

Week 9: Law in the Bible - Ch 20

Pre-Work

- Please watch the following video from the Bible Project as an introduction to the way Law functions in the scriptures.

<https://bibleproject.com/videos/reading-biblical-law/>

- Please read Exodus Chapter 20 in the translation of your choice. What stands out to you in these chapters? What questions arise in your mind when you read them?

Class Notes

- Types of law:
 - Statutory Law: most prevalent since the 1600's
 - Common law (flexible and based on precedent): more prevalent before 1600's
 - Covenantal law: similar to common law but with guiding principles agreed upon by both parties
 - Two main types of ancient near east covenantal law:
 - Apodictic/"as written" - underlying formative commands (10 commandments)
 - Casuistic/ "case law" - examples of applying underlying wisdom to specific situations (most of the Torah)

Code of Hammurabi - 1750BC, at least 300 years before Exodus, example of covenantal law given by a king (Hammurabi). Found all over the ancient near east, but very few examples of its proscribed punishments being followed - left to the discretion of the judge

In the bible, there are very few examples of the punishments proscribed being carried out, in part because of the failure of justice, but also in part because of the nature of "covenantal law" as opposed to statutory law.

- The number 10

The Ten

1. You shall have no other elohim before Me
2. You will make no graven images
3. You will not take/carry the name of Yahweh your Elohim in vain/false
4. You will remember the Sabbath and keep it holy
5. Honor your father and mother
6. You will not murder
7. You will not commit adultery
8. You will not steal
9. You will not bear false witness
10. You will not covet

20 Then God spoke all these words, saying,

² “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

- Because of Who God is and because of His work of rescue, here are creation commands for the chosen line of priests (all Israel and the mixed multitude with them)

³ “You shall have no other gods before Me.

- Love God
- “Elohim” - spiritual beings. Yahweh is THE spiritual being; all others must fade to the background to members of this covenant

⁴ “You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath, or in the water under the earth.⁵ You shall not worship them nor serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, inflicting the punishment of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, ⁶ but showing favor to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

- idol/crafted image - how idols “worked”
- Yahweh Himself is entering covenant with Israel (like a marriage) - this means “don’t cheat on God”.
- Yahweh can be trusted to be multigenerationally just upon those who reject Him, and merciful (chesed) to those who “keep His words” to thousands of generations
- Principle of first mention - this imbalance in favor of mercy/chesed is first connected to rejection of idolatry
- Appropriate “images” in the Bible

⁷ “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain.

- What it means to “take the name of Yahweh Elohim” in vain/falsely

⁸ “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹ For six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the LORD your God; *on it* you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male slave or your female slave, or your cattle, or your resident who stays with you. ¹¹ For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and everything that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day; for that reason the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

- These are the first reasons given for the imperative of rest on the “7th day”
 - This is a creation pattern (when the presence of the Divine inhabits the Temple)
 - This trusting gift must apply to everyone you oversee, including animals

- Jesus approached this command as covenantal not statutory

12 “Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be prolonged on the land which the LORD your God gives you.

- First command with a blessing attached. Note that it doesn’t say “tell your kids to honor you” but “be sure you show honor” - giving not trying to receive

13 “You shall not murder.

- Underlying wisdom: the life of another image of God should not be in your hands.
- Jesus’ reflection

14 “You shall not commit adultery.

- Covenant breaking in marriage is among “images of God” similar to worshiping other gods
- Jesus’ reflection in the SOTM
- Jesus’ judgment against adulterers in John 4 and John 8

15 “You shall not steal.

- This is both straight theft and the use of unjust weights and measures

16 “You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

- Doing right by your neighbor must come before self-interest to those who would be called followers of Yahweh.

17 “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male slave, or his female slave, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”

- Love people
- If you do not covet what your neighbor has, what’s left? Celebration for your neighbor.
 - Promotion, marriage, health, possessions, influence

Note that the majority of these commands (at least 6) focus on the treatment of other people. That is why “love God, love people” are two commands that are deeply interwoven.

“Context, style, and language suggest a basic division of the Decalogue into two distinct groups. The first governs the relations between God and the individual Israelite; the second regulates human relationships...In addition, there is the striking fact that the document opens with “the Lord your God” and closes with “your neighbor”.”

~Nahum Sarna, *Exodus, the JPS Commentary*

¹⁸ And all the people were watching *and hearing* the thunder and the lightning flashes, and the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw *it all*, they trembled and stood at a distance. ¹⁹ Then they said to Moses, “Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but do not have God speak to us, or we will die!” ²⁰ However, Moses said to the people, “Do not be afraid; for God has come in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may remain with you, so that you will not sin.” ²¹ So the people stood at a distance, while Moses approached the thick darkness where God *was*.

- The people fear God’s presence instead of “fearing” God’s commands
- Moses approaches Yahweh on behalf of the people

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

- Until the Tabernacle, the Israelites must fulfil their urge to worship using the “Temple” Yahweh already made - creation: earth and unhewn stone, not refined metal.
- Oh and make sure there are modesty steps so people don’t slip into the practices of everyone else around here in worship gatherings

The people are afraid, so God gives them a safety net. And this safety net gets ripped to shreds in a few chapters.

Reflections