

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 289

Exodus 20, Part 3

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Episode Summary

In the previous two parts of our discussion of Exodus 20, we talked about issues related to Decalogue and the first four of the Ten Commandments. In this episode we cover the remaining six commandments (honor your father and mother, do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness, and do not covet). It may come as a surprise, but some of these are hard to define and have biblical exceptions.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 289: Exodus 20, Part 3. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike. How are you doing?

MH: Pretty good. Can't complain.

TS: Yeah. Well, we're just a few weeks away from our 2nd annual Naked Bible Conference. Getting geared up for that. Excited for that. Can't wait to see everybody that's coming out. That'll be fun.

MH: Yeah, it'll be fun. It was fun last year, so I'm looking forward to it, too. I don't expect any different.

TS: Yeah, it was fun last year. Also, Mike, don't forget that if you can't physically make it this year, you can always stream it live. So go to NakedBibleConference.com. I think it'll be available for three months after the conference, so you can watch it over and over any time that you want, on demand. So go to NakedBibleConference.com and livestream it.

MH: Yeah. Again, I'm looking forward to it, meeting people and listening. It's one of the times of the year I get to listen to presentations, too. So I'm really looking forward to it.

TS: Alright, Mike. This week, Part 3. Is this the final part of Exodus 20?

MH: Yes, this is the final part for Exodus 20. Yep. It took us three times to get through it. We have six commands to cover today, so we'll be here a little while. But I think people will find this interesting. Because on the one hand, you kind of assume that they're pretty straightforward, and some of them are. [laughs] But then there are others that are a little difficult to define. And there are even biblical exceptions to some of the commands, so that is often new. I remember when I taught Ethics, we would spend a day at least on the Ten Commandments. And people were surprised that there were actually exceptions sort of built into them. We've actually seen that already in Part 2 when we got into the first four commands, where we had the command about not making graven images (idols, so to speak). "An image of anything in the heavens above and on the earth and under the earth" and all that. Then a few chapters later, God commands that the cherubim be made, or even the menorah (the golden lampstand). You could lump that in here, too. These are religious objects, certainly of things on the earth or in the heavens above the earth (in the case of the cherubim).

So how is that not a violation of the command? Well, it wasn't a violation (as we saw last time) because the real issue was that Israelites were not to bow down to or worship any of them. They were to bow down only to the uncreated Creator. And God himself shows up... This isn't fashioning anything, but God does show up as a man, which, of course, is certainly an earthly thing. So God is in human form. "How is that consistent" you might say, "with this idea that God is unrepresentable in these early commands?"

So we talked about that last time, that here you have what seems to be clear-cut, but then you have these other things that impede on it that require some unpacking to learn, "What was the real basis for the command here?"

We're going to get that again today with some of these commands. Not all of them, but some of them. So the real takeaway here is that the Ten Commandments themselves actually have context. They're not just dropped in our laps and there's nothing to think about here. There's actually plenty to think about in a number of instances. They have a context in which they themselves need to be understood. Mostly it's a wider context, that once you get into the wider context it reveals some exceptions or helps you sort of narrow down what the command actually means, what the point was. So that's often new to people. And we're going to see more of that today.

So we might as well just jump right in with the fifth command. Our starting point is going to be Exodus 20:12. It says:

¹² **"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you."**

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This is the fifth command. Sarna (whom we've referenced before and we will reference several times today), in his Jewish Publication Society commentary on Exodus, has a good summary. I really like Sarna's commentary in a number of respects. He writes this:

This command forms the transition from the first to the second group of divine declarations, in that it simultaneously possesses both religious and social dimensions. It shares with the preceding command the formula "the LORD your God." Also, the relationship of Israel to God is often expressed metaphorically in filial terms...

(Like in "family terms.") We have this "honor your father and mother" and that's linked to "the land that the LORD your God is giving you." So there's this boots-on-the-ground kind of thing. It has to do with your relationships one to another, but there's also this overarching relationship to God expressed in the land. This isn't new. Exodus 4:22... this is the passage where God refers to Israel as his son. So there you have family terminology there.

Jeremiah 31:20

Is "Ephraim my dear son? Is he my darling child?"

These are rhetorical questions.

Hosea 11:1

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.

So on and so forth. So you get this family language where ultimately what's being talked about is the relationship of God and then the covenant promises, one of which was the land. So on and so forth. We get a little bit of that here. Back to Sarna:

The same verbs of "honoring" and "revering" are used in expressing proper human attitudes to both God and parents...

So the same verbs in the Hebrew Bible are used of both how you relate to parents and how you relate to God. So this command is a bridge of the two halves (even though they're not equal halves) of the commands (the first four and then the next six)—relationship to God; relationship to other imagers (other people). So just by way of example, Exodus 21:17 says:

Whoever curses his father or his mother shall be put to death.

So there you have a very obvious one about revering parents. Leviticus 29 is the same way. Deuteronomy 21 is about the rebellious son. We're going to get into

some of these, where it talks about relating to parents in a certain way. But you also get the same kind of language in Leviticus 24. Those were laws about blaspheming God. Earlier (the one I just read) and some that I just referenced are about, for lack of a better way to put it, not blaspheming—not cursing your parents. The same language is used of God, like in Leviticus 24 and Numbers 15 and so on. So we get this language in both, which as Sarna is pointing out, is kind of a bridge between the two halves. He writes:

In fact, the obligation to respect is enjoined only for God and parents, and the offender in either instance is liable to the extreme penalty. The parallels point up the supreme importance that the Torah assigns to the integrity of the family for the sake of the stability of society and generational continuity. Family life is the bedrock on which Jewish society stands. No other item in the Decalogue is similarly formulated wholly in positive terms, and for none other is there a promise of reward.

So this one (the fifth command), “Honor your father and mother,” has some special characteristics to it that link that command to the way we should revere and honor God.

Now a few comments here, just to get into the weeds. You have “... and honor your father and mother.” There’s no hint here (if you really think about it) that the command has a time limit. It just says,

Honor your father and mother that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

He doesn’t say, “Honor your father and mother until...” and then there’s some limit. There’s no limit that the command has a time limit. There’s no hint that it expires when children reach a certain age or that one parent is valued above the other. Sarna notes elsewhere:

[The command] applies equally to son and daughter irrespective of their age, and it holds for both parents.

So the question, of course, is “what does ‘honor’ mean?” Does it mean “obey in every circumstance?” Now we get a little help here from other verses in the Torah that speak to the treatment of parents, one of which I’ve already quoted a little bit (Exodus 21:15). That’s the one we quoted:

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Exodus 21:15

Whoever strikes his father or mother shall be put to death.

Leviticus 20:9

“Anyone who curses his father and his mother shall surely be put to death. He has cursed his father or his mother. His blood is upon him.”

Now the verb for “cursing” there in Hebrew is the lemma *qalal* and it’s in something called the *Piel* stem. (Sorry for the little Hebrew grammar digression here.) The *Piel* stem is often characterized by grammarians as factitive in its semantic. Factitive means that it points... You would have a verb that when the action of the verb is performed, it leads to a certain specific end result. So in this case, since the verb for “cursed” is put in this particular Hebrew stem that has the end result in mind often in its semantics, the idea is that cursing your parents results in their being put in a state of being demeaned or humiliated. This is what you’re *not* supposed to do. Leviticus 19:3 reads as follows:

Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father and you shall keep my Sabbaths.

“Revere” here is the Hebrew word *yr’* which means generically “to fear.” We get the verb in Leviticus 19:30,

You shall keep my Sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary.

Leviticus 26:2 also references the sanctuary. So are the Israelites really supposed to be afraid of the sanctuary? No, they’re supposed to revere it. “Revere” is a good translation. You’re supposed to avoid desecrating it. You’re supposed to avoid defiling it in any way—bringing sacred space into a state of being common. Lowering it. Bringing it down. Making it low. Demeaning it. So “revere” is actually a pretty good translation. So this is what we’re not supposed to be doing to parents.

In Deuteronomy 27:16, we get a different verb (*qalah*), which means to degrade, despise, or treat with contempt. That verse says,

Cursed be anyone who dishonors [*qalah*] his father or his mother.

So this helps us get some sort of a framework for how these verbs are used in the fifth command. Don’t humiliate. Don’t do the opposite of revere. Don’t demean. This is what you’re not supposed to do. Don’t bring your parents down or bring them low. They’re supposed to be treated as special. It’s the same verbs that you would use for treating God. So don’t treat them as common, like everybody else, so that they’re humiliated and demeaned or whatnot.

So we need to have those things in mind and let Scripture (as best we can) try to define Scripture. The other factor that we need to think about is the Bible's own view of marriage and how this works out in biblical history. You have the "leave and cleave" language of Genesis, for instance. A man will leave his father and mother, leave his one family, and cleave to his wife and, of course, start a new family. Well, just because you're married and you have a new family unit, that doesn't excuse you from the fifth command. You just read it, it's pretty straightforward. There are no limitations or exceptions. But we still don't quite know what the command means, to honor your father and mother. How do we do that? How would we know if we transgress that?

So I bring up the "leave and cleave" thing because, yeah, it establishes a new family unit. But in Israelite culture, even in urban settings, when they're actually living in cities as opposed to patriarchal (when they're living in tents)... Even in urban settings, the new family units typically in the patriarchal era lived in the same tent. They lived under the same tent roof. You just essentially added to the tent or partitioned it off so that the man and his wife now have their own space within the patriarch's tent (his house, as it were). Or, as the parents aged, they weren't sent off to some other living accommodation. They stayed with the family, either in the same tent or in the same house (when we're in an urban setting). So you often have parents living in the home—parents and these other family units living together. It's an extended family living situation. And even when the leadership of the family or the clan passes on to the eldest son or whoever has the right of the firstborn conferred to them, the parents are still going to be there. So you have the presence of one or both parents in the home, and that kind of changes the dynamic, or at least it's a factor that needs to be considered. Regardless of who has leadership of the family or the clan, the parents were not supposed to be demeaned or belittled. Even when some other son effectively ran the home and the family's property, the parents (especially the father) had reverential leadership status.

Now in our day and age (really in modern society in general) the circumstances are often quite different. Those set of circumstances really aren't going to play out in the same way, at least in modern Western society. There is a different dynamic here. Let's take another angle at this. We have what the verbiage means. Don't humiliate, don't belittle. Treat as special, to state it positively. We have a situation where that's what the words mean. There are no limitations or exceptions in the command. The dynamic is a little bit unfamiliar to us because the parents basically stay with the children and the children with the parents their whole lives.

Another bit of a rabbit trail... Let's look at it a different way. There is one passage (the Deuteronomy 21 passage—Deuteronomy 21:18-21) where the command apparently *does* mean obey the parent. And we actually have an adult child in the context. So we need to factor this in as well. Let me read Deuteronomy 21:18-21. This is obviously a negative example.

¹⁸ “If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother, and, though they discipline him, will not listen to them, ¹⁹ then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his city at the gate of the place where he lives, ²⁰ and they shall say to the elders of his city, ‘This our son is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard.’ ²¹ Then all the men of the city shall stone him to death with stones. So you shall purge the evil from your midst, and all Israel shall hear, and fear.

Yeah, I guess they would. Now the context there seems to be one where the son is an adult (at least a young adult) because he's referred to as getting drunk. He has a drunkenness problem. And the son is undermining the family unit by being a drain on resources or just refusing correction. He's not a little kid, where they could chastise him in some physical way or isolate him in some way or take away privileges. We have what seems to be an adult child here. Because of the emphasis in other passages in regard to the prohibition of demeaning parents or treating them with contempt, we might presume that obviously this is what's going on here. Why else would they essentially have to “take him to the law” as it were? They're being treated with contempt. This is part of the picture. So the parents in this case do not take matters into their own hands, but instead they take the son to the tribal elders, which in effect in Israel was law enforcement, and put the son's fate into their hands. They turn him over. And now the legal system is going to do with him what the legal system does.

We, of course, today might have to do the same thing with a child (let the legal system handle that kid). They might do something where going to law enforcement is appropriate and merited. The passage is there for an endorsement of the idea that parents may need to resort to these means (to law enforcement). It's not an endorsement of the *system* of law enforcement or the penalty. It's an endorsement of the idea that, hey, when you have an adult son like this who's treating you with contempt, you may have to just take them to the authorities and let the authorities deal with him.

Now we aren't a theocratic state, obviously, and the theocracy was, by definition (I've said this a number of times on the podcast), planned to be obsolete. It's planned obsolescence, at least if we care to think about where all the covenants were supposed to lead—to the reunification of the nations, which meant a circumcision-neutral people of God brought back into the family through a savior, which is Jesus. This is where salvation history was always supposed to go. The theocracy is sort of a way station along the road that God is intending here. So God's plan was never to institute a theocracy that would endure for all time and that's how things are going to go now. No, it was supposed to lead somewhere. The theocracy was a stopping point, a way station. Even as far back as the

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Abrahamic covenant, the Gentiles were in the picture. Jacob's blessing in Genesis 48, which we talked about in earlier episodes about the reference to Ephraim... The Gentiles were supposed to be part of this.

So from the very beginning, the plan was not an Israelite theocracy. So to say that God ordained a theocracy and that this is God's ordained form of the way that his kingdom family is supposed to be on earth is *wrong*. You basically have to ignore not only the way salvation history played out, you have to ignore the way it was *intended* to play out. That's my point here. I continually go back to this, because we get stuck on these passages like, "Oh, well unless we turn our kids over and the kid gets capital punishment, we're not obeying the Bible. Just rip that thing out of context and pretend a theocracy was supposed to be the way things were supposed to play out in God's plan. Let's just pretend that." It's wrong. It's just wrong-headed. It's misguided. It's out-of-context interpretation.

So what we have here is not an endorsement of a particular culture or even a particular form of government that God was at one point behind. What we have here is an endorsement of the idea that parents may actually have to let somebody else deal with their kids. That, "Yep, that's what it is. We're at that point now." This is an important principle, that the Torah (and the wider Bible) does not endorse a specific culture. Hebrew culture... I realize that I'm striking at the Hebrew Roots people, and I don't mind doing that, because they're wrong-headed here. God does not endorse theocracy for the Church—for believers through all time. "Well, it's the Torah." Well, yeah, I know it's the Torah. If you'd *read* the Torah (like Genesis 48 and Genesis 12), you would know that Gentile inclusion was always in the picture. You would know that. And Gentile inclusion is a circumcision-neutral thing, because elsewhere in the Bible we have Gentiles becoming priests of the Most High. This is all part of the picture. So to pick one period of Israelite history and one facet of salvation history (in this case, theocracy) and say, "This is the way God wanted it from the beginning to the end," that's just wrong. It just is.

And so that's important when you get into things like the commands. Because the commands are the foundation for ethics. And the whole issue of, "Well, now that we have the church, which is a circumcision-neutral thing, what are we supposed to do with the Torah?"... The Torah was planned obsolescence (the theocracy). Now the *moral* laws of the Torah get carried into the New Testament. We know that. That makes sense, because it's just morality. But the specific laws of the theocracy do not, because they are bound—tied to... They are operative within a theocratic state which was never the designed end point.

So this is important. I would say this in regard to honoring the father and the mother, having gone on that little rabbit trail. But that's going to help us at some points in the rest of the episode. The command to honor the father and the mother may not have a scriptural limit, but it does have practical limits. So we need to get real here. And what I'm going to say here would have been logically

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applied in the theocratic state as well. People kind of know when, let's say, the parents are just not functioning like they should be, like there might be a health problem or something like that. People are people. We try not to treat parents with contempt. We want to make sure they're not belittled. This is what these verbs mean in the command. They don't mean to obey at all times in every circumstance regardless of how absurd or abhorrent it might be. So let's get real. The command wasn't given so that a parent or parents with dementia would have to be obeyed no matter how irrational they have become. That's just real life. If your parent in Israelite society is commanding you to sin, sorry, but the fifth command (and no command of God, I will add) is not given so that you enable evil to proliferate. No command of God is given so that you enable evil to proliferate. No command is given so that evil gets help. That is not the point of any command, including the Ten Commandments. And when we have a situation where someone is obviously debilitated, okay, this is real life. The command doesn't require slavish obedience by children when a parent wants to do evil or wants the child to do evil. The first authority is God, and God is omniscient. God actually knows when it's in a [child]'s best interest to not let that parent have authority. God knows the circumstances. He's not surprised by any of these things. Sometimes we read these commands as if they require us to check our brain in at the door or ignore a real-life circumstance. God knows the circumstances you are in.

So I know believers often struggle with how to honor a parent's wishes. "When do I say no to a parent, because I just know that if I say yes it's going to really be bad. It's going to be destructive, not only to my parents, but to somebody else. What do I do?" God knows the circumstances. He's not learning anything when he looks at your situation. He knows. He knows the circumstances you're in. He knows the motivation of your heart as well. And sometimes to honor a parent means making a decision contrary to their wishes. Just like, as a parent, sometimes letting a child suffer the circumstances of their behavior is the best thing in the long-term interest of the child. So having the best interest of the parent in mind is what the command is really about. That is honoring the parent. That is giving them the benefit of the doubt in every way possible. We are not treating them like they're some ordinary person. They have special status. This is why we're struggling with the decision. If it were somebody else, we wouldn't struggle at all. We're struggling with the decision because this is our parent (or parents), and we're trying to make the best decision for them. God knows the real motivation in our heart. He knows the things that we say and don't say that are just floating around in our head. God knows all of that. So we do need to be careful about the decisions we make in regard to parents, especially when they get to a certain stage in life. Because God does know, and we will be accountable, either in this life or we will suffer loss when it comes to reward in heaven because of the decisions we make. We're not going to get away with anything, is the point. So we *do* need to be careful. We need to do the best job that we can to honor them. But sometimes the best way to honor them is to say no or to come up with some alternative. And God knows that. And God isn't

learning anything here. God actually knows the circumstances and he knows what's in your heart. He sees everything and he knows everything. He knows if you're really acting in self-interest. He knows if you're taking pleasure in your parents' displeasure. He knows all that. God is not fooled, and he will not be mocked.

So the bottom line is that this command, which doesn't expire, speaks not of handing absolute dictatorial authority to parents no matter their situation or no matter what they want. That isn't the point. Rather, it speaks of not belittling or demeaning them—treating them in the best way possible with the circumstances being what they are. Don't treat them with contempt. Treat them well, as best you can, God being your witness. And that's tough sometimes.

Let's move on to command #6:

You shall not murder.

This is Exodus 20:13. That's the ESV. The exceptions in this command are discernible by virtue of that translation, "You shall not murder," as opposed to other translations that say something like, "You shall not kill." Now if you're going to translate the verse "you shall not kill," that produces conundrums (or conundra) when you look at the rest of the Bible. The Bible does command taking the lives of animals (i.e., sacrifices). I've actually heard people say "Thou shalt not kill, we need to be vegan." Is that really what the command means? Because God actually *did* command sacrifices. So you have a problem here, dude. God also commands taking human life in war or the life of anyone who has committed a capital crime, both within Israel and even before we get to the theocracy. Now Sarna nicely summarizes why murder (which is the taking of an innocent life, a life that has done nothing deserving of death in a legal sense) is in view biblically. And, of course, this is with respect to human beings. He writes this:

The Hebrew stem *ratsah*, as noted by Rashbam and Bekhor Shor [MH: two rabbinic authorities], applies only to illegal killing and, unlike other verbs for the taking of life, is never used in the administration of justice or for killing in war.

Let me read that again:

The Hebrew stem *ratsah*... is never used in the administration of justice or for killing in war.

That's a significant point.

Also, it is never employed when the subject of the action is God or an angel.

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God never murders. And his angel never murders either. They never *ratsah*.

This command, therefore, cannot be used to justify either pacifism or the abolition of the death penalty, both of which would have to be argued on other grounds.

In other words, he's saying it's illegitimate to argue for pacifism or to abolish the death penalty on the basis of this command. You're going to have to do it some other way. I think that's a significant point to bring up as far as the discussion, because this command does get used in the wider culture for those causes. And they're just not... If you're just taking the verse and you're not looking at any other verses and you're not looking at where the verb is used or not used anywhere else, okay then, "Thou shalt not kill..." No, that by definition would be taking the command out of context. And that's what Sarna's objecting to. Now he adds an interesting side note that takes us into the social/ethical application of the command. He writes:

Genesis 9:6 provides the rationale for the prohibition on murder [MH: taking an innocent life]: "Whoever sheds the blood of man,/By man shall his blood be shed;/For in His image/Did God make man." This means that society must exact satisfaction for the crime of murder because life, being derived from God, is infinitely precious and is His alone to give and to take. By his unspeakable act, the murderer usurps the divine prerogative and infringes upon God's sovereignty; and, because human beings are created in the divine image, he also affronts God's majesty. For this reason, it is not in the power of human beings to forgive a murderer or to commute the death penalty into ransom, as Numbers 35:31 makes clear.

Let me read you that verse, because he's speaking of Israelites and those who are going to follow the Torah here. Numbers 35:31 says:

³¹ Moreover, you shall accept no ransom for the life of a murderer, who is guilty of death, but he shall be put to death.

So there were other commands (we talked about this is in the Leviticus series) that could be downgraded. The penalty could be adjusted in some way. Murder is not one of those. And it's for these reasons that Sarna is articulating. He adds:

In practice, however, at least in Second Temple times, imposition of the death penalty was a rare occurrence.

That is also true. It was rarely ever carried out. We're not going to do an episode on whether Second Temple Judaism was fudging on the Torah. I think it's fair to

say in this regard that they were when they don't do this. But Sarna's bigger point is that the rationale for this is rooted in Genesis 9:6, which is pre-Mosaic and it's rooted in the image of God and God's own authority. Life is from him and he alone has the authority to give it and to take it legitimately. Now Wenham also comments on this. This is the *Word Biblical Commentary*. And his thoughts echo those of Sarna, but he adds a little bit of nuancing in here. He writes:

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The precise meaning of the sixth commandment depends on the definition of *ratsah*. This verb occurs just over forty times in the OT, far less frequently than the more general terms *harag*, "kill, slay, destroy," (more than 160 times) and the hiphil of *mût*, "cause to die, kill" (more than 200 times)... *ratsah* plainly refers to killing that can be understood to be murder (so Ps 94:6b or 1 Kgs 21:19), and some translators so render it (see neb, for example); but *ratsah* can also refer to unintentional killing, "manslaughter," as in Deut 19:3, 4, 6, and Josh 20:3, and to the legal execution of a convicted killer, as in Num 35:30. [One could therefore conclude] that *ratsah* is a verb of specialized application, referring to killing that brought illegal violence into the covenant community... Such a general understanding of *ratsah* fits its pattern of usage in the OT: the verb refers only to the killing of persons, never to animals; it can refer to capital punishment... but not to killing in war...

Manslaughter, because it's not legitimate killing (it's not something that God through the law would sanction), is still an illegal taking of life. But the penalty for that was different than for premeditated murder. Without getting into all the laws, those of us who have read through the Torah know that these things were treated differently. So when it comes to "Thou shalt not murder," there are exceptions if we understand what *ratsah* actually means and how it is used and how it is never used. So I think that discussion (getting into the word a little bit) helps us understand and incorporating the wider context helps us understand what the command means and what it doesn't.

Let's go to the seventh command. "You shall not commit adultery." Now obviously you're going to wonder, "What's not clear there? Where's the ambiguity? What could possibly be an exception to this?" [laughs] We'll get there. Now Wenham writes... This is *Word Biblical Commentary* and this sets up the discussion.

The ANE attitude toward adultery has been surveyed by Kornfeld, Rabinowitz, and Moran. [They] have commented, respectively, on texts from Egypt and Ugarit in which, as in the OT (Gen 20:9; cf. Exod 32:21, 30, 31; 2 Kings 17:21), adultery is referred to by the discreet euphemism, "the great sin"... The Hebrew verb for this "great sin," and the verb of the seventh commandment, is *na'aph* ("commit adultery"). It is used in the OT with both men and women as subject, though far more frequently of men, and, by analogy, as a designation of idol worship, the

violation of the bond of covenant relationship with Yahweh. “Great sin” is used in the OT of both these betrayals.

So that’s kind of interesting. The Old Testament refers to adultery as the “great sin,” and the other place that that expression is reserved for is idolatry. That’s just a really interesting observation. Now for the purposes of our discussion, and the exception that I’ve alluded to, we need to understand something from the outset: how the Old Testament defines adultery. I’m going to tell you right now, and this might be news to some of you, the Old Testament (the Torah) defines adultery in a way that we don’t. We’re actually more prohibitive in this regard than the Old Testament is. Here’s what I mean. Here’s how the Old Testament defines adultery. This is where you’re going to see *na ‘aph* used, these contexts.

1. A man having sex with the wife of another man.
I’ll just read an example for each.

Leviticus 18:20

You shall not lie sexually with your neighbor’s wife and so make yourself unclean with her.

So a man having sex with the wife of another man is adultery.

2. A man having sex with a woman betrothed (or engaged to) another man.

Deuteronomy 22:23-27

²³ **“If there is a betrothed virgin, and a man meets her in the city and lies with her, ²⁴ then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city, and you shall stone them to death with stones, the young woman because she did not cry for help though she was in the city, and the man because he violated his neighbor’s wife. [MH: Now you see there, betrothed virgin is defined as neighbor’s wife. Engagement was just like being married.] So you shall purge the evil from your midst.**

²⁵ **“But if in the open country a man meets a young woman who is betrothed, and the man seizes her and lies with her, then only the man who lay with her shall die. [MH: The presumption is that she cried out.] ²⁶ But you shall do nothing to the young woman; she has committed no offense punishable by death. For this case is like that of a man attacking and murdering his neighbor, ²⁷ because he met her in the open country, and though the betrothed young woman cried for help there was no one to rescue her.**

40:00

So that's different. That's rape. So the key point here is that a betrothed woman is defined as the "neighbor's wife" in that passage. So that's 2. So how does the Old Testament define adultery? A man having sex with the wife of another man. A man having sex with a woman betrothed to another man.

3. A married woman willingly having sex with a man who is not her husband. And this is where Hosea and Ezekiel pick up on the idolatry (the spiritual adultery) thing—playing the whore, that kind of language.

So we have three ways, three elements here, three trajectories that define adultery in the Torah. Now it should be obvious what isn't included here. What's not included is a married man taking another woman or a series of women to be additional wives, so long as none of them are married or betrothed to someone else (to another man). That's not adultery in the Old Testament context. It's never defined as adultery. The key is whether the woman was married or engaged. Now this is no surprise, given the patriarchal polygamous culture into which God inserts himself when calling his people out of Egypt. God shows up while they're in Egypt. He had talked to the patriarchs before (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). God never tells them, "Now look, I'd really love to have a covenant with you, but you need to not be patriarchal and polygamous in your culture first and then we can talk about having a relationship. Then we can talk about me using you to kickstart the kingdom of God. I have to start somewhere, so I'm starting with you, but before I can start you have to not be polygamists."

God never does that. The culture is incidental. God doesn't create the culture. He invades it. He inserts himself into it and he calls Abraham. He enables Abraham and Sarah to have a child. He punishes... It doesn't go well when Abraham goes outside the bounds of what God had told him by taking Hagar at Sarah's suggestion. But again, that was a normal suggestion. That's why Abraham doesn't recoil in horror when Sarah who isn't getting pregnant says, "Well, why don't you just take Hagar. Maybe that's what God meant. You'd have a kid. He promised you you'd have kids, so go take Hagar." And Abraham's like, "Okay, that makes sense." He doesn't recoil in horror because it's already part of their culture. But God had to intervene and said, "Look, this wasn't the point. The point is that Sarah is the chosen one because she is barren, and I'm going to supernaturally enable her to have a child."

So this is part of the culture. God doesn't create the culture. "Well, it's in the Bible." Yeah, it's in the Bible. Lots of things are recorded in the Bible that God doesn't come up with. This is one of them. There are lots of these cultural things God doesn't create and come up with. They just *are* when God invades the setting, when God enters into the picture.

So you have their descendants down in Egypt for 400 years and God calls Moses at the burning bush and says, "Hey, I need you to go down there and I'm going to deliver my people." He doesn't go with a message that, "Hey, God's

really interested in taking you out of here, but you have to get rid of the polygamy thing.” It’s absurd. But yet we read the Bible this way. They don’t have any law or anything until Moses. There’s no patriarchal law that’s codified. Yeah, I know all the Noahide law stuff. We sort of make up the idea that this gets codified. It doesn’t. There’s nothing in the Bible about that. That is rabbinic tradition. Frankly, it’s an overread of the Noah passage as well. We did a FringePop episode on that. If you’re interested in my thoughts on that, you can go watch that.

45:00

But we have here a situation where, again, we have a polygamous culture. The patriarchs were polygamous. That’s just the way it was. God doesn’t bother to change the culture when choosing these men to start anew his plan for people on earth. Now we get eventually Genesis 1 and 2. I think Genesis 1-11 was written (or heavily edited) much later than the mosaic era (I’ve said that many times on the podcast) because of all the very explicit and specific Babylonian polemic going on in there. But eventually we get it, whether it was at the time of Moses or later in the exile. We get the ideal: one man, one woman. Because that’s the reference point for Jesus, when Jesus is asked about marriage and all that. He goes back to Genesis. So that’s the ideal. That’s the way it *should* be. It’s the way it *should* have been. Okay? But God has to invade human history after not only the fall, but after all three rebellions that we read about in Genesis 1-11. He has to invade human history and he takes it as it is. He’s going to clean that up later. But for right now, we need to start a family anew on earth. And that’s what we’re going to do. We have to start somewhere. I think we just need to read Scripture a little more clearly for what it actually says. And God doesn’t endorse these cultural elements. He invades them. This is just where he inserts himself in the story.

Now none of that means that everybody (or even most people) were polygamists. It’s not that every man was a polygamist in Israel. If you think about it, we actually have very little information on this. It was the norm for patriarchal cultures, and it functioned as a means of social welfare for women, to make sure they were taken care of when their husbands died (because husbands are the property owners and the sons and all that stuff). And you have the succession issues. The women need to be taken care of, and this is part of the way it’s done. As distasteful as it is to us, this is... It beats putting her out in the desert and saying, “Good luck.” Okay? [laughs] It really does beat that. So it’s the norm for the patriarchal culture. It’s part of the social welfare system.

Once Israel was in Canaan (once you have an urban situation) the need for a patriarchal system isn’t as apparent. Just think about what urbanism means for something like middle class living. You’re not dependent on flocks and herds. You don’t need to have lots of kids by lots of wives to manage huge flocks and herds. The circumstances change. But we’re just not told many specifics in the Bible about how life was. So we have very little way of knowing how many families were polygamous or not. Our only glimpse into this is with the leadership (royalty), and in such cases there’s the added consideration there (and I use

“consideration” as a nice term; I’m not saying it’s a good thing)... But we have the added consideration of political and family alliances when you get into the monarchy. What we do know is that someone like David had no qualms about having more than one wife. Nor is he condemned for it, so long as it wasn’t adultery. He *is* condemned for adultery with Bathsheba. But he has other wives before that.

So that’s what we know. We have a spotty picture. Now this leads us to the chief exception for the adultery command in Israelite culture, and that is yes, generally taking other women sexually as wives as long as they were not married to someone else or betrothed. There was actually a legal institution to do that and that is Deuteronomy 25:5-10—what we call “levirate marriage.” This is a Latin term for what the passage describes. Let me just read the passage.

⁵“If brothers dwell together [MH: which is an interesting phrase], and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the dead man shall not be married outside the family to a stranger. Her husband's brother shall go in to her and take her as his wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. ⁶And the first son whom she bears shall succeed to the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out of Israel. ⁷And if the man does not wish to take his brother's wife, then his brother's wife shall go up to the gate to the elders and say, ‘My husband's brother refuses to perpetuate his brother's name in Israel [MH: boy, isn’t that cunning?]; he will not perform the duty of a husband's brother to me.’ ⁸Then the elders of his city shall call him and speak to him, and if he persists [MH: basically, they’re trying to talk him into doing this], saying, ‘I do not wish to take her,’ ⁹then his brother's wife shall go up to him in the presence of the elders and pull his sandal off his foot and spit in his face. And she shall answer and say, ‘So shall it be done to the man who does not build up his brother's house.’ ¹⁰And the name of his house shall be called in Israel, ‘The house of him who had his sandal pulled off.’

This is a contemptible thing. For the brother to refuse to take this woman as his wife is a contemptible thing. Now here’s the question. What if the brother is already married? He’s still supposed to take this additional woman. This is the law. There’s nothing in Deuteronomy 25 that lets him off the hook if he’s already married. This is part of the Torah. This is a divinely ordained exception to what we would think is adultery. But this is not adultery in the Torah, because this woman has no husband now. She is not married. She is not betrothed. He is allowed... not only allowed, but the law basically wants him to take her and add her as a wife so that the name of the deceased will not be blotted out.

50:00

Now Tigay has some interesting commentary here. I've said before, this is my favorite Deuteronomy commentary. I like Tigay's commentary. He's a good writer. He always gets to the point. So in verse 5 he comments on the phrase "if brothers dwell together."

The precise force of this term here [MH: "together"] is uncertain. It could mean that the brothers are living on the same family estate, either because their father is still alive or because they have not yet divided the estate after his death. But it could also mean that they are living near each other, in the same vicinity. In Genesis 13:6 and 36:7 "dwelling together" means dwelling close enough to use the same pasture land. In either case, this condition is perhaps related to the fact that the offspring of the levirate marriage will inherit the dead man's property. This may mean that in biblical times the marriage was obligatory only if the levir's home, where the widow and her future child would reside, was close to that property.

So Tigay is suggesting, "Hey, if we take the biblical phrase... Maybe if you lived 500 miles away, you don't have to do this, because it's really connected to property." It's possible. Tigay also comments on the phrase "and he has no son."

The halakhah [MH: Jewish law and Jewish legal theory] and the Septuagint take *ben* to mean "offspring," whether male or female. Thus, levirate marriage takes place only if a man leaves no child of either sex. This view is based on reading the law in the light of Numbers 27:1–11 [MH: that is the Zelophehad incident], which implies that a sonless man's name can also be perpetuated if he has daughters to inherit his property, thus obviating the need for levirate marriage.

Tigay has a whole excursus on levirate marriage. I'm going to read a little bit of that. He writes:

According to Josephus, whose view is echoed by some modern scholars, the purpose of levirate marriage is to prevent men's households from dying out and their property passing to relatives, and to provide for their widows.

You realize what would happen. Let's say you have a woman. Her husband dies. And this happens... I'll put myself into the situation. Let's say I'm the brother here. So my brother dies and his wife is just there. And I'm supposed to marry her even though I'm already married. Why? It's so that a stranger doesn't get hold of her (i.e., my brother's property). The property needs to stay within the family, both for the family's sake and also for the woman. Because he could basically... Somebody could either swindle her or a stranger could marry her and then divorce her and then she's toast. She is just toast. She is abandoned and alone. She has nothing. And in this society, women who have nothing are either going to turn to prostitution or they're just going to die. They have nothing. There

is no government to take care of them. So it's a serious thing for me to look at this situation and say, "Okay, I'm going to add her and we're going to make sure that she is taken care of and the property stays within the family and the children inherit..." All that stuff. This is what it's for. Now back to Tigay.

55:00

The practice undoubtedly had these effects, but the Bible's own explanation, as noted in the Commentary to 25:5–10, is that levirate marriage aims to provide a dead man with a son in order to prevent his name from being blotted out. [MH: This is the secondary concern.] This reflects the belief [MH: this is real interesting for those who want to deny an Old Testament afterlife] that death does not put an absolute end to an individual's existence. In biblical times it was believed that dead people's spirits continue a kind of shadowy existence in Sheol (the netherworld, beneath the earth), and that the living could assist them in various ways. Many of these methods involved keeping a deceased man's name present on earth, thus perpetuating his spirit's contact with the living. Perhaps the reasoning was that just as the mention of a person's name can conjure up a very real mental picture of him, wherever a person's name was present his spirit was present. In this respect, a name functioned more or less as an image was thought to function. Hence in some places it was the custom to place a person's image, or an inscription bearing his name, in a sanctuary, thus keeping him before the deity at all times; conversely, one's enemies could be harmed by writing their names on bowls and then smashing the bowls, just as effigies are used in voodoo...

I've commented on this before about... When we get to the teraphim issue... The teraphim were probably what we would call idols, but physical objects that represented a person. Maybe they were effigies. They were akin to our pictures—Polaroids, if you want to go back to the '80s. Why do we have pictures of deceased loved ones around the house? It's because we want to remember them, to "keep them alive." And also because (at least for most of us) we believe that they're honored in this way. Why do we leave flowers at a gravesite? Does the dead person like that? Well, even though they're dead, we think that yeah, this is a gesture of respect. The person's looking down on me and seeing... all this stuff. Well the Israelite version of that was to do what Tigay just described. You inscribe their name somewhere. You maybe make a little representation of them. You keep it in the house. The teraphim were kept in the house. This is why you brought the servant to the house—the slave that wanted to join the family, you had to bring them before the family. And the family of the dead are called *elohim*. You had to bring them before the *elohim*. It's not the Israelite judges. If you want to get into this, we spent a whole episode (I think it was episode 109) on this. And there's another one. You'd have to just google it. But this is the thinking. They're still part of the family. And I realize this is a rabbit trail here, but this is part of the logic of levirate marriage. You don't want the person's name to die out. The name is going to be inherited by the son of this new marriage (this new relationship) when the brother adds the woman as a wife to his own family

and then her first son inherits the name of the father. This is the logic of it. Tigay adds:

Levirate marriage is part of the same complex of practices. It provides a man with a son posthumously, to assist his father's spirit in the ways just described. Given the importance of perpetuating the name of the deceased, it seems likely that the son would not only be legally attributed to the deceased man, but would also take his name as a patronym...

Marriage of a widow to a member of her husband's family is also mentioned in Genesis 38 [MH: here's where we get into the Onan incident] and in the book of Ruth. In Genesis, Judah, the father of the dead husband, is still living, and it is his responsibility to ensure that another of his sons marries the widow. The second son, Onan, is unwilling to provide a son for his brother...

What he does is that he has sex with her and withdraws. In the King James, "spills his seed on the ground." He uses her. He doesn't want the responsibility of the levirate relationship. And you'll notice (this is Genesis 38), this is before Moses. This is before the law. This is part of the culture. This is just part of the culture, and it gets codified in this case in Deuteronomy 25. This is an instance where a cultural element gets codified. But there's a logic to it. And so if I was already married and I was in this situation as an Israelite, this is not adultery. This is adding a wife in a very specific circumstance. Let's move on.

The 8th commandment:

You shall not steal.

Now Sarna lets us know that things aren't quite as simple as they would seem here. He writes:

The precise application of this prohibition is complicated by the lack of specifics. The Hebrew verb *ganav* may cover theft of chattels and kidnapping. Rabbinic tradition interpreted the command according to the latter meaning. Many modern scholars do likewise [MH: they think that "Thou shalt not steal refers to kidnapping], arguing that otherwise there would be an overlapping with the last commandment; that, in the context of the foregoing items, a capital offense rather than a tort is more likely...

So the argument to say "Thou shalt not steal" refers to kidnapping is, "Well, if it doesn't, then this command repeats "Thou shalt not covet," and that's confusing. So that's why a lot of scholars want "Thou shalt not steal" to refer specifically to kidnapping. Sarna keeps going. He says:

1:00:00

These considerations are not entirely persuasive. [MH: So Sarna's not on the kidnapping bandwagon.] The summaries of the Decalogue's provisions found in Leviticus 19:11, Jeremiah 7:9, and Hosea 4:2 also fail to specify the category of theft that is intended. It would seem best, then, not to define this command so narrowly as to exclude from its scope the protection of property rights.

To me that seems reasonable. Let me read you what Pete Enns says in his Exodus commentary here. He writes:

This commandment is developed somewhat in chapters 21–22. [MH: Those are case laws. We're going to be getting into some of those in future episodes.] Although the references to stealing are not exhaustive in these chapters, it does give us a framework from which to understand how the Israelites may have heard this command. Stealing includes kidnapping (21:16) in addition to taking animals (22:1, 12) and material things (22:7). Clearly the Israelites have some notion of ownership and rightful property for such a command to make sense. Stealing from one's "neighbor," as with the seventh commandment, is a threat to society. It breeds distrust and strife. Little explanation is given perhaps because little is needed.

I think Pete is on the right track here because you do get these case laws that come up after the Ten Commandments are given, and the stealing (thievery) that's described is not limited to kidnapping. It includes other things like personal property. I think that really helps us here. So I think he's on the right track. It doesn't help us, though, except perhaps to tell us that we need to make this wide because it would've been intuitive to Israelites and therefore it ought to be intuitive to us. So whatever constitutes theft in our culture, it would seem reasonable to attach it to this command. And I do think that's reasonable. And Wenham agrees. He says: "The eighth commandment is best understood perhaps as a prohibition of stealing any kind under any circumstances." So I would add to that, the commandment has no apparent exceptions, which is a circumstance created by the lack of any precise definition. And we just leave it there.

So we have things that we would call theft today that a pre-technological, pre-digital culture would not even have imagined. What I'm saying is, we need to still apply this command to those things. Because back in the day, in Israelite thinking, the command was sort of left wide open. It would have been intuitive to the culture, and so that's the way we need to look at it now. Our application of this is based on what's intuitive to *us* as far as theft—taking property.

So let's move on to the 9th commandment:

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

Now Wenham makes an important observation here, and one that is perpetually neglected by most Bible students. Let me say that again. Wenham's going to make an observation here, and this is something that I'm willing to say most Bible students (at least the ones I've encountered) don't even think about this, and it's an important part of the context. And I'm talking about preachers. I'm talking about even theologians and Bible students. They hear "Thou shalt not bear false witness" and they don't even ask, "Well, is there a context to that?" Yeah, there is. Wenham writes:

The language of the ninth commandment connects it to the judicial process in the covenant community.

In other words, the "bear witness" language here is the same as one finds in the Torah for legal proceedings. As such, the context for the commandment is the legal system of Israel. And Sarna has a nice summary of this. He writes:

Each individual is here directly addressed as a potential witness in a juridical forum. This is not the same as "swearing falsely," discussed above, for witnesses did not testify under oath in ancient Israel. The purpose of court procedure was to establish the truth, on which decisions could be based. The witnesses, whose testimony about the facts with which they were acquainted was always given orally, constituted the key factor in the judicial process. False evidence not only hindered the administration of justice in any particular case, but also undermined public confidence in the integrity of the judicial system—and thereby jeopardized the very stability of society. As a consequence, various measures were taken to discourage false testimony. Two witnesses were necessary in order for the evidence to be valid (Num. 35:30; Deut. 17:6; 19:15, cf. 1 Kings 21:10; Isa. 8:2), [MH: so you need at least two witnesses] and false witnesses were punished according to the principle of talion [MH: that's *lex talion*, "an eye for an eye."]. That is, for their mendacious, damaging testimony, they would receive the same punishment that would have been meted out to the accused. Also, the witnesses themselves had to initiate the execution in cases involving capital punishment (Deut. 13:10; 17:7; 19:16–20).

1:05:00

This is a serious business, "Thou shalt not bear false witness." Don't give false testimony in court, because if you do, the punishment that was due to the accused is going to fall on your head, up to and including death. That's actually the context for that command. Now we interpret that command as any sort of non-truth-telling or any sort of withholding of information. That is not the context for this command—neither of those things.

Now I'm going to put it this way. I used to love to do this in Ethics class, because I think it drives home the point pretty effectively. What this means, consequently,

is that this command was not given by God to forbid being tactful. The ninth command does not compel us to provide exhaustive, precise, detailed responses to questions like: “Do I look fat in this dress?” “Did you like dinner?” “Doctor, did my child suffer much before he/she died?” “Oh yeah, I’m a Christian doctor. Let me tell you in exhaustive totality what happened to your kid and how much they suffered, because I don’t want to violate the ninth command.” That’s just bunk. This is not why the command was given. How about “Officer, what do you think happened to my wife?” “Oh, let me tell you in excruciating detail.” Or your kid walks up to you after a game: “Did I do good, Daddy?” “Well, you did okay. But let me just tell you what you did wrong, because we’re Christians and the ninth command forbids us from being nice, from being tactful. So I’m going to just give it to you in as many ways as I can, just so that we avoid violating the ninth command. Here’s what you didn’t do good.” The ninth command is not given to crush people. We just need to stop it. We need to look for what’s going on in context.

There’s more here. The ninth command was not given for us to produce absurd ethics or assist evildoers in doing evil. How about these examples: when the Christian quarterback looks left and throws right, I’m suggesting he doesn’t need to repent. It’s the same for the no-look pass in basketball, or the intentional foul. It’s part of the game. How about, “Are you hiding any Jews here?” “Well, yes, sir, SS person. I am. And just so that I don’t withhold any information, let me draw you a map in my house to where they’re hiding. Because I don’t want to violate the ninth command. Or let me lead you to them so that you don’t waste your time or I can’t be accused of withholding information.” How about the drunken dad comes home and in a rage yells at the kid, “Where’s your mom?” and the kid knows that the whole reason for the question is so that he can beat her. “Well Daddy, we’re Christians so I’ll tell you where Mommy is.” This is bunk. This is not why the ninth command was given. A little lighter, “Are you planning a surprise party?” “Ugh. Yeah, here are the details. Gosh, I don’t want to withhold any information.”

1:10:00

Look, this is not... I could just go on and on with these things. But this is how we (and I’m going to say it) undermine (we destroy) this command. We do. These and other circumstances are not what this command forbids. We know this for sure because God himself uses deception to thwart and punish evil. We did a whole episode on that on the podcast (episode 210)—God’s use of deception to punish evil. Aside from the obvious judicial context “Thou shalt not bear false witness,” the witnessing language... The best way to apply this command is to remember that you owe the truth to those authority structures and partnerships—relationships—that God has placed over you and put you in, things like the government, church leadership, marriage. You owe the truth to your spouse. Child/parent relationships. These are the institutional things that God has given and endorsed and uses and has put you in and put over us. But the point of the command is not to compel you to crush people, to crush their spirits and to avoid

being tactful. It's about truth-telling that doesn't damage fellow imagers and that doesn't make evil easier and more possible. It doesn't proliferate evil.

Let's move on to the tenth command. This is verse 17.

You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's.

Sarna summarizes the difficulty with parsing this command. He writes about the term covet:

A study of the biblical contexts in which the Hebrew stem *ḥamad* occurs discloses that it does not signify the general human proclivity for acquisitiveness [MH: to acquire things] and cupidity; rather it always focuses upon a specific object of desire, the sight of which stimulates the craving to possess it. However, because of an inherent ambiguity in the biblical usages of that Hebrew stem, the meaning of the present command has been a matter of dispute. Action, not just a hidden mental state, is certainly implied in Exodus 34:24: "No one will covet your land when you go up to appear before the Lord." Yet a decidedly inward feeling is understood in Proverbs 6:25, literally, "Do not desire her beauty in your heart." Further, passages like Deuteronomy 7:25, Joshua 7:21, and Micah 2:2 indicate that *ḥamad*, itself having a passive nuance, is of sufficient intensity to stimulate active measures to gratify the desire. The issue is further complicated by such questions as whether desire or its avoidance can be commanded or legislated, and whether there can be liability for mere intention or feeling. But this poses no greater difficulty than does the oft repeated command to love God, one's neighbor, and the stranger, and not to abhor an Edomite or an Egyptian, or not to hate one's brother in one's heart.

That's nice. It's a little bit abstract. So I'm going to read you Wenham's approach. I think it's a bit more helpful. And then we'll wrap up.

...*ḥamad* is by choice a reference to an obsessive covetousness that could be the gateway to the violation of every other principle in the Decalogue.

The tenth command basically is at the root of violating all the other ones.

Thus coveting for oneself the gold and silver with which idols are decorated leads to idolatry, the violation of the first commandment. Desiring the "free love" of the fertility cults leads both to the worship of other gods and to sexual irresponsibility, the violation of the first and the seventh commandments (Isa 1:29). Yearning after the possessions of others may lead to stealing, a violation of

the eighth commandment... The tenth commandment thus functions as a kind of summary commandment, the violation of which is a first step that can lead to the violation of any one or all the rest of the commandments. As such, it is necessarily all-embracing and descriptive of an attitude [MH: something internal] rather than a deed. It was perhaps set last in the Decalogue precisely because of this uniquely comprehensive application...

I think that's well-said. I would agree that that's what's at the heart of the covet command. It is the place where the violation of all the other ones begins. So I think it's well-placed and certainly is pretty devastating in terms of the necessity of circumscribing our behavior—not just our behavior, but our thought processes. It's James about how sin is conceived and brings forth death and all that.

1:15:00

Now the rest of Exodus 20 all the way through Exodus 23:20 (so basically three chapters)... And Exodus 23:20 stops right before the instruction God gives to Moses about sending the angel in whom was the name to lead them to Canaan. All of that stuff up to that point is comprised of a wide description of other laws. The context for those laws will be these first ten (obviously), but there will be laws that are new in the sense of not specifically deriving from these ten. But even those might be said to have a peripheral conceptual relationship these ten (to the Decalogue) about relating to God and fellow imagers (fellow members of the covenant relationship with Yahweh). So we're going to jump in to those three chapters. I'm going to land in different places in that material. I don't know if we'll spend more than one episode doing that. But that's what's coming next—some specific case laws, application of what we've just read through in the Decalogue. And we'll tackle not everything, but some of the things that are interesting in that material as we keep going through the book of Exodus.

TS: Mike, I just have a quick question about the structure of the Bible. Why not end chapter 20 there? Why start with the laws of the altars in chapter 20 rather than 21?

MH: As far as interrupting the Sinai sequence?

TS: Yeah. Why... Just to break in the chapters. Why didn't they start the chapter with the laws of the altars with chapter 21? Why is it on the end of chapter 20?

MH: I'm going to combine a bit of the thinking of that last comment about the tenth command about how it's the springboard or the starting point for the other ones with something we talked about in Part 1. If this part of Exodus is more clear when laws (the Decalogue) is given in Deuteronomy 5... There it's really clear. In Exodus 20 it's less clear, but there are those who would argue it's still here. If this is all set-up as a covenant ceremony—a covenant event—then the laws need to occur in a certain place in the structure of how covenants were written. Now that (I'm confessing) is more evident in Deuteronomy than it is in

Exodus. But there will still be those scholars who argue that this is why to our eye it looks interruptive. But it's actually following a covenant formula for the whole wider event. Once they get to Sinai, when the Decalogue is actually given, it's put in that place because that's where it belongs in the covenant ceremony kind of thing. So it's a little odd to our eye, but I think that's probably... It's a reasonable reason. The other one is (if you recall from two episodes ago) that they're situated here not to interrupt the theophany necessarily but to precede the case law that comes. But in my mind, that doesn't answer why you get here at the end of Exodus 20 (which we didn't read)... Right after the laws, it picks up with the scene,

When all the people saw the thunder and flashes of lightning, the sound of the trumpet...

They're still at Sinai. So the second explanation to me doesn't explain as well the interruptive nature of this as well as the first one. Because essentially if you're following a covenant formula and people are reading it that way or it's read orally, literate people in the culture are going to know why it is what it is, even though it's really foreign to our ear and to our eye. But I think that's probably the best option.

TS: Alright, Mike. We'll be looking forward to the laws here in the next episodes. And don't forget about livestreaming the conference. It's coming around the corner. So don't miss out on our conference. Well, Mike, we appreciate it, and with that, I just want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God Bless.