD and returned to the people, God began to speak. After identifying Himself as the God who delivered them from Egypt, He proceeded to relate the commands which Israel was to, follow (20:1-17). Having witnessed the awesome Sinai scene, the people requested that Moses speak to them, not God (20:19). Moses again drew near to the thick cloud where God was (20:22). The LORD gave Moses ordinances to communicate to the people (20:21-23:33), which he laid before them, with all the words of the LORD. Again the people spoke, "We will do [all the words]" (24:3). Moses wrote all the words and the next morning built an altar to the LORD. Ratification of the covenant occurred soon (24:8).

The immediate context for chapter 20 is set in 19:16ff. with the beginning of the theophany. On this day of cosmic eruption the three blocks of material in chapter 20 find their setting (*Sitz im Leben*). The presence of the LORD saturated Mount Sinai. The people viewing the smoking mountain and hearing the sound of the trumpet stood at the foot of the mountain trembling. After Moses returned to the people and reiterated to them the consequences of approaching too close to God's majesty, God spoke the words which form the unit of material to be considered in this study (20:1-17).

The commandments found in 20:1-17 are said to be

spoken by God at Sinai. The audience is not mentioned in the opening statement (20:1). Throughout the commandments the pronoun "you" is singular. This would, perhaps, suggest that Moses was the immediate listener.² However, it appears from other passages that the people heard God speak. For instance, before the theophany, the LORD revealed to Moses that the people would hear His communication with Moses (19:9). Also later the LORD stated that He had talked with the people from heaven (20:22). After God had spoken, the people requested that Moses be the mediator (20:19): the people did not want God to speak to them, lest they die (20:19).³ If (as it seems) Israel was the audience, the singular, second person pronoun emphasizes the message addressed to the individuals within the community and the requirement of individual observance.⁴

Much of the new information concerning the ten commandments⁵ has come from an analysis of the form of the "ten words" and a comparison of the form with others in the ancient Near East. By simple observation one recognizes

² Since the pronoun "you" is singular throughout 20:1-17, it might appear that God was addressing Himself to Moses alone. Of course Moses would then be expected to relate the message to the Israelites.

³ It could be argued that the people had not yet heard the voice of God. By observing the activities of nature around Sinai, they might feel that if God spoke to them, surely they would die. Though this passage is somewhat ambiguous, the other passages seem to indicate that the people indeed heard God's voice.

⁴ J. P. Hyatt, "Moses and the Ethical Decalogue," *Encounter* XXVI (1965), 202. Noth feels Israel is addressed in the collective second person; cf. M. Noth, *Exodus*, trans. J. B. Bowden (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), p. 162.

⁵ The introductory remark (20:1) does not mention "ten words" but simply states "these words." Other passages, however, give precedence for coining the term "ten commandments" or "ten words" (Ex. 34:28; Dt. 4:13; 10:4). There is no complete agreement on a

that all of the commandments are in the negative except for those relating to the Sabbath and the honoring of parents (20:8,12). Further analysis indicates that the laws of Israel were of two types. Albrecht Alt' has identified two forms of law.⁷ One type of law (casuistic law) is to be found in the "if" clauses of the Book of Covenant (20:22-23:19) and also in the Holiness Code (Lev. 17-26).⁸ This conditional law consisted of the characteristic formula: If this happens, then that will be the consequence. This type of law was common in the ancient Near East as is evident from legal documents

division of the commandments into their separate entities. The RSV follows Josephus, Philo, the Greek fathers, and the Reformed Church in dividing 20:2-3 for the first, 20:4-6 for second, 20:7 for the third, 20:8-11 for the fourth, and 20:12-17 for the remaining six. Modern Jews tend to separate 20:2 for the first, 20:3-6 for the second, and 20:7-17 for the remainder. The Latin fathers, the Roman Catholics, and the Lutherans see 20:2-6 as the first, 20:7 as the second, 20:8-11 as the third, 20:12-16 as the fourth through eighth, 20:17a as the ninth and 20:17b as the tenth. Each of these different divisions reflects not only different emphases, but also an approach toward handling critical exegetical problems; cf. J. E. Huesman, "Exodus," *The Jerome Biblical Commentary* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1968).

⁶ A. Alt, *Essays in Old Testament History and Religion*, trans. R. A. Wilson (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1968), pp. 103-171.

⁷ J. J. Stamm with M. E. Andrew, *The Ten Commandments in Recent Research* (Illinois: Alec R. Allenson, Inc., 1967), p. 31. Stamm and Andrews' book is an excellent compendium of the more important explanations of various portions of the decalogue. It provided a major source for this study.

⁸ At this point it may be helpful to identify the legal material designated by various terms by scholars. Hyatt quotes Pfeiffer's list: (cf. Hyatt, op. cit., 200.)

1. Covenant Code--Ex. 20:22-23:19
2. Ritual Decalogue--Ex. 34:10-26 and 22:29b-30; 23:12,15-19
3. Twelve (originally ten) Curses--Dt. 27:14-26
4. Ten Commandments--Dt. 5:6-21 and Ex. 20:1-12
5. Deuteronomic Code--Dt. 12-26
6. Holiness Code--Lev. 17-26
7. Priestly Code--Lev., *in toto* and parts of Ex. and Num.

from Sumeria and the laws in the Code of Hammurabi. On the other hand, Alt felt that the short command or prohibition, characteristic of the ten commandments, was without parallel in ancient oriental law. Alt concluded that this form of legal material was unique to Israel and a unique expression of her religion.⁹ In the course of time, an interesting discovery was made: There were extra-Israelite parallels to apodictic law. George Mendenhall found parallels between the Decalogue and vassal treaties of Hittite kings who reigned in the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries B.C.¹⁰ Of course such a date indicates that the treaties were written around the time of the Exodus. Evidently the Hittite covenant form circulated in the same area where the Israelites had wandered, i.e., from Northern Syria to Egypt. It is very possible that Israel became familiar with this form during this period. One type of Hittite treaty was the suzerainty treaty,¹¹ in which the suzerain extended his terms to the vassal king. In a similar manner, God extended the terms of His love to Israel. In the Hittite documents great attention was given to the benevolence of the king. In fact, the vassal's motive for obligation was gratitude for what had been done for him by the suzerain.¹² The ten commandments are prefaced by a reminder to Israel of God's care.

⁹ Alt sees the connection of apodictic law with Moses and Sinai as grounded in the cultic practices of Israel, i.e., in the recitation of the law at the Feast of Tabernacles; cf. Stamm, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

¹⁰ G. Mendenhall, "Ancient Oriental and Biblical Law," *Biblical Archaeologist Reader III* (New York: Anchor Books, 1970), 3-24.

¹¹ Another Another type of treaty has been discovered, viz., the parity treaty, in which both partners in the treaty had equal status; cf. G. Mendenhall, "Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition," *Biblical Archaeologist Reader III* (New York: Anchor Books, 1970), 25-53.

¹² D. Hillers has written an excellent book on the covenant idea. One chapter deals with Sinai (and Shechem) and the parallels to the Hittite treaties; D. Hillers, *Covenant: The History of a Biblical Idea* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1969), pp. 46-71.

Beyerlin has written an interesting study of the parallels, and he notes particularly those parallel to Exodus 20 which aid in the text's interpretation.¹³ The Hittite treaties had preambles in which the originator of the covenant presented himself (cf. 20:2). A historical prologue gave the great deeds of the Lord (cf. 20:2). The dependence on the founder of the covenant excluded any concurrent dependence (cf. 20:3). The covenant was not valid unless it existed in written form.¹⁴ Moses, too, wrote the "words of the covenant, the ten words" (34:28). The Hittite documents had to be kept in appropriate places (cf. Deuteronomy 31:9-26), and the documents were to be read regularly to the people.¹⁵ These examples of Hittite treaties provide many parallels with the legal material at Sinai." The question is how one should

¹³ W Beyerlin, *Origins and History of the Oldest Sinaitic Traditions*, trans. S. Rudman (Great Britain: Basil Blackwell, 1965), pp. 52-67.

¹⁴ A covenant tablet for Rimisarma, king of the Halap country. My father Mursiks made it for him, but the tablet was robbed. I, the Great king, made a new tablet for him, with my seal I sealed it and gave it to him. In all future nobody must change the words of this tablet." Cf. A. S. Kapelrud, "Some Recent Points of View on the Time and Origin of the Decalogue," *Studia Theologica* XVIII (1964), 87.

¹⁵ Although there is no regulation in the text of Exodus 20 concerning the reading of the words, "there can be no doubt that the Decalogue was proclaimed at more or less regular intervals in Israel's cult in some form or other;" cf. Beyerlin, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

¹⁶ Beyerlin feels the logical conclusion is that the decalogue was modeled after the well-established treaty form found in the Hittite treaties (cf. *Ibid.*, p. 43). M. Andrew has a valuable discussion on the caution which should be taken in making assertions as to the dependence or origin of treaties or apodictic laws. He mentions, in particular, the work of Dennis McCarthy in evaluating the covenant, treaty idea; cf. Stamm, *op. cit.*, pp. 44-74.

interpret these data.¹⁷ For the purpose of this study, these observations can be made. The genre of legal material represented by Exodus 20:1-17 is not unique in the ancient Near East. It is true that much of the content and intent is different; however, the basic forms of expression and terminology used in formulating the covenant has parallels in the thirteenth century B.C. Therefore, the form of literature confirms a date of origin which is compatible with the time period expressed in the Biblical material, i.e., about the thirteenth century B.C.

Most scholars feel that originally all the commandments were a brief single clause.¹⁸ Also some think that the commandments on the Sabbath and on reverence toward parents were originally in prohibitive form. Thus the sixth, seventh, and eighth commandments (20:13-15) have been understood as normative. The differences between the Deuteronomic statement of the ten words and the Exodus account have been adduced as proof that the original list of

¹⁷ D. McCarthy is "wary of using literary forms to argue to historical dates since literary forms can and do have a complex and variable history..." In other words, he is hesitant to use similar literary forms (i.e., Hittite treaties) in dating the Decalogue. In fact, McCarthy feels that "the Decalogue itself is really something different from the apodictic stipulations of the treaties and can hardly be deduced from the treaty form." D. J. McCarthy, "Covenant in the Old Testament: The Recent State of Inquiry," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* XXVII (1965), 229f.

¹⁸ A typical reconstruction is suggested by R. Kittel: (cf. Stamm, *op. cit.*, pp. 18f.).

- I. I, Yahweh, am your God: you shall have no other gods before me.
- II. Do not make yourself a divine image.
- III. Do not utter the name of your God Yahweh for empty purposes.
- IV. Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.
- V. Honor father and mother.
- VI. Do not murder.
- VII. Do not commit adultery.
- VIII. Do not steal.
- IX. Do not speak lying witness against your neighbor.
- X. Do not covet the house of your neighbor.

the commandments was briefer. For instance, in Exodus the reason for "remembering" the Sabbath is that God rested on the seventh day; in Deuteronomy the reason given is that the people of Israel were once slaves in Egypt. Deuteronomy gives a reason for honoring parents not mentioned in Exodus, viz., "that it may go well with you" (Deuteronomy 5:16). Different words also occur in these two passages.¹⁹ The variations in the two accounts must be explained somehow. Scholars feel the accounts represent two traditions of the Decalogue, expanded as they were transmitted. Thus, scholars say, originally both were briefer.

Quest for the original Decalogue leads one to look for the origin of the commandments. Mention has been made of attempts to parallel the literary form with existing forms in the ancient Near East. Some of the major theories which have been proposed for the origin of the commandments are now to be noted. Many scholars are rather vague as to the origin of the Decalogue. They speak of the Sinai tradition. Von Rad thinks the Sinai tradition grew out of the Shechemite shrine's festival legend and that its basic structure reflected the pattern of the cult there.²⁰ Noth also connects the revelation on Sinai with a cult and its creed; he thinks various traditions (e.g., Egypt, Sinai, Conquest) were brought together as a result of the tribal confederacy or amphictyony.²¹ To Noth, Moses had no historical connection with the event which

¹⁹ In Ex. 20:16, the expression *'ed saqer* occurs; in Dt. 5:20, the same commandment has *'ed saw*. In Ex. 20:17, *lo tahimod* is found; the similar commandment in Dt. 5:21 has *lo tih'aueh*.

²⁰ Von Rad also finds an Exodus-Settlement tradition which was independent of the Sinai tradition. The former tradition was associated with the Feast of Weeks at Gilgal. After both traditions had been severed from this cultic background, the Yahwist incorporated the two traditions into his work; cf. G. von Rad, *The Problem of the Hexateuch and other essays*, trans. E.W.T. Dicken (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1966), pp. 48-50.

²¹ Beyerlin, *op. cit.*, xvi.

occurred on Sinai.²² For both of these scholars, participation by all Israel in the Sinai events as recorded in Exodus 19ff. is "out of the question." Both Kapelrud and Beyerlin locate the origin of the Decalogue at Kadesh. The tribes gathered there and summed up what had happened to them. Evidently Sinai was not far from Kadesh (Deuteronomy 1:2). It was at Kadesh that the great historical events received a cultic expression.²³ Beyerlin suggests that the part played by the cult in developing the Sinaitic tradition should not cause one to overlook the impulse which proceeded from historical circumstances. "It was God's activity in history that gave the impulse to the formation of this tradition and had a decisive influence on its contents and character."²⁴ He holds that the Decalogue was recited in the cult for the renewal of the covenant for many years and that through its long and active use, explanatory clauses were added to the original, briefer Decalogue for the people's benefit.²⁵ Noth feels the original Decalogue was expanded by explanations, reasons, and recommendations.²⁶ The theories of the traditions as proposed by these scholars by no means exhaust all the theories.²⁷

²² Hyatt, *op. cit.*, 220.

²³ Kapelrud, *op. cit.*, 89.

²⁴ Beyerlin, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

²⁶ Noth, *op. cit.*, p. 161. "When a piece which, like the Decalogue, represents a catechism-like collection of the fundamental requirements of God, has been handed down over a long period and has been repeated, the secondary appearance of expansions and alterations is not to be wondered at."

²⁷ See Eduard Nielsen, *The Ten Commandments in New Perspective* (Illinois: Alec R. Allenson, Inc.; 1968). Nielsen's study attempts to present a history of the traditions of the Decalogue, after first dealing with literary and form-critical problems (thus the reason for his subtitle "A traditio-historical approach"). Another approach is

Among the benefits from the various explanations given for the origin and subsequent history of the Decalogue is that the evidence affirms the importance of Moses in Israelite history.²⁸ The tradition concerning the writing of the "words of the LORD" (Exodus 24:3, 13) appears to be reliable. Thus the origin at Sinai through the mediatorship of Moses seems probable. That the Decalogue had a "historical development" after Moses seems to be supported by the Bible itself. The differences between the accounts of the "ten words" in Exodus and Deuteronomy lend validity to the supposition that some additions were made in the transmission, which seemed appropriate to those who handled the text.²⁹ The efforts to arrive at the original Decalogue by making the other commandments conform to the structure of the sixth, seventh, and eighth commandments do not appear convincing.

Concerning the growth of the material and its com-

proposed by Mowinckel, who sees the *Sitz im Leben* for the Decalogue as a prescription formula for entry into the cult. He believes it originated in the cult; cf. Stamm, *op. cit.*, p. 29. Fohrer sees the customary laws as transmitted independently (orally) and later absorbed by the source strata of the Pentateuch; cf. G. Fohrer, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, trans. David Green (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1968), p. 133.

²⁸ Harrelson states that the Old Testament is implicit about the importance of Moses: "no more appropriate author could be suggested;" cf. W. J. Harrelson, "Ten Commandments," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible IV* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), 573. Rowley is also impressed by the magnitude of Moses' contribution. "To Moses, the man of God, we are indebted, and to God, through him, for this high standard which is set before men, and for all that it has wrought for the enrichment of life by its inspiration and its summons down all the ages." Rowley, *op. cit.*, 36. Rowley mentions many men who accept the Mosaic origin of the Decalogue, e.g., T. K. Cheyne, R. Kittel, S. R. Driver, H. Gressmann, and G. A. Smith. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

²⁹ It is even possible that Moses altered the account when he related it to Israel in Dt. 5.

pilation, it appears from the text that the Decalogue (20:1-17) and the Covenant Code (20:22-23:33) were recorded soon after they were spoken (24:12 and 24:3). Later some individual wrote the material of 20:18-21, giving an account of the incidents which preceded Moses receiving additional instructions from the LORD (20:22-26).³⁰ The same author probably also composed the material in 10:16ff., for many descriptions of the cosmos are the same in both accounts.³¹ The narrative in 20:18-21 is important, both because it relates the reaction of God's people to this momentous event and because it emphasizes the important place Moses had in the eyes of the people.³²

Analysis and Interpretation

Upon an understanding of the general structure and context of the "ten words" in chapter 20, the remainder of the study will be concerned with an analysis and interpretation of the individual passages and their relationship to the whole (i.e., to the pericope and the entire chapter). Unless a grammatical construction bears particular significance to the interpretation of a passage, the notation will be reserved for the footnote.

The words of God in 20:1-17 form the pericope to be

³⁰ Beyerlin feels 20:1-17 stood between 20:18-21. and 24:1ff. before the insertion of the Book of the Covenant. Therefore the Decalogue was inserted into its context before the insertion of the Book of the Covenant which displaced the Decalogue in its role as the Book of the Covenant; Beyerlin, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

³¹ Beyerlin attributes this material to E; cf. *Ibid.* This writer feels the account was written nearer to the period when the theophany occurred. If the laws could be written, then surely narratives which accounted for the origin of the laws and the circumstances could also be written.

³² Beyerlin feels this section was written to answer the question why the voice of God was no longer heard by the cultic community at the cultic recapitulation of the Sinai-theophany; cf. *Ibid.*, p. 139.

interpreted. The tone for the entire section is set by verse 2: "I am the LORD, your [sing.] God³³ who brought you [sing.]³⁴ out of the land of Egypt from the house of slaves." The LORD can call on His people because he has delivered them;³⁵ the Israelites have changed masters. The Israelite was to view the commandments through a heart which had been touched by the loving action of the LORD. The commandments were an expression of God's concern for Israel; God's grace was manifest in the demands of the law. One must determine whether the first commandment intends to advocate monotheism or monolatry. "There shall not be to you [sing.] other gods before me"³⁶ (20:3). The verse claims that Yahweh tolerates no rivals to his authority. If other gods confront you now or in the future, he would warn, immediately consider them as nothing. None should be in your presence, for Yahweh is among His people. The force of *lo'* with the imperfect stresses permanent prohibition.³⁷

The second "word" draws on the implications of the first: "You shall not make for yourself an idol or any form

³³The phrase *'anoki yehah 'eloheyka* can be interpreted in two ways: "I am Yahweh, your God" or "I, Yahweh, am your God." The former interpretation is followed by the LXX and Vulgate and is herein advocated. The phrase "Yahweh, your God" is found in 20:5, 7, 10, 12.

³⁴The second person singular is used throughout the 17 verses. As has been suggested, it emphasizes the necessity of individual response.

³⁵Again the relation is to be viewed in light of the benefits that were extolled in the vassal treaties of the Hittites, as an incentive to obedience by the vassal.

³⁶The phrase *'al panay* is rendered in various ways: RSV: "before me" or "beside me"; NEB: "against me" or Koehler: "in defiance of me;" LXX, *plen emou*. All the interpretations would indicate the same general meaning for the verse.

³⁷*Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, edited by E. Kautzsch and A. E. Cowley (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1952), paragraph 107 o, p. 317 and paragraph 152 b, pp. 478-479.

which is ... (anywhere)" (20:4). To the ancient Near Eastern mind, the idol was the place of residence of the god.³⁸ The deity was not considered the material of the image; the deity simply resided in the form. The question has arisen whether the images prohibited were those of foreign gods or of Yahweh. Perhaps with a view toward the situation, the Israelites were commanded not to cleave to any forms of wood, stone, or metal; the images of the Canaanite gods were abundant in the land. Not only were the Israelites not to offer religious worship to foreign deities³⁹ "residing in images," but they, no doubt, were not to construct a form of Yahweh.⁴⁰ They were to remember, "I am the LORD, your God, a jealous God⁴¹ visiting upon the iniquities of fathers to sons upon those of the third and fourth generations to those who hate me" (20:15). The phraseology is reminiscent of the opening acclamation (20:2): "Remember, Israel, I the LORD your God was the one who brought you out of slavery; I am zealous for your welfare. Do not be led to serve

³⁸ As early as the First Dynasty of Egypt it was stated in the "Theology of Memphis" that gods entered into images of wood, stone....; cf. Hyatt, *op. cit.*, 203.

³⁹ Stamm states that the phrase *tistahweh ta'ab dem* in 20:5, means in essence "to offer religious worship" and is only used in connection with divinities which are foreign to Israel and forbidden to her, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

⁴⁰ No figures of Yahweh have been found in excavations, though many Canaanite figurines in Israelite houses have been found; cf. D.M.G. Stalker, "Exodus," *Peake's Commentary on the Bible* (Great Britain: Nelson, 1962), p. 228.

⁴¹ Orlinsky feels *qana'* entails being zealous (LXX, *zelotes*, emotionally involved, impassioned; Harry Orlinsky, *The Torah* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1969), p. 175.

other gods."⁴² Yes, I punish those who hate me,⁴³ but view my steadfast love⁴⁴ which extends to thousands, to those who love me and keep my commands⁴⁵ (20:6).

A name was a precious thing to ancient man; it reflected his being, his personality. Accordingly, God's name was representative of His nature, His Holiness.⁴⁶ "You shall not take⁴⁷ the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave unpunished the one who takes His name in vain" (20:7). The use of God's name for no purposeful intent included at least two activities.⁴⁸ The Israelite was not to swear by God's name falsely (Leviticus 19:12). There was, however, a legitimate, meaningful way of swearing by His

⁴² BDB thinks *ta 'ab' dem* means to "be led or enticed to serve." F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and A. A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Great Britain: Oxford, 1959). The NEB gives "be led to worship them" as a possibility. Also, Zimmerli thinks the *lahem* refers back to "other gods"; cf. Stamm, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

⁴³ Possibly such a judgment is placed on the sons because they too hate the LORD (20:5).

⁴⁴ *Hesed* is hard to express in English: RSV, "steadfast love"; ASV, "loving kindness"; BDB, "kindness"; NEB, "(keep) faith"; KJV, "mercy"; (LXX, *Eleos*).

⁴⁵ It appears that a parallelism is indicated; those who love me are those who keep my commands (Dt. 6:5ff.).

⁴⁶ Stalker, *loc. cit.*

⁴⁷ Andrew sees *nasa* in the sense of lifting up one's voice. He further states that *sawi'* "is used in many sections of the Old Testament for what is false (just made up) [Dt. 5:20], empty (having no point or purpose, hopeless) [Isa. 1:13], and for what even has a light-minded but nevertheless mischievous wantonness in it [Ex. 23:11. " M. Andrew, "Using God," *Expository Times* LXXIV (1963), 305.

⁴⁸ No doubt, another way of using God's name for no meaningful reason was in cursing God (Lev. 24:13ff.).

name.⁴⁹ Another way of dishonoring God's name was using it in magic formulas. The names of divinities were prominent in incantations in the ancient Near East. The use of the name of a deity was important in affecting curses or bringing misfortune upon a person. The sorcerer who invoked a deity's name was actually attempting to gain control of a deity and his power. Yahweh made it clear to Israel that such pronouncement of His name was prohibited and was punishable. Yahweh's name was to be protected from unlawful use in oath, curse, or sorcery. Control could not be gained over Yahweh either by making an image or invoking His name.⁵⁰

The Israelite was to "remember the day of the Sabbath to observe it as holy" (20:8) for the LORD "rested on the seventh day (and) . . . blessed the day of Sabbath and observed it as holy" (20:11).⁵¹ Man was asked by God to share in the observance of the Sabbath. Not only was the man not to work,⁵² but also those under his care were to cease from labor (20:10).⁵³ The origin of the Sabbath

⁴⁹ Jeremiah speaks of swearing by the phrase "as the LORD lives" as being expressive of God's people (Jer. 12:16).

⁵⁰ Stamm, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

⁵¹ Deuteronomy has the motivation of remembrance of the slavery in Egypt (5:15).

⁵² It is commonly alleged that this commandment cannot be from Moses because those tending the flocks could not rest even one day. Hyatt comments that one does not know how Israel defined work. Hyatt, *op. cit.*, 204.

⁵³ Both the LXX and Dt. add two animals to the list in Exodus 20:10 (ox and ass).

outside the institution of Yahweh is obscure.⁵⁴

The next commandment, like the Sabbath statement, is positive, rather than negative in form:⁵⁵ "Honor⁵⁶ your father and mother in order that your days will continue long upon the land⁵⁷ which the LORD your God gives you" (20:12). It appears that this is the only commandment which is intended for children, rather than for the *paterfamilias*. However, in light of the family situation in Israel the relationship between adults and their aged parents lies within the scope of the commandment also. The normal family unit was the clan which dwelt together on inherited property.⁵⁸ Aged parents lived with their adult children. In those years when the parents would be unable to care for their own needs, it was the adult child's responsibility to provide for their welfare.⁵⁹ That the commandment was directed also to

⁵⁴ Stamm posits three possible origins: (1) *sapattu* in Babylon, which was the 15th day of the month, (2) Kenites, a tribe of smiths, had a Sabbath day of rest, which Moses appropriated (Koehler, Budde, Rowley), and (3) the market day which developed into a festival day (E. Jenni); cf. Stamm, *op. cit.*, pp. 90-92. Stalker states that the Babylonian *sapattu* was quite different from Jewish Sabbath (e.g., there is nothing about ceasing work in connection with it); Stalker, *loc. cit.*

⁵⁵ Many scholars feel that the commandment was originally negative (e.g., "You shall not curse your father or mother."). Nielsen suggests that the affirmative form was a transformation which occurred under the influence of the Wisdom literature; cf. Nielsen, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

⁵⁶ *Kabed* was the opposite of despise (Dt. 21:18-21). In Num. 22:17, to do a person honor is to obey a person. In Mal. 1:6, honor is associated with fear. Upon the death of Nahash, David sent comforters to Hanun. Such an action by David was considered as a means of honoring Nahash (II Sam. 10:3ff.).

⁵⁷ Both the LXX and Dt. add "and that it may go well with you."

⁵⁸ Stamm, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

⁵⁹ G. Beer states, "The aged parents, those over 60 years, whose capacity for work and whose valuation has diminished are not to be treated harshly by the Israelite; he is not to begrudge them the bread of charity, or force them to leave the house or take the way of voluntary death, or even to kill them himself." *Ibid.*

children is seen in Deuteronomy 21:18-21.⁶⁰ The book of Proverbs contains much material on the child-parent relationship (e.g., 19:26; 20:20). The fifth commandment concludes with the promise that one's life upon the land will be lengthy. This promise should be seen in view of Yahweh's promise concerning the gift of the land.⁶¹ The commandment is indicative of the fact that a woman as mother was equal to the man as father. Proverbs insists on the respect due to one's mother (e.g., 23:22; 30:17). Though a woman's position was often limited, her role as mother and wife was an honored one.⁶²

An understanding of the sixth commandment, "You shall not kill," centers on the meaning of *rasah*. Three words are used in the Old Testament to designate "killing:" *hemit* (201 times), *harag* (165 times),⁶³ and *rasah* (46 times). Some would confine the meaning of *rasah* in Exodus 20:13 to "murder"⁶⁴ (i.e., premeditated killing). However, other passages indicate that *rasah* is used for accidental (i.e., unintentional) killing as well as for deliberate killing.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ A stubborn and rebellious son was to be taken by his parents to the elders of the city. All the men of the city would then stone him to death.

⁶¹ As Nielsen states, "The basic idea is, of course, not that obedience to parents leads automatically to the attainment of a long life, but that those who show respect to and care for their parents are rewarded by Yahweh with length of life on the plot of land which he has bestowed upon them," Nielsen, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

⁶² See de Vaux "s comments on the position of women in Israel; R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel I* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1965), 39.

⁶³ *Hemit* and *harag* are "used for killing one's personal enemy, for murdering him, for killing a political enemy in battle, for killing one who was punishable according to the law, and for death as a judgement of God." Stamm, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

⁶⁴ The NEB has translated *rasah* "murder."

⁶⁵ Cf. Dt. 4:41-43; 19:1-13; Josh. 20-21.

Nielson is justified in saying that "it is no part of the purpose of this commandment to rule out the death penalty or the waging of war."⁶⁶ Though *rasah* is used in one instance of capital punishment (Numbers 35:30), it is clear that such punishment *when commanded* by God is not prohibited by the sixth "word." Also the wars *sanctioned by Yahweh* in the Old Testament and the *accompanying* killing of enemies in battle (cf. Deuteronomy 20:1ff) are outside the meaning of 20:13. In fact, *rasah* is never used for the killing of the enemy in battle.⁶⁷ That premeditated murder is prohibited is unquestionable; that accidental killing is prohibited also may be surprising. However, in a society where capital punishment and wars were permitted and commanded, the sanctity of human life had to be preserved. It was God's prerogative, and His alone, to give and take life.

The seventh commandment, "You shall not commit adultery," is directed toward unfaithfulness in the marriage relationship. In fact, Rylaarsdam states that *naap* is used exclusively in the Old Testament concerning marital infidelity.⁶⁸ Leviticus 20:10 and Jeremiah 29:23 define *naap* as a man with the wife of his neighbor.⁶⁹ Adultery constitutes a denial of the unity of the relationship between

⁶⁶ Nielsen, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

⁶⁷ Cf. Stamm, *loc. cit.*

⁶⁸ J. C. Rylaarsdam, "The Book of Exodus," *The Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1952), 986.

⁶⁹ Hauck comments, "Adultery is the violation of the marriage of another, Gn. 39:10ff. Hence a man is not under obligation to avoid all non-marital intercourse. Unconditional fidelity is demanded only of the woman, who in marriage becomes the possession of her husband." D. F. Hauck, "Moicheuo" *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1967), p. 730. De Vaux states, "The husband is exhorted to be faithful to his wife in Pr. 5:15-19, but his infidelity is punished only if he violates the rights of another man by taking a married woman as his accomplice." De Vaux, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

man and woman, a unity offered by Yahweh.⁷⁰

The eighth "word" prohibits stealing.⁷¹ Harrelson thinks the Old Testament conceives of property as a kind of extension of the "self" of its owner (Joshua 7:24).⁷² He concludes that acts of theft are violations of the person. Alt asserts that the commandment did not mean theft in general, but refers rather to the kidnapping of the free Israelite man. The kidnapping of dependent persons or those not free was covered by 20:17. Because Exodus 21:16 was from an apodictic series, Alt concluded that it would be placed into the Decalogue (i.e., defining 20:15).⁷³ However, as Anderson has stated, simply because one meaning can be found in one apodictic series does not mean that another apodictic series has the same meaning.⁷⁴ It seems best to preserve the general meaning of "steal."

The next commandment does not deal primarily with gossip, but with the lying witness who jeopardizes the welfare of another. "You shall not testify (as) a witness of false hood⁷⁵ against your neighbor (20:16). The setting for this commandment is in the court.⁷⁶ "He who showed himself to be truthful here would not have wanted to give way to falsehood elsewhere."⁷⁷

⁷⁰ Harrelson, *loc. cit.*

⁷¹ Commandments six through eight are variously arranged: LXX: 14,15,13; Philo, Luke 18:20, Romans 13:9: 14, 13, 15 (Matt. 19:18 and Mark 10:19 follow the MT).

⁷² Harrelson, *loc. cit.*

⁷³ Cf. Stamm, *op. cit.*, p. 104

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

⁷⁵ BDB (p. 729) reads 'ed as a person; RSV and NEB have translated it as objective evidence.

⁷⁶ *Anah* has a special meaning for the reciprocal answering of the parties in law.

⁷⁷ Stamm, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

The last "word" of the ten centers around the meaning of *hamad*. "You shall not desire the house of your neighbor; you shall not desire the wife of your neighbor⁷⁸ or his slave or his maidservant or his herd of cattle or his ass or anything which is to your neighbor." The question has arisen as to whether the Decalogue really prohibited a covetous impulse of the heart. Herrmann showed that *hamad* was repeatedly followed in the Old Testament by verbs meaning "to take" or "to rob" (Deuteronomy 7:25; Joshua 7:21). He concluded that the Hebrew understood the verb to mean an emotion which led to corresponding actions.⁷⁹ Herrmann's attempts to validate his point have not been accepted by all scholars.⁸⁰ Hyatt takes a different view. A person in a place of authority or serving as a judge should not be covetous and thus allow himself to be bribed. Since the courts of justice were administered by laymen, bribery was a common temptation. Hyatt feels an injunction against it was necessary.⁸¹ Concerning whether covetousness would have been forbidden in Moses' time, Hyatt cites an early document which forbids covetousness.⁸² This writer favors the view that the commandment is directed toward the impulse of the heart.

Of necessity, this exegesis has limited itself to Old

⁷⁸ Both the LXX and Dt. reverse house and wife.

⁷⁹ He used Ex. 34:24, where *hamad* is not followed by a verb to show that desire was closely related to action.

⁸⁰ H. J. Stoebe is somewhat doubtful as to the meaning of *hamad*; cf. Stamm, *loc. cit.*

⁸¹ Hyatt, *op. cit.*, 205. He feels this would follow the court motif for 20:16.

⁸² "The Instruction of the Vizier Ptahhotep" relates, "Do not be covetous against thy (own) kindred It is (only) a little of that for which one is covetous that turns a calm man into a contentious man"; cf. *Ibid.*

Testament material. An attempt has been made to express the meaning of the Decalogue in its original historical context. The task remains of evaluating later references and interpretations of the "ten words" found in the New Testament and in Rabbinic literature in light of the Decalogue's original meaning. No doubt, reinterpretations were made in changing circumstances. Perhaps this study has acquainted the reader with a new perspective in which to view the commandments. The words were given in a less-than-passive setting; though the cosmic eruptions invoked fear in the people, they were to remember that the God of the Exodus was in control. The commandments He gave them were expressive of His gracious love and, in fact, were designed for their welfare.

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