

The Beginning of All Things – Genesis through Deuteronomy Fall, 2015

The Beginning of All Things – Genesis through Deuteronomy Have you ever wondered what the scriptures teach about the origin of the universe? What about the patriarchs, who were they, and why are they important? What relevance does the account of the exodus of the Hebrews from the land of Egypt have for Christian growth? What can the seemingly tedious ceremonial laws of Leviticus as well as the long list of names in Numbers teach us about godly living? How should a believer read and reflect on the five books of Moses collectively called the Pentateuch (or Torah)? How do these five books “fit in” to the over-arching story of scripture? These questions and more will be explored as we seek to understand this section of God’s Word.

The objective of this class is: to gain an overview of the first five books of the Bible (otherwise known as the Pentateuch), and understand the relation between these foundational books to Christ and Christian living.

A People of the Covenant: Last week we looked at the beginning of the book of Exodus and witnessed three major parts of the first twelve chapters: the expansion of the children of Israel while enslaved in Egypt, the revelation of the divine name of God, YHVH, and the relational aspects communicated in this revelation, and the miraculous deliverance of God’s people from Egyptian slavery. We gave particularly close attention to the final (tenth) plague, the death of the firstborn son and discussed the significance of this event in the redemptive history of God’s people. Today we will begin where we left off and survey chapters 13 through 20. We will look at three major events: The journey to Sinai, which encompasses the Red Sea debacle. Then, we will explore the elements of the Mosaic covenant, and finally take a close look at the Decalogue (the Ten Commandments).

Point One: The Journey to Sinai – before Israel left the land of Egypt, they were explicitly informed of their need to journey to the mount of God for the sake of worship. In **5:1** we read, *“Thus says the Lord God of Israel, ‘Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness’*”. Then, in **6:6-7** God instructs Moses, *“Say therefore to the people of Israel, I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. I will make you to be my people, and I will be your God...”* Moses later tells Pharaoh, *“...we must go three days journey into the wilderness and sacrifice to the Lord our God as he tells us”* (**Ex. 8:27**). Here we see at least three descriptions of what the journey from Egypt to the land of promise is expected to be: 1) the children of Israel will hold a feast to the Lord in the wilderness; 2) God will make the people of Israel his people and he will be their God (this does not mean that they were not his people heretofore, but he is announcing a new covenantal relationship that would build upon that under which they were already living – the Abrahamic covenant); 3) the children of Israel were to travel a three days’ journey into the wilderness where they would receive instructions from God as to how they should worship him.

After the slaying of the firstborn and the plundering of the Egyptians, the people of God left the land of their captivity and journeyed in the direction of the wilderness. God establishes two statutes for his people: the redemption (sanctification) of their firstborn, and the inauguration of the Feast of Unleavened Bread commencing the day following Passover. He then leads them to Pi-Hahiroth, a place between giant rocks and the sea. It is here that they are trapped by the pursuing Egyptians and begin to launch the first of many complaints against Moses for leading them out of slavery. God’s presence accompanies them throughout their wilderness wanderings beginning upon their departure from Egypt until they rest in the Promised Land as a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night. Despite the

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visible appearance of God's presence among them, they are convinced of their imminent doom. However, God intervened on the behalf of his people and sent a strong east wind to drive back the sea, and the people of God crossed the sea on dry land. Unfortunately, the Egyptians who attempted to pursue after them into the sea did not make it to the other side. One point that should here be made in passing is the manner in which the apostle Paul would later understand this event. In **1 Corinthians 10:1-2** Paul states, *"I want you to know brothers that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea..."* Last week we mentioned that the act of circumcision was suspended during the time of the wilderness wandering of the children of Israel. Therefore, their participation in the Abrahamic covenant, which continued to be in effect even at the time of the receiving of a new covenant (the Mosaic Covenant) was fulfilled by means of being baptized into the mediator (or federal head) of the covenant, Moses. In this respect Moses was a type of Christ.

After the miraculous deliverance of God's people and the parting of the Red Sea we have a statement made in a moment of worship that beautifully portrays God's purpose for redeeming Israel as well as his underlining covenantal intent from the time of creation forward. **Exodus 15:17** states, *"You will bring them in and will plant them on your own mountain, the place, Oh Lord which you have made for your abode, the sanctuary, Oh Lord, which your hands have established."* The three underlined phrases/words above offer superlative insight into the covenantal plan of God. God's intention through Abraham's descendants was to bring them to his mountain, where he will dwell, and his sanctuary. Knowing that Jerusalem is/was the city constructed on Mt. Zion (the mountain of God) compare this statement with **Revelation 21:2-3**, *"And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God."*

Point Two: The Mosaic Covenant – The point cannot be stressed enough that God's redemption of his people from Egyptian slavery precedes the initiation of the Mosaic covenant in which a response on the part of Israel is expected. One can make the strong case that God's gracious election of his people is independent of any effort or goodness on the part of Israel. He does not issue commands and statutes until he has accomplished their redemption; his election is unconditional. We see this even after their sin with the golden calf (Exodus 32). God shares with Moses his desire to annihilate Israel and continue his covenant through Moses, but then uses Moses (as covenant mediator) to petition for mercy and thereby shows mercy to his people. In this manner, Moses is once again an O.T. type of Christ.

When Israel came to Mt. Sinai, the Lord calls Moses up to the top of the mountain and establishes, 1) the preamble to the covenant, and 2) the conditions of the covenant. In **19:3-6** we read, *"Thus you shall speak to the house of Jacob and tell the people of Israel: you yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on Eagles wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation..."* Moses descends from the mountain and informs the elders and all the people of the words of the Lord, to which they reply, *"All that the Lord has spoken we will do"* (**Ex. 19:8**). Moses took the response of the people to God and God instructed him, *"Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments and be ready for the third day. For on the third day, the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. And you shall set limits for the people all around,*

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saying, *‘Take care not to go up into the mountain or touch the edge of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death. No hand shall touch him, but he shall be stoned or shot; whether beast or man, he shall not live’* (Ex. 19:10-13). After this warning, God does indeed appear on the top of the mountain the third day and the people of God see and witness the mountain wrapped in smoke, the mountain trembling, and the ascending crescendo of a trumpet. From the thick darkness, God bequeaths to his people the “Ten Words” or Ten Commandments. After the giving of the Ten Commandments as well as other various statutes and commandments, Moses came and shared the terms of the covenant with the people of God. The response of the people is recorded in 24:6-8, *“And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar. Then, he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, ‘All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient’. And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, ‘Behold the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words’”*.

Point Three: The Ten Commandments – The central part of the Book of the Covenant is the part of the covenant heard uttered (although in an unintelligible way) from the top of the mountain, also known as the Ten Words or Ten Commandments. Each commandment is briefly mentioned and explained below.

- 1) *Thou shalt have no other gods before me* – this solidifies the exclusivity of God’s covenant community; they are not to worship any god other than the one true God.
- 2) *Thou shalt not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.* – This commandment specifically addresses how God can be worshipped and forbids worshipping him in any way not prescribed by scripture. The justification for permissible worship is given as well, i.e. God will not share with others what rightfully belongs to him.
- 3) *Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord your God in vain* – this commandment forbids using the name of God dishonorably or in a profane manner. Historically, to take the name of the Lord God in vain meant (among the Jews) to willingly submit to the sovereign rule of God, and then fail to hallow the name or live as one who is a member of the kingdom of heaven.¹ This meaning is supported elsewhere in the Torah such as **Leviticus 22:31-32**, *“So you shall keep my commandments and do them: I am the Lord. And you shall not profane my holy name, that I may be sanctified among the people of Israel.”*
- 4) *Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.* – This command speaks of the significance of a creation ordinance, which must have been known prior to the giving of the Ten Commandments (see Exodus 16:23). Observing the Day of the Lord means spending one in seven days in the communal, familial and private worship of God.²

¹ Young, Brad H. *The Jewish Background to the Lord’s Prayer*

² WCF LC – The Sabbath is to be sanctified by a holy resting all that day, even from such worldly employments and recreations as are lawful on other days; and spending the whole time in the public and private exercises of God’s worship, except so much as is to be taken up in the works of necessity and mercy.

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- 5) *Honor your father and mother* – This command is explicit and is the first to accompany a promise: ...*that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.*
- 6) *Thou shalt not kill* – This command addresses both the willful slaying of someone maliciously as well as the accidental death of another through carelessness or negligence. The punishment for those who killed another unintentionally differed from someone who did so purposefully, but both instances are sin, because the taking of another human life must be required.
- 7) *Thou shalt not commit adultery* – This command addresses all unchaste thoughts, words and actions towards another.
- 8) *Thou shalt not steal* – This command is explicit in that it entails taking something from another that is not yours.
- 9) *Thou shalt not bear false witness against your neighbor* – Do not seek to maliciously slander your own name or the name of your neighbor.
- 10) *Thou shalt not covet your neighbor's house; thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's* – This command addresses the heart in such a way that it forbids discontentment and requires contentment.

A final point that should be made regarding the Ten Commandments is the breakdown of each section. The first four commandments address the relationship between God and man. The remaining six address the relationship between people. This is not to say that the remaining six do not address the relationship between God and man, but do so in the context of man's relationship to each other. Collectively, these ten commands make up the moral law as it is presented in scripture and all ten commands are binding on the N.T. church.

Conclusion: The redemptive historical mission of God continues to unfold throughout the Pentateuch as the promised descendants of Abraham are led out of Egypt and into a personal relationship with YHVH through the Mosaic Covenant. In conclusion, one final remark should be made about the increasingly apparent transcendence of God as witnessed by the children of Israel at the base of Mount Sinai. When one considers what would seem to be the uninhibited ability of God to communicate with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (the Patriarchs) in comparison to YHVH whose appearance at Sinai was accompanied by thunder, smoke and the threat of death in the event that anyone touched the mountain, he/she might rightly wonder, what is going on? The explanation to such an enigma is climactically revealed on the cross of Christ: a holy God cannot dwell among unholy people without adequate atonement. Such atonement is foreshadowed in the Pentateuch but awaits the N.T. and the coming of the promised "seed" before being sufficiently addressed.

Questions:

What was the feast of the Lord held in the wilderness referenced in 5:1?

In what ways are the Ten Commandments binding on the church today?

Are the Ten Commandments binding on non-believers? Why or Why not?