

Exodus 20

Preceding Text

(Where are we? Chapters 16-24 **Covenant – Ten Commandments**)

All the previous chapters are about redemption, but now we enter the story of recreation and new identity. In the last chapter, the people arrived at Mt. Sinai where they met God (and we noticed several parallels with chapter 3 when Moses met God on the same mountain). But now, it is not a bush on fire but a mountain. The visual presence of a holy God necessitates that the people consecrate themselves before they have the encounter with God. This is when God tells the people about their *intended* identity. They are not slaves. They are a treasured people, a kingdom of priests.

Current Text: Themes and Background

We are at a critical turning point. The rest of the book is not only about shaping the people to live into their new identity but also how God will reside in their midst. This requires the Israelites to behave a certain way that reflects God's character to the surrounding nations. This new identity and new way of life is revealed through the teachings/law.

A good thing to clarify at this point is that this chapter and the ones to follow (called the Covenant Code) was considered a gift. (We see this repeated in various ways in Leviticus and Deuteronomy.) These are God's best instructions for the individuals and for the whole people to be fully human, living in harmony with others and the land. They are boundaries to point in the way the people should live and thrive (as a group not only as individuals! This means several teachings are about managing the individual's consumption!) Although in modern vernacular we call this a "law code," (which we resist as overbearing) it did not have the same connotation for the Israelites. These were instructions for life. These were instructions for how to live into the calling of being a people who reflect God in the world.

Chapter 20 contains what we call the ten commandments. Notice, however, that they begin with "I am the Lord who brought you up out of Egypt..." Without that statement, we have law without gospel. The Law does not tell us what to do without reminding us of who God is. The Israelites must learn this lesson before they get into the land of inheritance. Without a change of identity and without knowing *why* they shape society in a particular way, they are in danger of recreating a society based on Egypt instead of on God's character (this is a massive concern in Deuteronomy!).

Engage the Text: Discussion Questions

1. What did you hear as the main point of the sermon? Or what was your primary takeaway?
2. See how far we've come through the book of Exodus before any laws are given? What does this tell you about God's redemption?
3. Pay attention to how the 10 Commandments start. We do *not* begin chapter 20 with "You

shall not....” Identify the way the chapter begins and suggest reasons why this is important. Do you think this changes the emphasis of the chapter?

4. What do you notice about *why* the Israelites should follow these instructions?
5. New Testament writers use the lens of Exodus to explain what God did through Jesus at the cross. Read 1 Peter 1:13–2:3 and 2:9-10. “Called out of and then into” is Exodus language. What parallels do you see between Exodus and the teachings in 1 Peter?
6. What is the text telling us about God’s character, God’s revelation, and God’s mission in the world?

Read for Next Week: Exodus 32

Additional resources

1. Podcast with Dr. Carmen Imes: What does it mean, “[Do not bear God’s Name in Vain](#)”?