

elders (24:1). But even then these were to worship afar off, and only Moses came near to Jehovah (24:2).

Exodus 19:25 ends rather abruptly. The words of Moses to the people are not recorded, but they surely consisted of God's repeated warning in 19:21.

As we come to the end of chapter nineteen, we should be in eager expectancy. All things are ready for the declaration of the covenant of the law. The awesome appearance at the mount shows the greatness of the occasion. The miracles of the deliverance from Egypt and the wilderness journey all point toward this great moment. We shall not be disappointed as we proceed into chapter twenty!

THE TEXT OF EXODUS
TRANSLATION

20 And God spake all these words, saying,
(2) I am Je-ho-vah thy God, who brought thee out of the land of E-gypt, out of the house of bondage.

(3) Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

(4) Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image, nor any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: (5) thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them; for I Je-ho-vah thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, upon the third and upon the fourth generation of them that hate me, (6) and showing lovingkindness unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments.

(7) Thou shalt not take the name of Je-ho-vah thy God in vain; for Je-ho-vah will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

(8) Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. (9) Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work; (10) but the seventh day is

a sabbath unto Je-ho-vah thy God: *in it* thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: (11) for in six days Je-ho-vah made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore Je-ho-vah blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.

(12) Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land which Je-ho-vah thy God giveth thee.

(13) Thou shalt not kill.

(14) Thou shalt not commit adultery.

(15) Thou shalt not steal.

(16) Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.

(17) Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his man-servant, nor his maid-servant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbor's.

(18) And all the people perceived the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the voice of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they trembled, and stood afar off. (19) And they said unto Mo-ses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die. (20) And Mo-ses said unto the people, Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before you, that ye sin not. (21) And the people stood afar off, and Mo-ses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was.

(22) And Je-ho-vah said unto Mo-ses, Thus thou shalt say unto the children of Is-ra-el, Ye yourselves have seen that I have talked with you from heaven. (23) Ye shall not make *other gods* with me; gods of silver, or gods of gold, ye shall not make unto you. (24) An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt-offerings, and thy peace-offerings, thy sheep, and thine oxen: in every place where I record my name I will come unto thee and I will bless thee. (25) And if thou make me an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stones; for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it. (26) Neither shalt thou go up by steps unto mine altar, that thy nakedness be not uncovered thereon.

EXPLORING EXODUS: CHAPTER TWENTY
QUESTIONS ANSWERABLE FROM THE BIBLE

1. What did God, as He began the ten commandments, remind Israel that He had done for them? (20:2)
2. Does "before me" in 20:3 indicate that other gods really exist?
3. What does *graven* mean in "graven image"? (20:4). Compare "molten image" in Deut. 27:15.
4. What is the "water under the earth" in 20:4? Compare Deut. 4:18.
5. What acts involving idols are forbidden? (20:5)
6. Of what is God jealous? (20:5; Compare Ex. 34:14; Ezek. 39:25)
7. Why should God punish the third and fourth generations? Can you give any example of God's doing this? (20:5; Compare Deut. 24:16; Ezek. 18:20)
8. To whom does God promise great mercy (lovingkindness)? (20:6)
9. What does "in vain" mean? (20:7; Compare Lev. 19:12; Ps. 60:11; Prov. 30:8)
10. What day of the week is the Sabbath day? (20:8-10)
11. How was the Sabbath to be kept? (20:8)
12. What was forbidden on the Sabbath days? (20:9-10)
13. What reason is given for not working on the Sabbath? (20:11) What reason is given in Deut. 5:15?
14. What reason is given for honoring father and mother? (20:12)
15. What does honoring father and mother involve? (20:12; Compare I Tim. 5:4; Matt. 15:3-6; Eph. 6:1-3)
16. Does "not kill" forbid only murder, or all killing? (20:13; Num. 35:16, 22-24; I John 3:15)
17. What was the penalty for adultery? (Lev. 20:10)
18. How did Christ modify the command against adultery? (Matt. 5:27-32)
19. Is the command against bearing false witness limited to courtroom statements, or is it applicable in other situations?

- (20:16; Matt. 5:33-37; Eph. 4:25)
20. What does *covet* mean? (20:17)
 21. What items are named that are not to be coveted? (20:17)
 22. What did the Israelites see that frightened them? (20:18).
Where did the Israelites move to?
 23. Whom did the people ask to speak to God? (20:19)
 24. For what three purposes did God come unto Israel, according to 20:20?
 25. Where was God as Moses drew near to Him? (20:21; Compare Jer. 23:23-24.)
 26. Who had talked with Israel from heaven? (20:22; Compare Deut. 4:33, 36; 5:24)
 27. Of what materials specifically were idols not to be made? (20:23; Compare Ex. 32:2-4)
 28. Of what were altars to be made? (20:24-25)
 29. At what places only would God come and bless them when they offered sacrifices? (20:24)
 30. What prohibition was given about stones used in making altars? (20:25)
 31. By what means was an altar not to be approached? (20:26)
Why not?
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EXODUS TWENTY: THE TEN WORDS (COMMANDMENTS)

1. The ten commandments given; 20:1-17.
 2. The people's fear; 20:18-21.
 3. Instructions about worship; 20:22-26.
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THE TEN COMMANDMENTS, A PROTECTION

1. First commandment: Protection from false gods; 20:2-3.
2. Protection from false worship; 20:4-6.

3. Protection from misusing God's name; 20:7.
4. Protection of rest and the remembrance of creation; 20:8-11.
5. Protection of parents; 20:12.
6. Protection of human life; 20:13.
7. Protection of marriage; 20:14.
8. Protection of property; 20:15.
9. Protection of truth; 20:16.
10. Protection from evil desires; 20:17

(Adapted from John Davis, *Moses and the Gods of Egypt*
[Grand Rapids; Baker, 1971], pp. 200-210)

THE TEACHING OF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS AS GIVEN IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

1. No other gods. I Cor. 8:5-6; Acts 14:15; Matt. 22:36-37; I Tim. 2:5.
 2. No graven image. I John 5:21; Acts 15:20, 29; I Cor. 5:10, 11; Rev. 2:14.
 3. Name not in vain. James 5:12; Matt. 12:36; Rev. 13:6.
 4. Sabbath. Heb. 4:9; Col. 2:16; Acts 20:7; Rev. 1:10.
 5. Honor parents. Eph. 6:1-3; Matt. 15:4-6; I Tim. 5:3-4.
 6. Kill. Matt. 5:21-22; Rom. 13:19; I John 3:15.
 7. Adultery. Matt. 5:27-28; I Cor. 6:9, 18; Heb. 13:4.
 8. Steal. Eph. 4:28; Titus 2:10; Rom. 12:17.
 9. False witness. Matt. 5:33-34; Col. 3:9; Eph. 4:25.
 10. Covet. Eph. 5:3, 5; Luke 12:15, 16-21; Rom. 13:9; I Cor. 5:10.
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GOD'S REVELATION OF HIMSELF (20:18-20)

1. Is plain and obvious; 20:18.
2. Comes in striking display; 20:18.

3. Brings fear; 20:18-19.
 4. Creates desire for a mediator; 20:19.
 5. Tests his people; 20:20.
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WHY GOD COMES TO US (20:20)

1. To *prove* (test) us.
 2. To put *fear* into us. (Prov. 16:6)
 3. That we *sin not*.
-

MEN'S RESPONSES TO GOD'S REVELATION (20:18-19)

1. Fear; 20:18.
 2. Request for a mediator; 20:19.
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GOD'S VOICE, BUT NOT A FORM! (Ex. 20:22-23; Deut. 4:12, 15)

1. No form seen; 20:22.
 2. No forms to be made; 20:23.
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THE ALTAR OF GOD (20:24-26)

1. Made of simple materials; 20:24.
2. Used only for God's specified offerings; 20:24.
3. Used only where God designated; 20:24.

4. Made of unadorned materials; 20:25.
 5. Approached with modesty; 20:26.
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PUBLIC WORSHIP (20:24-26)

1. Offered in simplicity. 20:24.
 2. Offered only with commanded sacrifices; 20:24.
(For us this is CHRIST.)
 3. Offered only where God designated. 20:24.
 4. Offered without men's adornment; 20:25.
 5. Offered in decency; 20:26.
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SPECIAL STUDY: THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

1. *Where do we find the ten commandments in the Bible?*
We find them in Exodus chapter twenty and Deuteronomy chapter five. (Please memorize this and do not ever forget it!)
2. *How significant are the ten commandments?*
 - a. They are recognized as the basis of all public morality in the Western world. Their influence is too great for calculation. Probably our society could not survive without these simple comprehensive regulations.
 - b. They are a *unique* thing in all the religious teachings of the world. They are without any real parallels.
They are unique in their teaching that it is impossible to separate morality from religion.
They are unique in making duties to mankind on a par with duties to God.
They are unique in the awe-inspiring manner in which they were delivered.
They are unique in both their comprehensiveness and

their conciseness.

3. *How does the world feel about the ten commandments?*

Most people will say, "Oh, the ten commandments are great!" But in their hearts they really do not like some of the commandments. The philosopher Will Durant said, "The world has never quite come to terms with the ten commandments." This is not surprising. The apostle Paul in Romans 8:7 declared, "The mind of the flesh is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be."

4. *What are the names that are given to the ten commandments?*

We believe in using Bible names for Bible things. We believe also that names tell us very much about the character and function of the things that are named. What are the names?

- a. The *ten words* (or commandments). (Ex. 34:28; Deut. 4:13; 10:4). This is the Biblical name for them. The term *words* does not refer to single words, but to utterances, or sayings. We use the term *word* with the same signification in such statements as "Bring me word."
- b. The name *Decalogue* is a good title for the ten commandments. It comes from the Greek words *deka* (meaning ten) and *logos* (meaning word). It is first found in the writings of Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 160-210), and was commonly used by the church "fathers" who followed him.
- c. "The words of the covenant" (Ex. 34:28)
- d. "The tables of the covenant" (Deut. 9:9)
- e. "The covenant" (Deut. 4:13)
- f. "The two tables" (Deut. 9:10-17)
- g. "The testimony" (a very common name for them; Ex. 16:34; 25:16)
- h. "The tablets of the testimony" (Ex. 31:18)
- i. "The commandments" (Matt. 19:17)

5. *How are the ten commandments to be divided?*

The scripture does not set forth any division of the ten commandments, either as to which commandment is number

one, two, . . . ten; or as to how the commandments were divided up and arranged on the original stone tablets.

We do know that there were TEN commandments, but opinions differ as to how these are divided.

a. *Which commandments are to be numbered one, two, etc.?*

- (1) Most Protestants and the ancient Jewish authorities Philo and Josephus treat 20:3 as the first commandment, 20:4-6 as the second, and thus on to 20:17 as the tenth. We prefer this arrangement.
- (2) Jewish scholars regard Ex. 20:2 as the first commandment. Then 20:3-6 is treated as the second commandment. The remainder are divided up as most Protestants do, with all of 20:17 being the tenth commandment.
- (3) Roman Catholic and Lutheran theologians treat 20:3-6 as the first commandment; 20:7 as the second, and thus on to 20:17, which is divided into two commandments, the ninth and tenth. The ninth is "Thou shalt not covet they neighbors' house," and the tenth is "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife." Most non-Catholics suspect that this method of dividing the commandments was made to deemphasize the commandment against image-making. When stated as a separate command, the law against image-making seems somewhat more definite than it does as part of the commandment about having no other gods.

As for dividing the commandment against coveting into two commandments, the form of the commandments in Deut. 5:21 argues against this. There the order of the two primary objects of coveting (house and wife) is reversed from that in Exodus. Also a synonym for *covet* (*desire*) is used instead of *covet* in one of the statements. This seems to us to weaken the probability that there are two commandments there.

b. *How were the ten commandments arranged and divided on the original stone tablets?*

The undeniable truth is that we do not know. Some have

proposed that five were on one slab and five on the other. This arrangement would have placed 137 words on the first tablet and only 26 on the second. Others have suggested that the first three laws were on the first tablet and the last seven were on the second. This arrangement would come as near to equalizing the writing on each slab as could be done, and still allow the first tablet to end at the bottom with a completed commandment.

Others have proposed that the first tablet had the first four commandments, which concern men's duties to God; and the second tablet had the last six, which involve men's duties to men. To this we can only say "Maybe so." This arrangement would place 122 words on the first tablet and 41 on the second.

We see no reason for assuming that the first tablet had to end its writing at a division between commandments. Many ancient tablets ended in mid-sentence, and then the writing continued on the next tablet.

6. *What is the relation of the Decalogue to the rest of the laws in Exodus?*

The law of Moses (the Torah) makes no clear line of separation between the ten commandments and the laws in the chapters that follow it. All alike disclose the will of God.

Admittedly the ten commandments stand out most prominently among the precepts of the Torah because of the awe-inspiring manner in which they were given and because of their fundamental and far-reaching importance. Only the ten commandments were placed in the ark of the covenant (Ex. 40:20). The conciseness and comprehensiveness of the Decalogue are unique in all the world's literature.

Nonetheless, there is still no clear demarcation between the authority and permanence of the Decalogue and that of the other laws of Moses. The Decalogue is called the *covenant* in Ex. 34:28, but the other laws also constitute the "book of the *covenant*" (24:7). While the Decalogue was kept **IN** the ark, the other laws were kept **BY** the side of the ark of the covenant (Deut. 31:26).

The two greatest commandments of all are not even included among the ten commandments. See Matt. 22:37-40; Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18.

Interpreters have sometimes tried to maintain that the ten commandments are the permanent MORAL law, and that this was not done away with as were the CEREMONIAL laws when Christ died on the cross. This is simply not a valid division of the law. There are many MORAL laws outside of the ten commandments. See Ex. 23:1-3 for example. Also the Sabbath law in the ten commandments has a partly CEREMONIAL character. Furthermore, in God's laws, ceremonial laws often have distinctly moral character about them. Note Ex. 23:10-12. The law is simply not divisible into distinct categories. The law is a unit, and the ten commandments, in spite of all their distinctive features, are an integral part of the larger undivided LAW given in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

7. *How do the ten commandments differ in Exodus from the form given in Deuteronomy?*

- (1) The fourth commandment (about the Sabbath) is different in Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy says (in 5:12) to *keep* (or observe) the Sabbath, rather than to *remember* it, as in Ex. 20:8. Deut. 5:12 adds "as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee." Deut. 5:14 adds "your ox or your ass" and "that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou." Deut. 5:15 says that the Sabbath is to be observed in memory of Israel's deliverance from Egypt, rather than because Jehovah made heaven and earth in six days and rested the seventh day (Ex. 20:11).
- (2) In the fifth commandment (Deut. 5:16), the words "that it may go well with thee" are added. Also Deuteronomy has the words "as the LORD thy God commanded thee" added.
- (3) In Deut. 5:18-21 the last four commandments are all introduced by "and" (sometimes translated "neither").
- (4) The tenth commandment (about coveting) is

considerably different in Deuteronomy 5:21 from Ex. 20:17. Deuteronomy reverses the order of "wife" and "house." Deut. adds "field." Deut. also uses "desire" as a synonym for *covet* at the second occurrence of the word *covet*.

8. *How shall we account for the differences between the form of the ten commandments in Exodus and in Deuteronomy?*

Probably it is to be accounted for by the fact that in Deuteronomy Moses was citing somewhat extemporaneously God's words that had been given at Mt. Sinai. Often in such cases the very words themselves are not cited, but certain variations and changes are introduced.

The version in Exodus twenty is said to have been written by the very finger of God (Ex. 31:18). We accept this as true and therefore regard the commandments there as being the exact original wording.

When Moses repeated the law nearly forty years later in the Plains of Moab (as given in Deuteronomy), he enlarged upon many parts of it and paraphrased it somewhat. For an illustration, compare the laws about the Hebrew slave in Ex. 21:1-6 and Deut. 15:12-18. Compare also the laws about the Feast of Weeks in Ex. 23:16 and Deut. 16:9-12. Compare also Ex. 20:24-26 and Deut. 27:5-8. We should not be surprised to find some minor variations between the ten commandments as given in Exodus and in Deuteronomy.

This does NOT imply that the Deuteronomy version of the ten commandments is inferior, or represents only Moses' own imperfect memory of them or his own personal interpretation of the Exodus twenty commandments! Jehovah spoke through Moses at the Plain of Moab just as certainly as He spoke on Mt. Sinai. See Num. 36:13; Deut. 29:1. God allowed Moses or caused Moses to speak some new words in Deuteronomy five. But the ideas are unchanged, or are merely enlarged upon. There is no conflict of truth between Exodus and Deuteronomy.

Cassuto (*op. cit.*, pp. 250-251) calls attention to the fact that the two laws which differ most in Deuteronomy from

Exodus (the laws on obeying parents and the sabbath law) both insert in Deuteronomy the words "as Jehovah thy God commanded thee." Thus Moses alluded to the fact that although the commandments were expressed one way in Deuteronomy, he was not quoting their precise words.

9. *Were the ten commandments given at first in the words in which we now have them?*

It is a popular opinion that the ten commandments as originally given were all brief, succinct, one-line commandments. Supposedly the enlargements and explanations given with some of the commandments (like those in the commandments about graven images, the sabbath day, and coveting) were added later.

We do not feel that this is a correct opinion. The text says of itself that God spake ALL these words (20:1). When Moses repeated the ten commandments in Deuteronomy 5, he declared that "These words Jehovah spake unto all your assembly in the mount out of the midst of the fire." Moses referred to the ten commandments in the form in which we now have them.

Also we feel that the idea that the commandments were originally all brief one-line assertions rests upon a basic misunderstanding of the commandments that are somewhat elaborated. The commandments that are elaborated (the ones about graven images, sabbath day, coveting, etc.) are the very ones which expressed NEW religious ideas. Laws about stealing or killing were familiar. But the ideas of a God who must not be represented in any material form, and of a regular day of rest to commemorate the rest of God after creation, and of a law against *desiring* other people's possessions - these were new and revolutionary ideas which required some elaboration, even in the concise presentation the ten commandments make. Compare Cassuto, *op. cit.*, pp. 235-237.

10. *Are Christians under the ten commandments?*

To this vital question we must give a paradoxical answer: Yes and No.

To the Christian the law is *holy* and *righteous* and *good* (Rom. 7:12-13). We do not nullify the law through faith. God forbid! Rather, we *establish* the law (Rom. 3:31). Christ came not to destroy the law, but to *fulfill* it (Matt. 5:17). He came "that the ordinance (or requirement) of the law might be *fulfilled* in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit" (Rom. 8:4). We *delight* in the law of God in our inward man (Rom. 8:22). We can speak with all the intensity of King David: "Oh how I *love* thy law! It is my meditation all the day!" (Ps. 119:97). The scriptures of the O.T. law are "able to make us wise unto salvation" (II Tim. 3:15). We could never praise God's law enough!

In spite of the preceding sincere praise of the ten commandments and the other laws of Moses, we must declare categorically that **WE ARE NOT UNDER THE LAW**, including the ten commandments. Romans 6:15: "We are not under the law but under grace."

Please consider the following argument carefully:

- (1) Ex. 34:28 and Deut. 9:9 specifically refer to the ten commandments as being the *covenant*.
- (2) Jer. 31:31-32 prophesied that God would make a *new covenant* with the house of Israel, not like the covenant he made when he brought them out of Egypt.
- (3) Heb. 8:6-13 declares that Christ is now the mediator of a *new* and better *covenant*, and contrasts this new covenant with the very one God made when He led Israel out of Egypt. In II Cor. 3:6 Paul declared that he was a minister of a *new covenant*, not of a covenant written on stones (and only the ten commandments were written on stones).

When the present United States were colonies of Great Britain, the Continental Congress enacted laws against various crimes. Our present laws include ordinances against some of the same crimes. Does this mean that we are still under the laws of the Continental Congress because some of our present laws have provisions like those of the Continental Congress? Similarly, although numerous laws in the old

covenant are repeated in the new covenant, that does not mean we are under the old covenant. Our Christian laws get their authority from being in the new covenant, whether they were in the old covenant or not.

As a matter of fact, nine of the ten commandments are repeated in the New Testament in one form or another. Only the Sabbath law is not repeated. So, as a matter of fact, we are under most of the ten commandments, not because we are legally under the covenant that included the ten commandments, but because the new covenant includes most of these commandments.

When the apostles and elders held the big conference in Jerusalem to determine whether Gentile Christians had to keep the customs of Moses or not (Acts 15:1, 5), their decision (which was reached by the guidance of the Holy Spirit [Acts 15:28; Gal. 2:2]) was that the Gentiles did not have to keep any of the laws of Moses except to avoid idolatry, and fornication, and things strangled, and eating blood (Acts 15:20). Not a word was uttered about keeping Sabbath days, or diet laws, or feast days, or sacrifices, or circumcision.

Failure to understand these things will cause us to seek to return to the law of Moses, which is a ministration of death (II Cor. 3:7), a ministration of condemnation (II Cor. 3:9). The law of Moses passes away (II Cor. 3:11). It brings us under a curse (Gal. 3:10). It causes us to be cut off from Christ (Gal. 5:4). It was only a shadow of things to come (Col. 2:17; Heb. 10:1). Let us hold on to Christ, and in so doing we shall fulfill the law.

EXPLORING EXODUS: NOTES ON CHAPTER TWENTY

1. *Who uttered the ten commandments? (20:1)*

God (Heb., *Elohim*, God, the powerful creator, God of nature, and God of all nations) spoke all these words, saying "I am *Jehovah* (Yahweh, the LORD) thy God." Yahweh is

the covenant name of God as God of Israel. See Ex. 3:13-15.

Note how the Bible text links GOD to the WORDS which were spoken. Deut. 5:22: "These words Jehovah spake unto all your assembly in the mount."

2. *Were the words of the law given by angels?*

Acts 7:53: "Ye who received the law as it was ordained by angels, . . ." Gal. 3:19: (The law was) "ordained through angels by the hand of a mediator." Heb. 2:2: "If the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, . . ." Deut. 33:2: "Jehovah came from Sinai, . . . And he came from the ten thousands of holy ones." ("Holy ones" frequently refers to angels.)

From these passages we learn that the law was in some way communicated by God through angels. We do not know the process by which this was done. It does not appear that the Decalogue (ten commandments) was delivered by angels, but directly to the people by God's voice, "face to face." (Deut. 5:4).

3. *What was the purpose of God's declaration of Himself in 20:2?*

It would seem that God declared His great acts to cause the Israelites to pay strict attention to the great words He was about to say.

Although God had brought Israel out of Egypt, that did not mean that they had no responsibilities to Him. Far from it! Redemption introduces new motivations and responsibilities upon us.

Exodus 20:2 starts with an emphatic *I* in the Hebrew.

The LORD had declared many times in earlier chapters that the people would know that He was Jehovah! (6:7). Surely by now that name had become extremely meaningful to Israel.

Jewish scholars usually regard 20:2 as the first commandment of the ten. However, the eminent Jewish commentator Cassuto¹ says (correctly we feel) that verse two is not a

¹U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1967), p. 241.

command, but only a proclamation introducing the speaker. Nevertheless, the Jewish designation of 20:2 as the first commandment does emphasize the truth that we cannot have the moral values of the ten commandments without having faith in the LORD who gave the commandments.

4. What does "before me" mean in "Thou shalt have no other gods before me"? (20:3)

Literally it reads "before my face" or "near my face." Since God's face (or presence) is everywhere (Jer. 23:23), to have no other gods "before me" actually means to recognize no other gods at all.

In Hebrew "before me" is *al panay*. Very similar Hebrew expressions are found in Gen. 11:28 ("Haran died *before the face* of his father Terah."); also in Job 1:11 ("He will renounce thee *to thy face*."); also Ezek. 40:15 ("And *from the front* of the gate. . ."); and Ex. 18:13 ("the people stood *before* Moses."). These passages illustrate the meaning of "before me."

The expression may also imply "against me" or "in opposition to me." The Heb. preposition *al* has this meaning in Ezek. 5:8 and Ps. 3:1. It could also mean "in addition to me." This meaning is implied by the preposition *al* in Gen. 31:50. The Greek O.T. translates it "besides me." (The Greek preposition is *plen*, meaning besides, except, or save.)

The verse clearly teaches that God did not tolerate recognition of any god except Him. Israel was to practice a genuine monotheism. The "liberal" view of this verse is that the command does not state that only one God exists, but rather that the LORD was supreme among the gods of the ancient Near East; and that only in the later centuries did Israel affirm that only the Lord existed (as in Isa. 45:5; 46:1).² It surely appears to us that Ex. 20:2 teaches a pure and exclusive monotheism.

The fact that Israel worshipped other "gods" in later centuries (Joshua 24:15) does not prove that a commandment against such practices had not been given. Note Judges 17:4.

²Broadman Bible Commentary, Vol. 1 (1969), p. 411.

The expression "Thou shalt have" (literally, "There shall not be to thee") has a singular verb, although its subject ("other gods") is plural. This appears to forbid acceptance of all other gods as a collective body of nonentities.

When Israel remained true to the one exclusive God, she was victorious and united. When she forsook the LORD, she was defeated and fragmented. (Judges 2:11-15; Chs. 17, 18)

5. *What are "graven" images? (20:4-5)*

A graven image is a carved image of wood, stone or such material. (Our word *engrave* is from the same root.) Compare Judges 17:3; II Kings 21:7. Cast (or molten) images were also forbidden (Ex. 34:17).

A "likeness" is a form seen by man, rather than an image made by man.³ (Num. 12:8; Deut. 4:12, 15ff; Job 4:16; Ps. 17:15). In 20:4 "likeness" refers to a statue or painting of anything they may have seen.

The command forbidding the making of any graven images was in total opposition to the religious practices of all the world at that time. It is little wonder that God elaborated upon this commandment (in 20:4-6) more than He did upon obvious commandments, such as "Kill not." (The two commandments that are lengthily elaborated - the graven image and Sabbath commandments - are the very ones that deal with completely new religious ideas, and therefore needed a more thorough presentation.)

Israel was not forbidden to make all statues or paintings. They were just forbidden to make such things "unto thee," that is, as objects of worship. God Himself commanded them to make golden cherubim (angel figurines) upon the ark of the covenant. Presumably these were made by an "engraver" (Ex. 38:23). Also in Solomon's temple there were decorations of cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers (I Kings 6:32), and also of lilies (I Kings 7:22). Decoration of lions, oxen, and cherubim decorated the lavers by Solomon's temple (I Kings

³C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, Vol. II (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), p. 115.

7:29). Moses made a brass snake at God's command (Num. 21:8-9). Thus it appears not all statues and art work was forbidden in Israel, only those which were objects of worship. (Even the brass snake was destroyed when it became an object of worship (II Kings 18:4).

6. *What is the "water under the earth"? (20:4)*

The "water under the earth" is simply the water lying below the surface of seas, rivers, etc. This is made clear by Deut. 4:18, which refers to the "fish that are in the water under the earth." It is "under (or below) the earth" because it is lower than the ground level at the surface of the water.

Occasionally we read the view that the "waters under the earth" refer to one of the "three stories" which ancient people thought the universe consisted of, namely of heaven above, the earth, and the world "beneath the earth," as if there were some great subterranean cavity under the earth full of water. The Bible presents no such unscientific and superstitious world-view.

7. *In what way is God jealous? (20:5)*

He is jealous in that He is full of zeal and ardor against those who give to graven images the recognition and worship that He alone deserves as God.

This word *jealous* is a term applied exclusively to God. Compare Deut. 34:14. The word does not suggest the pettiness and nastiness that we often associate with jealousy.

Isaiah 42:8: "I am Jehovah, that is my name; and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise unto graven images." Compare Isa. 46:5; 44:9-17; 42:8; Deut. 6:15; Josh. 24:15; Nahum 1:2.

8. *Is it fair for God to recompense the iniquity of the fathers upon the children? (20:5-6)*

Assuredly it is just and fair. It would be just and fair even if we did not understand why God did it, because God is always just (Rom. 3:26).

Consider first Deut. 24:16: "The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers; every man shall be put to death for his

own sins." Compare Ezekiel 18:4, 20!

The word translated "third generation" (*shillesh*) means a great-grandchild. The expression "third and fourth generation" seems simply to refer to indefinite future generations. Compare Amos 1:3, 6.

The best way to understand the threat of 20:5 is to see how God carried it out. From later history we learn that God often endured the wrongdoing of people with great longsuffering. However, His patience had a definite limit. And when God finally brought down punishment upon the later generations, He inflicted upon those generations the punishment for their own sins and also those of their fathers. But - and this is very important - God only did this to the descendants who continued to walk in the wicked ways of their fathers. To those who loved Him and kept His commandments He showed great lovingkindness. ("Lovingkindness," or "mercy," or "steadfast love" is *hesed* in Hebrew, an enduring covenant-love. See notes on 15:13 and compare Ex. 34:7.) (Loving God means keeping God's commandments. I John 5:3).

The histories of the Biblical kings illustrate Ex. 20:5-6. King Manasseh was a very evil king, whose evils brought the sentence of destruction upon the kingdom (II Kings 21:10-15). However, Manasseh's good grandson, Josiah, who kept God's covenant, was not punished (II Kings 22:16-20). Nonetheless, Josiah's goodness did not turn away the wrath upon Manasseh's sins (II Kings 23:26-27); and the penalty for the wrongdoings of *all* the kings fell in the time of Josiah's son Zedekiah (who was Manasseh's great-grandson, "the third generation"), who "did that which was evil" (II Kings 24:19).

Similarly, God threatened doom on the house of king Ahab for his sins (I Kings 21:19, 22-26). But Ahab repented somewhat and "walked softly" (I Kings 21:27). Therefore God postponed His judgment (II Kings 21:29), but brought it down upon Ahab's son Jehoram who "walked in the ways of Ahab" (II Kings 3:2-3; 9:24).

Likewise, because of king Jehu's sins and excessive bloodshed (II Kings 10:29; Hosea 1:4), his great-grandson

was slain (along with the entire dynasty) because "he did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah, as his fathers had done." (II Kings 15:9).

The children "fill up the sins of their fathers" so that when they are punished for doing as their fathers did, the consequences of both their sins and those of their fathers fall on them at once. Compare Lev. 26:39; Amos 7:17; Jer. 16:11ff; Dan. 9:16. If the children would only keep God's covenant, they would receive mercy from God, regardless of what their fathers had done.

The "thousands" in 20:6 has no reference to the sequence of generations, that is, it does not refer to a "thousand generations." There have been less than two hundred generations in the entire time since Moses' life.

9. *What does taking the LORD's name IN VAIN mean? (20:7)*

"In vain" (or "for vanity") means at least three things:

- (1) It means to use God's name to back up a LIE. The following are some of the verses that illustrate this meaning of "vain": Isa. 59:4: "They trust in vanity and speak lies." (The word *lies* here is the same Hebrew word *shav* translated "vain" in Ex. 20:7). Hosea 10:4: "swearing falsely in making covenants." Ex. 23:1: "Thou shalt not take up a false report." Compare Job 31:5.
- (2) It means to use God's name in an idle, useless, flippant, irreverent utterance. This meaning of "vain" is illustrated by the following passages: Psalm 60:11: "for vain (useless) in the help of man." Compare Ps. 108:12. Malachi 3:14: "Ye have said, It is vain (useless) to serve God." Psalm 119:37: "Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity."

The Greek O.T. confirms this meaning of the word *vain*, by translating the phrase *epi mataio*, "for something worthless" (idle, foolish, trifling).

- (3) "In vain" also means to use God's name for any wicked purpose, in defiance, blasphemy, etc. Ps. 139:19: "For they speak against thee wickedly. And thine enemies take thy name *in vain*."

Ex. 20:7 condemns the cursing and much of the slang that is so popular in our time. Read Psalm 19:14.

A person's name is closely associated with the person who bears it. Thus to use the name wrongly is to use the person wrongly. Note Ex. 3:13-15.

The Old Testament saints could swear by God's name if they swore the truth. (Lev. 19:12; Jer. 4:2; II Sam. 2:27). The New Testament forbids taking oaths in God's name (Matt. 5:34-37; James 5:12).

Instead of uttering God's name in vain, we should reecho Psalm 111:9: "Holy and reverend (fearsome) is his name;" also Matthew 6:9: "Hallowed be thy name."

Jewish interpreters have felt that the law against using God's name in vain meant that God's name is not to be uttered unnecessarily in common conversation. In fact, in centuries after Moses' time the Jews pronounced the divine name (Yahweh) only once a year, by the high priest when he gave the blessing on the day of atonement. It appears to us that Jehovah's name was used quite freely by Godly people in the Old Testament age. See Ruth 2:4; Gen. 14:2; II Sam. 16:12; and others also. Of course, we agree that it would be better not to use the name at all than to use it irreverently.

Some liberal commentators think they detect implications of evil or magical powers in the uttering of the divine name; and hence it was not to be uttered "in vain." We feel that this notion is apparent only to those who are looking for some such idea.

10. *What was the law about the Sabbath day? (20:8-10)*

Two things: (1) Keep it *holy*; (2) Do not work on that day. It was to be a day not profaned by usual workaday activities.

What day of the week is the Sabbath day? It is the seventh day of the week, Saturday on our calendars. It is a mistake to call Sunday, the first day of the week, the Lord's day, the Sabbath day.

See the Special Study on the Ten Commandments concerning the differences between the wording of the commandments (especially the Sabbath law) in Exodus and

Deuteronomy, and concerning whether Christians are obligated to keep the ten commandments or not.

11. *What does REMEMBER imply in "Remember the Sabbath day"?* (20:8)

Remember may simply mean to observe faithfully. See Malachi 4:4 for an example of this meaning of *remember*.

More probably *remember* implies that the people already knew something about the Sabbath, which they were to remember by appropriate obedience. They knew that the manna had not been provided on the Sabbath days, and that they were to rest on that day. (See Ex. 16:22-23, 29). This they were to remember, along with other things about it.

There is no scriptural indication that men knew anything about the Sabbath day until the giving of the manna, as related in Exodus sixteen. Neh. 9:13-14 says, "Thou camest down also upon Mt. Sinai, and spakest with them from heaven, . . . and MADEST KNOWN unto them thy holy Sabbath, . . ." See also Ezek. 20:10-12.

Thus it seems that although God had rested on the seventh day after creation, He had not commanded man to keep the seventh day until Exodus sixteen and twenty. Israel may have known that God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh, but no commandment had been given to man to sanctify that day.

Is there archaeological information which suggests that men were acquainted with the Sabbath day before the time of Moses? We do not feel that any such evidence exists. The Babylonians and the Assyrians applied the name *shabattu* (or *shapattu*) to certain days, and this name is etymologically related to the Hebrew word *Sabbath*. But the applications of the Babylonian and Hebrew words were fully as different as *Sunday* is different from *sun-god's day*.

U. Cassuto⁴ sums up the archaeological evidence by noting that the Babylonians and Assyrians applied the name

⁴Cassuto, *op. cit.*, pp. 244-245.

Shabattu to the day of the full moon, the fifteenth of the month, which was especially dedicated to worship of the moon-god and of related deities. Also the seventh, fourteenth, twenty-first and twenty-eighth days of the month had a particular significance in the Mesopotamian calendar. They were connected with the four phases of the moon, and were seven days apart, except for the seventh of the month, which came eight days after the twenty-eighth day of the preceding month, if that month was defective (that is, consisted of 29 days), or nine days thereafter if that month was full (that is, comprised 30 days). All these days, both the day of the full moon, and the other days mentioned above, were considered days of ill luck, on which it befitted a man to fast, to abstain from pleasures, and to avoid performing important works, for they would not succeed. It seems that the Israelite sabbath was instituted in opposition to the Mesopotamian system, and its character was completely original. It was not on the day of the full moon, nor any other day dependent on the moon's phases. It was the seventh day in perpetual sequence, and had no connection with the signs of heaven. It was not a day for the worship of the host of heaven, but a day consecrated to Him who created the Host of heaven. It was not a day of fasting and of misfortune, but a day of rest and blessing. No work was to be done, not because of the danger it would fail, but because it was a day on which the people rose above the need for hard work that they were called upon to do on other days for a living, and thereby shared the divine refreshment with the creator of the world. (Summary adapted from Cassuto)

12. *Why was the Sabbath given?* (20:9-11)

- (1) It was given to provide *rest* for men and beasts. See Deut. 5:14. The Hebrew word *sabbath* means a day of *rest*. The related verb means to cease, or to rest. This principle of a day of rest each week is a valuable, necessary, and joyful arrangement. It was a day of delight (Isa. 58:13), a precious boon to the weary.

On the sabbath days all work activities were to be

suspended except those utterly unavoidable. Forbidden work included plowing and reaping (Ex. 34:21), pressing wine and carrying goods (Neh. 13:15), bearing burdens (Jer. 17:21), carrying on trade (Amos 8:5), holding markets (Neh. 13:15ff), gathering firewood (Num. 15:32), and kindling fires for cooking (Ex. 35:3).

While the Lord's day, the first day of the week, is not strictly a sabbath (rest) day, we are of the opinion that Christians ought to keep it holy, and that this can probably be best done by keeping the day somewhat as the Jews kept their sabbaths. Many of the early Christians were slaves or soldiers and did not have the opportunity of rest on the Lord's day. Thus, God did not command a particular legal rest day for Christians. But the principle of rest still deserves our serious attention.

"Six days shalt thou *work*." Certainly work is a necessary part of the life of God's people, and is commanded in both the old and new Testaments. Gen. 3:17-19; I Thess. 4:11; II Thess. 3:10. But the principle of rest is also important.

- (2) A second reason for the Sabbath is to attest the fact that the LORD is the creator of the world (Ex. 20:11). In fact, if it had not been for this link with God as creator, we doubt that the Sabbath law would have had a place in the Decalogue, any more than the laws about the other holy days.

The fact that the LORD blessed a *day* of rest after six *days* of creation, and then used the Sabbath *day* as a direct comparison to the seventh *day* of creation surely indicates that the *days* of creation in Genesis one are the same duration as our days now. This means that we should regard the earth as "young" in contrast to the speculations of many, who assume the earth is several billion years old. There is no cause to assume that the earth is much over 6,000 years old. All theories to the contrary disregard much scientific evidence as

well as Biblical evidence.⁵

- (3) A third reason for keeping the Sabbath was stated in Deut. 5:15. This was to cause Israel to remember that they had been slaves in Egypt and that the LORD had brought them out of Egypt. This reason for keeping the Sabbath would apply to Israel only, and shows that the Sabbath day was never designed to be observed by all races and nations.

13. *Are Christians to keep the Sabbath (Saturday) as a holy day?*

The answer is No. We live under a new covenant (II Cor. 3:6), and the new covenant does not include the commandment to keep the Sabbath day. The early Christians, who were under inspired apostolic oversight and direction, met on the first day of the week, our Sunday (Acts 20:7). The first day of the week is not called by the name *Sabbath* in the New Testament, but is referred to as the Lord's Day (Rev. 1:10). The Sabbath, like the other Hebrew feast days, such as the new moon, and the laws about meat and drink, was only a shadow of things to come. But the "body" (which cast the shadow) is Christ's. (Col. 2:16-17) Hebrews 4:9 speaks of a "sabbath rest" which now remains for the people of God. The setting of that verse indicates that this "sabbath rest" was a rest that was different from God's rest on the seventh day of creation, and was instituted long after that. It came into being even after Joshua gave Israel "rest" in the conquered promised land. Thus our Christian "sabbath rest" is not the seventh-day rest commanded in Moses' law, but is probably our spiritual rest in Christ (Matt. 11:28), or our eternal rest (Rev. 14:13), or both.

14. *What was the law about parents? (20:12)*

They were to be *honored*. The reason for honoring parents was that the children's days might be long in the land which

⁵There are many books now available which give scientific as well as Biblical evidence that the earth and the universe are young in comparison to the billions of years proposed by evolutionary dates. We mention here only a few: John C. Whitcomb, Jr., & Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Flood* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1961); Henry M. Morris, *Biblical Cosmology and Modern Science* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970); Melvin A. Cook, *Prehistory and Earth Models* (London: Parrish, 1966).

Jehovah their God was giving them.

The command to *honor* is a very impressive significant command. The same word *honor* that is here applied to parents is frequently applied to the honor due to God. See Prov. 3:9; Isa. 43:23. The Hebrew noun translated *honor* (*kabod*, from the verb *kabed*) is also translated *glory*, and is applied to *God's* glory (Ex. 16:7; 24:17; 40:34; I Kings 8:11; and others). The Greek O.T. translated "honor" as *timao*, a verb referring to honor rendered to superiors, of men to gods, of men to elders, rulers, and guests. The use of these words shows that honoring parents was a very meaningful act.

How is this honor to be shown to parents?

- (1) Negatively, parents were not to be cursed or struck. See Ex. 21:15; Lev. 21:15, 17.
- (2) By showing them respect. Lev. 19:3: "Ye shall fear every man his mother, and his father."
- (3) By obeying them. Deut. 21:18-21; Ephesians 6:1.
- (4) By caring for them in their advanced years. Mark 7:10-12; I Timothy 5:4, 8. The honor due to parents continues on into their elderly life, even after their children are grown.

A persistently disobedient, stubborn, drunken, gluttonous son could be stoned to death. God views disobedience in sons as very serious. See Deut. 21:18-21.

The command about honoring parents comes immediately after the law about the Sabbath. The same two commandments are mentioned together in Lev. 19:3. Probably God intended that they should be associated together. In societies where divine worship is not practiced, the elderly are sometimes neglected, rejected, and "turned out."

In our modern society youth is worshipped and old age is dreaded or despised. The result is a folly in which men and women strive to remain eternally youthful, only to find it is an impossible task. We need to return to the Biblical ideal of honoring parents and respecting the elderly.

As the apostle Paul stated (in Eph. 6:2) this command about honoring parents is the "first commandment with a

promise," the promise that their days would be long in the land which the LORD their God gave them. Also there is the promise "that it may go well with thee" (Deut. 5:16).

Obedience by children will generally result in good health, safety, and wisdom. These things, plus the blessing of God, will generally make the days of our life longer.

It must not be assumed, of course, that obedience to parents guaranteed longevity in every case, any more than that lack of obedience guaranteed a short life for all wicked men.

The promise probably had a collective national application. If Israelite children obeyed Godly parents, their nation (or land) would survive longer. If they disobeyed, their land would go into captivity and they would not "dwell long in the land."

If the promise of long life seems to be too material and earthly for those who feel they are more spiritually minded, remember that in the O.T. age God's promises were usually of a material nature because the people were yet spiritual children, as it were yet in God's school. See Gal. 3:23-25. Most of us are still in that state!

15. *What is forbidden in the command "Thou shalt not kill"?* (20:13)

It seems to forbid murder, manslaughter, and suicide.

Certainly the Hebrew word *ratsah* translated *kill* referred to *murder*. It has this meaning in numerous references. See Num. 35:16, 17, 18; and others. In the laws in the following chapters more detailed laws about murder are given. Note 21:12, 14; and others.

The word *kill* also applies to *manslaughter*. It has this meaning in at least a score of references. See Num. 35:16-21; Deut. 4:42; Josh. 20:3; Num. 35:6, 11; and others. In the laws in the following chapters more specific details are given about manslaughter. See 21:13, 20, 29; and others. We have a divinely ordained obligation to respect and protect the lives of others in all our life's activities (including our auto driving). We must not kill in carelessness, anger, hatred, or vengeance.

Inasmuch as there is no specific object named after "Thou shalt not kill," the verse surely forbids killing ourselves

(suicide) also.

In the O.T. life is viewed as sacred, as a gift from God. "All souls are mine," God said in Ezek. 18:4. The ending of any man's life must be left to God's decision.

"Thou shalt not kill" does NOT forbid capital punishment when that punishment is administered by authorized judges following God's directions. "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed" (Gen. 9:5-6). In the following three chapters alone there are at least eight offences named for which God commanded that men be executed. The apostles Paul and Peter believed in capital punishment. Acts 25:11; Rom. 13:4; I Pet. 2:13-15.

Neither does "Thou shalt not kill" forbid war. Wars were frequently instituted by God himself. Ex. 15:1; Deut. 20:1; Ex. 17:16; Num. 10:9. The question as to what circumstances might now be the basis of a "just war" is a topic that lies outside the scope of this book.

We must not conclude our comments about "killing" without referring to our savior's words. "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; . . . But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and . . . whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire." (Matt. 5:21-22, King James, vers.)

16. *What is adultery?* (20:14)

In the O.T. *adultery* meant sex relations between a man and a married woman (other than his wife) or a betrothed woman. See Gen. 39:9. Both an adulterer and the adulteress were to be put to death. See Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22. To lie with a betrothed virgin brought death to both man and woman, unless she cried out for help (Deut. 22:23-27). A betrothal (engagement) was regarded as being as binding a contract as the marriage. If a man lay with a virgin, he had to pay a dowry to her father and take the woman as his wife, and could never leave her (Deut. 22:28-29; Ex. 22:16-17).

The law of Moses did not directly forbid concubinage and polygamy, although the ideal of one wife for one man with

no divorce ever occurring had been God's intention for men from the beginning. See Matt. 19:7-8; Malachi 2:15-16; Deut. 24:1-4.

While adultery, strictly speaking, is limited to relations with a married woman, the law also dealt with other types of sexual offenses. These include bestiality (Ex. 22:19), homosexuality (sodomy) (Lev. 20:13), sex relations with near relatives (incest) (Lev. 20:14-21), and rape (Deut. 22:25-29). While there is no specific law in the Torah forbidding seeking prostitutes, God did indicate that this was a detestable practice to Him, and its practice would fill the land with wickedness (Lev. 19:29). No Israelites were to make prostitutes of their daughters (Lev. 19:29; Deut. 23:17-18). In the later writings by the prophets (like Hosea 4:11, 14) and other writings (Prov. 6:26; 29:3) God expressed His condemnation of prostitution clearly. The New Testament condemns lying with harlots in the severest language (I Cor. 6:15-18; Eph. 5:5-6).

The law against adultery is an absolute necessity for the security and happiness of homes and family life.

Matt. 5:27-28: "Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt not commit adultery: but I say unto you, that every one that looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart."

17. *What was the law about stealing? (20:15)*

The law was "Don't do it." Every unlawful acquisition of property by violence, cheating, embezzlement, forgery, etc., is forbidden. Even "sophisticated" methods like moving over a neighbor's property boundary marker (usually just a rock pile) were forbidden (Deut. 19:14). The law forbade stealing people (kidnapping) (Ex. 21:16). The laws and penalties for stealing are expanded in 22:1-4.

Eph. 4:28: "Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labor." II Cor. 8:21: "Take thought for things honorable . . . in the sight of all men."

The eighth commandment protected the right of private property. Not even a king dared to steal the property of one

of his people without just compensation (I Kings 21:15-19). In our times of communist propaganda and growing socialism and agitation for government ownership of everything, we need to proclaim loudly that the right of private property is a God-given right, and is the basis for the only social and economic system that will produce enough wealth to supply a nation.

18. *What is meant by bearing false witness?* (20:16)

Since witnessing generally referred to testimony in courts of law, bearing false witness meant lying in court, or perjury. See Ex. 23:2; I Sam. 12:3; Prov. 14:5; Deut. 19:18.

However, the command about bearing false witness is broad enough to include all lying in daily conversation (Ps. 40:4; 101:7; Prov. 6:16-17), the flattery of a false tongue (Ps. 12:2-3), and even tattling and unfounded unkind gossip (Lev. 19:16). "Putting away falsehood, speak ye truth each one with his neighbor" (Eph. 4:25). Compare Col. 3:9; Rev. 21:8, 27.

Who is "thy neighbor" against whom we are not to bear false witness? It seems that "neighbor" probably means "all men." Thus "neighbor" in Ex. 11:2 referred to anyone near to a person. In Lev. 19:18 "neighbor" is made parallel to "children of thy people" (or Israelites). Lev. 19:34 says that the Israelites were to love the stranger that sojourned with them "as thyself." Therefore, Jewish scholars have interpreted the "neighbor" in this command to refer to all men, and we think this is correct. Jesus in the story of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37) taught that our "neighbor" is anyone who needs our help.

The commandment to be truthful always in dealing with our neighbor is so contrary to usual human conduct that it surely bears the marks of God's divine authorship right on the face of it.

19. *What is coveting?* (20:17)

To *covet* means to desire. The Hebrew word for *covet* (*hamad*) is translated "desire" in Psalm 68:16. The word itself does not necessarily suggest an EVIL desire. Like the

Greek *epithumeo*, it indicates evil only when the desire is directed toward unlawful things.

Sin begins with wrong thoughts and wrong desires. This commandment cuts off sin at its root - our own desires and cravings. See Eph. 5:5; James 4:1-2. Only God would issue a law against coveting. Can you imagine the U.S. congress passing a law against coveting?

Many interpreters (generally those of a "liberal" persuasion) feel that *coveting* refers not just to a mental state but to activities by which we seek to acquire what we desire. Thus coveting is (to them) the attempt to take property. We agree with Cassuto (*op. cit.*, p. 248-249) that this is NOT implied in the word *covet*. If it were, it would only be a repetition of the commands about stealing and adultery. The use of the word *desire* in Deut. 5:21 as a synonym for *covet* also argues against the idea that coveting primarily refers to actions to take things. The verses set forth to prove this view (such as Deut. 7:25; Josh. 7:21; Micah 2:2) merely indicate that coveting preceded seizure. We fear that it is easier to reinterpret the word *covet* than it is to discipline our spirits to stop coveting.

The commandment about coveting as stated in Deut. 5:21 differs somewhat in arrangement of words from Ex. 20:17. In Deuteronomy the reference to a neighbor's wife comes first and then the neighbor's house. Deuteronomy adds "field" which is not in Exodus. The Greek O.T. of Ex. 20:17 follows closely the order of items as listed in Deut. 5:21, but adds *cattle*, which is not mentioned in the Hebrew of either Deuteronomy or Exodus. As stated in our special study on the Ten Commandments, we do not regard the changes in Deuteronomy from the text in Exodus as having any real significance.

The variations between the commandment about coveting in Exodus and Deuteronomy suggest that the Roman Catholic division of the commandment in Exodus into two commandments is probably not valid.

20. *How did the people react to the thunderings, voice, etc.?*
(20:18)

They trembled and stood afar off. The spectacle was too much for them. (Ex. 19:16-19). They shrank back away from the mountain in near-panic.

Josephus (*Ant.* III, v, 6) says that when the multitude heard God himself giving these precepts [the decalogue], they *rejoiced* at what was said! That is an astounding contradiction to the Biblical story, and suggests that Josephus' writings are frequently pure propaganda to make Israel look good.

The word "perceived" (or "saw") has the idea of perceiving a continuous viewing. (It is a Hebrew participle.) The sentence is worded so as to indicate that their "perceiving" was not after the preceding account of hearing the ten commandments, but during the course of it.⁶

Ex. 20:18-21 forms the introduction to the "book of the covenant," that body of laws given by God and recorded in Ex. 20:18—23:33. This "book of the covenant" contains numerous enlargements upon the ten commandments, but it is more than just that. It has new subject material of its own. The actual phrase "book of the covenant" appears in Ex. 24:4, 7.

The clause which the A.S.V. translates "When the people saw it," the R.S.V. translates "the people were *afraid*, they trembled. . . ." This is really a very small and even possibly legitimate alteration. The change was made because the R.S.V. translators felt that the vowels attached to the Hebrew consonants of the verb should be altered to read "They feared" rather than "They saw." The R.S.V. reading is supported by the Greek reading (*phobethentes*). However, it does involve changing the vowels that were added by the Jewish Masoretic rabbis A.D. 500-900, and are in the common Hebrew Bible now.⁷

⁶The "and" in the Hebrew is attached to the pronoun *all* rather than to the verb, as is done to indicate consecutive action.

⁷The R.S.V. reads the verb as *yira'* (from *yare'*, to fear) instead of *yar'* (from *ra'ah*, to see). This involves no changes in the Hebrew consonants. We do not assume that the vowel markings in modern Hebrew Bibles are part of the inspired Biblical text. Nonetheless we are not disposed to alter the vowel markings without rather strong cause for doing so.

21. *How did the people want to hear God's words? (20:19)*

They wanted to hear them from Moses. They wanted Moses to listen to God's awesome voice and then have Moses to speak to them. They feared (unnecessarily) that they would die if God spoke more to them. Deut. 5:23 says that when they heard the voice, they came near unto Moses, that is, the heads of their tribes and their elders came unto him.

It is easy to criticize Israel's fear of God's voice. But it probably is not fair to do so. Even Moses felt some fear (Heb. 12:21). At least Israel desired to hear what God would say. We doubt that any of us now living would have been less fear-struck than they. But what Israel dreaded, Moses desired! See Ex. 33:18.

At this point please read Deut. 5:28-33. God very graciously accepted the Israelites' words and promise to Moses, saying "They have well said all that they have spoken." God knew that the people would not live up to their promises, but He was gracious nonetheless. The people were sent back to their tents, while Moses was called to stand by the Lord and hear His commandments.

Moses' position as the *mediator* through whom the law was given becomes very apparent at this time. See Gal. 3:19.

Israel's terror at God's voice (see Heb. 12:18-21) should be a warning to the ungodly of our time. We shall ALL hear God's voice in the time to come. That voice will then not shake the earth only (as at Mt. Sinai) but the heaven itself (Heb. 12:26). If the Israelites, a people who had committed themselves to accept God's covenant (Ex. 19:8), were terrified by God's coming, what will be the fears of those who have scorned His gracious covenant offers?

22. *For what purposes had God come to the people at Mt. Sinai? (20:20-21)*

(1) To prove (or test) you; (2) that his fear may be before you; (3) that ye sin not.

Proving Israel is a frequent theme in Exodus. See 16:4. God did not test Israel to discover for Himself how they would react in any situation. That He already knew. But, as

any experienced teacher will know, a test is a powerful training tool in itself. It intensifies study and thought. God's awesome demonstrations at Sinai brought the Israelites face to face with realities of His power and majesty that many of them had simply not yet faced up to (not that they had lacked opportunity).

Note that God wanted to put the "fear of God" into the people. Prov. 16:6: "By the fear of the LORD men depart from evil."

The use of the name *God* (Heb., *elohim*) in 20:21 rather suggests that God spoke then as the Lord of all creation, rather than as YAHWEH, the LORD of Israel. However, 20:22 starts, "And Jehovah said," Thus all aspects of God's name and nature are on display.

Moses drew near "unto God," that is unto the place where the infinite omnipresent God had designated for finite man to meet him. And Moses drew near the "thick darkness." Compare Ex. 19:9.

23. *What was Israel not to make? (20:22-23)*

They were not to make gods of silver or gold. These shall not be "with me" (a slightly different expression than "before me" in 20:3). Twice in 20:23 God declared, "You shall not make. . . ." The building of the golden calf (Ex. 32) soon violated this command.

When Israel left Mt. Sinai, she began to encounter many pagan peoples of that region. All of these had their own religions, idols, altars, and temples. There was strong probability that Israel would pick up practices of these religions and corrupt her own true worship. Therefore God gave the restrictions on worship in 20:23-26.

24. *What were altars to be made of? (20:24-25)*

Altars were to be made of earth or unhewn stones ("Cyclopean" altars). These would be the humble altars of wanderers, to be used and then abandoned.

We do not know the exact reasons why God commanded them to use earth and uncut stones. Certainly such humble materials would restrain a common feeling that men get,

thinking one spot is more holy than another because it has some impressive statue or monument on it. It would be very humbling to a skilled stone cutter to be told that his chiseling upon stones would pollute them and make them unacceptable in God's altar! This suggests that human works and human skill cannot in any way bring God's salvation to us. It is God's gift altogether (Eph. 2:8-9). No human shall glory in God's presence.

Not long after this God gave to Israel the instructions about the altar to be built for use in their tabernacle. It was made of wood and brass. See Ex. 27:1-8.

25. *What types of offerings were to be made on the altar? (20:24)*

Two types: burnt-offerings and peace-offerings. These are two very ancient types of offerings. (Gen. 8:20; 22:2; Ex. 18:12). These were the very two kinds of offerings that the young men offered on the altar soon afterwards (Ex. 24:5). Offerings with names like "peace-offerings" and "burnt-offerings" were offered by the ancient Canaanites. These were, of course, corrupted forms of the ancient offerings to God.

Burnt-offerings are described in Lev. 1:3-17 and 6:8-13. Peace-offerings are described in Lev. 3:1-17; 7:11-18.

The offering of sacrifice indicates a break of fellowship between God and men. Burnt-offerings involved the death and destruction of sacrifices to cover the separation between man and God. Peace-offerings were given in gratitude when that separation between God and man had been covered (atoned for) through burnt-offerings.

26. *Where was sacrifice to be made? (20:24)*

"At every place where I cause my name to be remembered." Compare Jer. 7:12. As God led Israel from encampment to encampment by His guiding cloud (Num. 9:17-18), they would set up their altar at each stop. It is noteworthy that only ONE altar for all the people is mentioned in 20:24. God did not say, "Ye shall build *altars* of earth unto me," but "an altar (singular) of earth shalt thou (a collective singular pronoun, referring to all the people) make unto

me." Note in Ex. 24:4 that they set up twelve pillars, but only one altar.

Thus from its very outset Israel's worship was supposed to be centralized. This is in perfect agreement with the restriction in Deut. 12:11 that all offerings in the promised land of Canaan were to be made in the place which Jehovah would choose. God's word is consistent within itself.

The site of the one altar was, of course, transferred from place to place - from wilderness camps, to Mt. Ebal (Josh. 8:30-31!), to Shiloh, to Gibeon, and to Jerusalem.

The people later disobeyed this law about the single altar and built many altars, many of them to other gods. But that did not occur because God had not given commandment to build only one altar.

We stress this point, because one of the basic ideas in the "critical" interpretation of the Old Testament is that the idea of a single sanctuary and a single altar developed much later in Israel's history, long after the time of Moses. Supposedly the "primitive" people in the day of Moses had many altars and many gods. "Critics" think that they can see evidence of this in some passages, and they attribute these to authors they call J (for Jehovist) or E (for Elohist). Then supposedly in the time of king Josiah (621 B.C.) a new document called D (for Deuteronomy) was sprung on the people in an effort to shut down the many sanctuaries and altars outside of Jerusalem and to centralize worship there. By attributing this D document to Moses, the priests overcame the popular resistance and centralized worship at Jerusalem. Some scholars now think this "Deuteronomistic reformation" occurred earlier, in the time of King Hezekiah (728-696 B.C.) or thereabouts.

Admittedly kings Josiah and Hezekiah shut down the out-of-Jerusalem sanctuaries. But they did this because they were obedient to the word of God given through Moses. Their actions in no way prove that Deuteronomy and other passages advocating a single place of worship were written long after Moses' time.

One particularly valuable book showing that Deuteronomy (and other passages teaching the idea of a single place of worship) could not have been written centuries after the time of Moses is G. T. Manley, *The Book of the Law* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957).

We suspect that the solitary altar of ancient Israel served as a type of Christ, who alone is our altar. (Heb. 13:10-12).

27. *Why were steps not to be made up to God's altar? (20:26)*

"So that your nakedness be not revealed while you are on the altar." "Nakedness" is a euphemism for the sex organs. See Lev. 18:6.

We know that priests in Ancient Mesopotamia (Sumer) sometimes were naked.⁸ But among the Israelites even immodesty by priests, much more nakedness, was forbidden by the holy God of Israel. God's priests even wore pants! (Ex. 28:42)

God made clothes for Adam and Eve after they sinned (Gen. 3:21). When people get away from God, they want to throw off their clothes and "break loose" and act like animals (Ex. 32:25, King James vers.). God's people should dress modestly (I Tim. 2:9).

The Canaanites built steps up to their altars (like those at Megiddo and Petra). The Israelites' equipment for worship was to be as distinctive as the God whom they worshipped.

THE LAW OF MOSES AND THE LAW CODE OF HAMMURABI*

The law code of Hammurabi is one of the most helpful archaeological discoveries ever found to aid us in understanding the law of Moses.

⁸James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near East in Pictures*, 2nd ed., with Supplement (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1969), p. 197.

*The entire Code of Hammurabi and the Laws of Eshnunna are given in an English translation in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, James B. Pritchard ed. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1955), pp. 163-180.



Two altars with steps. The Israelites were not to build altars with steps (Ex. 20:26). The lower picture shows the great Canaanite altar at Megiddo (about 1900 B.C.). The upper shows a stone altar at the "high place" of Petra (probably Nabatean, about 300 B.C.). (Photos by author.)



"And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel: speak unto them, saying, At even ye shall eat flesh . . . And it came to pass, that at even the quails came up, and covered the camp"
(Exodus 16:11-13).

Quails are found not only in Europe but also, as has been observed from ancient times, in Egypt and Arabia. Every spring, flocks of these migratory birds cross the Red Sea on their way to the Sinai peninsula, where they land exhausted near the coast and are easily caught. This is exactly how the Bible describes what happened during the Israelites' sojourn in the desert (Exodus 16:13 and Numbers 11:31). The birds were on their way northwards: "and there went forth a wind . . . and brought quails from the sea". This wall-painting from a grave at Thebes shows that the trapping of quails was a normal occurrence on the Nile and indicates how it was done. Four men are walking through a cornfield holding a square fine-meshed net, extended in a horizontal position. When the birds fly up they are entangled in the net and can be readily caught.

FROM: THE BIBLE AS HISTORY IN PICTURES
By Werner Keller - Wm. Morrow Co.

Hammurabi (1728-1696 B.C.) was the greatest king of the Old Babylonian empire. He was a great conqueror, but was also a builder and a lawgiver for his people.

The significance of Hammurabi's law code to us lies partly in the change its discovery made in the thinking of scholars about the Old Testament law.

In the last century (the nineteenth) Bible critics confidently declared that ancient Israel did not have any written law code in the time of Moses. Such codes did not exist that long ago. They believed that Deuteronomy was the first written law in our sense of the word, and that Deuteronomy was not written till nearly 600 B.C. (eight hundred years after Moses' time)!

Julius Wellhausen, the famous German critic, wrote, "Ancient Israel was certainly not without God-given bases for the ordering of human life; only *they were not fixed in writing.*" (Emphasis ours.) He also said, "There was no Torah as a ready-made product, as a system existing independently of its originator and accessible to every one; it became actual only in the various utterances, which naturally form by degrees the basis of a fixed tradition." (*Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (Edinburgh, 1885), pp. 393, 395). Views like these came to be accepted far and wide.

In A.D. 1901-2 the Frenchman Jacques de Morgan found at Susa (the Biblical Shushan) fragments of a black stone pillar about seven and a half feet tall and two feet in diameter. It had been inscribed by King Hammurabi. It contained a prologue dedicating it to Shamash, the sun god. The main body of its writing consisted of about 282 brief laws dealing with many social issues. An epilogue heaps praise on Hammurabi for his noble deeds. Fragments of two other duplicates of this code have also been found. It must have been widely known.

When this code was translated, it was found to contain numerous laws resembling those in the law of Moses. This caused a great change in the thinking of scholars about the Old Testament law. No longer could men allege that law codes such as that of Moses were nonexistent in those ancient times.

Since the discovery of Hammurabi's Code, more than half a

dozen other ancient codes of law have been found, many of which are older even than that of Hammurabi. Law codes presently known include (besides that of Hammurabi) the following:

- (1) Code of Ur-Nammu, king at Ur. Dated about 2050 B.C. It is a mutilated fragment having only five fairly readable laws.
- (2) Laws of the city of Eshnunna (near the Tigris river). These are dated about 2000 B.C. There are over sixty laws in this, three of which closely resemble the laws in Ex. 21:28, 29, 35.
- (3) Code of Lipit-Ishtar, king of the city of Isin. About 1900-1850 B.C.
- (4) Later Babylonian laws (after the time of Hammurabi).
- (5) Assyrian laws, from Cappadocia (about 1800 B.C.), and from the City of Ashur (about 1350 B.C.)
- (6) Hittite laws, found in Asia Minor. Dated about 1350 B.C. A large group of these were found.

In the course of our commentary on Exodus we shall refer to numerous laws of Hammurabi and others which shed light on the verses in the Bible, either by similarities or by differences. These are quite striking in many cases.

We list here just a few of Hammurabi's laws that seem to be comparable to laws in Exodus:

- a. Smiting parents. Hammurabi 195; Ex. 21:15.
- b. Stealing people. Ham. 14; Ex. 21:16.
- c. Wounding people. Ham. 206; Ex. 21:18-19.
- d. Law of retaliation. Ham. 196; Ex. 21:24.
- e. Knocking out someone's eye. Ham. 199; Ex. 21:26.

Was Moses familiar with law codes such as that of Hammurabi? We feel that he was. Both certain similarities and certain contrasts are so striking that we hardly see how it could have been accidental. This need not trouble us. God did not give His laws in a vacuum, to a people who had never had contact with any other cultures and never would. Educated people in Egypt like Moses were familiar with the Babylonian language and literature. If Israel's law was to be truly meaningful to them, it

had to relate in some ways to the laws of the world with which they were familiar. Thus God gave to Moses a law which resembled other law codes in occasional good points, and differed from them noticeably in points where men's laws had departed from God's standards. Overall, there is not much relationship either way.

Did Moses copy from Hammurabi or adapt some of Hammurabi's laws? We definitely think not. The scripture declares that God directly gave His law to Moses. Furthermore, most scholars who have studied Hammurabi's code feel that the differences between Moses and Hammurabi are so basic that it is unbelievable that Moses could have borrowed from Hammurabi. George A. Barton wrote as follows:

A comparison of the code of Hammurabi as a whole with the Pentateuchal laws as a whole, while it reveals certain similarities, convinces the student that the laws of the Old Testament are in no essential way dependent upon the Babylonian laws. (From *Archaeology and the Bible*, 7th ed. [Philadelphia: American Sunday School Union, 1937], p. 405.)

Hammurabi's code is altogether secular. It does not give spiritual or religious reasons for obedience, as the Torah does. Note Ex. 22:7.

Hammurabi's code shows much partiality toward the upper classes of society. Those who harm them receive severer punishment than those who harm poor citizens or slaves. Moses' law shows very little of such class distinctions.

The law of Moses presupposes that life is sacred. No one is to be executed for taking property, as Hammurabi commanded. Even the life of a slave is sacred in the Torah. Hammurabi is often more interested in protecting property than people.