

THE
PASTOR'S
BIBLE STUDY™

VOLUME TWO



A NEW INTERPRETER'S®
BIBLE STUDY

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THE PASTOR'S BIBLE STUDY™
Volume Two
A NEW INTERPRETER'S® BIBLE STUDY

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MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

A STUDY BY
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THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

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Introduction

Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5

Displaying the Commandments

Any mention of the Decalogue during the last half of the twentieth century would have triggered recollections of Cecil B. DeMille's three-and-a-half-hour movie, *The Ten Commandments*, filmed in 1956, featuring Charlton Heston (as Moses), Yul Brunner (as Ramases) and Anne Baxter (as Nefretiri). Some older Americans remember when Ten Commandments granite monuments were donated to many municipalities across America in the 1950s and 1960s by the Fraternal Order of Eagles, with the support and sponsorship of Cecil B. DeMille, who wrote from Mount Sinai while filming on site, ". . . we need the Divine Code of Guidance which was given to the world. That is why I am so enthusiastic about the Fraternal Order of Eagles' project of circulating and erecting copies of the Ten Commandments everywhere the Order's widespread influence reaches".

But the gifts of those Ten Commandments monuments erected mid-century on public property and courthouse lawns became, by the end of the century, the basis for lawsuits and legal battles. Any mention of the Ten Commandments now, at the start of the twenty-first century, triggers a religio-political debate about the display of the Decalogue on government or public properties. The best example of this happened on August 1, 2001, when attention shifted from Hollywood and DeMille's film, available on DVD, to the Alabama State Judicial Building in Montgomery, Alabama, where the Alabama Supreme Court Chief Justice Roy Moore had authorized the placement of a

Teaching Tips

Divide the class into two groups. Have one group support the posting or displaying of the Ten Commandments in government and public places (Justice Roy Moore's view) and the other group take the position that these actions violate our separation of church and state and the civil liberties of those who don't adhere to the religious beliefs connected with the Ten Commandments. Make available periodicals or Internet resources that discuss this legal issue (e.g., Elsie Soukup, "Monuments: Thou Shalt Display," *Newseek*, March 1, 2004; http://atheism.about.com/library/decisions/ten/bldec_GlassrothMoore.htm). Allow the class at least fifteen minutes to brainstorm. Have each group select a person to present the findings of the group (five to seven minutes each). Allow additional time for class discussion.

Source

DeMille, Cecil B, "Why We Need the Ten Commandments." *The Eagle Magazine*, September, 5-6, 2001.

5,280-pound granite monument of the Ten Commandments in the building's rotunda. Two months later, on October 31, 2001, two lawsuits seeking the removal of the monument were filed against Chief Justice Moore by plaintiffs represented by the American Civil Liberties Union, Americans United for Separation of Church and State, and the Southern Poverty Law Center. A three-judge panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 11th Circuit ruled unanimously against Chief Justice Moore, resulting in Moore's suspension from office on August 22, 2003, for ignoring a court order to remove the monument. It was finally removed from the rotunda on November 14, 2003, and placed in storage. The fate of Justice Moore now rests with the Alabama electorate, and the fate of the monument rests with the men whose names were chiseled into the granite at its copyright sign: Justice Roy Moore, Richard Hahnemann, the sculptor, and Moore's attorney, Stephen Melchoir.

The Los Lunas Decalogue

While much attention has been given to the legal battles in cities and counties of Alabama, Indiana, Kentucky, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Wisconsin over the presence of monuments and plaques of the Decalogue on public property, little attention has been given to the world's oldest Hebrew inscription of the Ten Commandments, which turned up in New Mexico in the nineteenth century. The Decalogue was inscribed in Hebrew (using a quasi-Phoenician script) on the flat face of a large basalt boulder on a mesa now known as "Mystery Mountain" and "Hidden Mountain," three miles west of Los Lunas. Given its antiquity, the monumental boulder is of some significance for early American history. Photographs of it should be in American history textbooks, if not replicas of it placed in schools or on courthouse lawns. In 1949, Robert H. Pfeiffer of Harvard University recognized that the inscription was an abbreviated form of the Decalogue; and since then a number of other scholars, including Harvard Professor Barry Fell (1976: 310), have confirmed the identification.

Resources

Los Lunas Decalogue

<http://www.ebts.edu/tmcdaniel/LosLunas.html>
<http://www.ebts.edu/tmcdaniel/LosLunasRock-4.jpg>
<http://www.ebts.edu/tmcdaniel/LosLunasRock-5.jpg>

Reflections

Lessons on Los Lunas

The displaying of the Ten Commandments by the Los Lunas community, perhaps crypto-Jews among the Spanish conquistadors, did not ensure the survival of this religious community. What lesson is to be learned here for those who feel that taking away the Ten Commandments from our public schools and government places will reduce the number of those who adhere to God's moral law in the Ten Commandments?

My inspection of the inscription, on site, in 1983 and a comparison of the script used on the boulder Decalogue with other early northwest Semitic scripts, led me to conclude that the “Mystery Mountain” inscription is not just centuries old but could possibly be pre-Columbian or even pre-Christian. The most compelling bit of evidence is the unique shape of the letter *q* in the word *lěqădděšô* “to hallow it,” referring to the Sabbath. It was written resembling a tall angular number eight in our English script. The letter *q* written this way appears elsewhere only in Phoenician inscriptions found in northern Spain from 200 B.C.E. to 200 C.E. In addition to the unusual shape of the *q*, the use in the “Mystery Mountain” Decalogue of the consonants *’aleph* and *hē* as internal vowel letters parallels the same use of these letters in other Phoenician inscriptions. The content of the Decalogue in this Los Lunas inscription, aside from its being abbreviated and having several spelling errors, which suggest that it was inscribed from memory—such as confusing the sound of a *qoph* (*q*) with the sound of a *kaph* (*k*) so that *šeker* “drunkenness” or *šakar* “hire, wages” was written for *šeqer* “falsehood, lie”—varies little from the received Hebrew texts of Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5.

Although some scholars have conjectured that the “Mystery Mountain” Decalogue dates from Solomonic times, the odd shape of the letter *q* precludes that possibility since that script is unattested that early. Others would date the inscription to the first century B.C.E., based upon a petroglyph of a sky-map allegedly depicting a solar eclipse that is said to have occurred on September 15, 107 B.C.E., which would have been the Rosh Hashanah of that year. In my opinion a more likely scenario to account for this Decalogue is that some “Crypto Jews” or Marranos—those Jews of Spain who converted to Christianity upon penalty of death but secretly practiced their Jewish faith—were among the Spaniards who reached (New) Mexico. Once in the New World, some Marranos separated themselves from their Spanish Christian comrades and established an isolated Jewish community on what became known as “Hidden Mountain.” An inscription

Study Bible

On the Ten Commandments, see: *NISB*, 115-16 (Exod 20); see also “Special Note” on the Decalogue; and 252-53 (Deut 5).

of the Decalogue in ordinary Hebrew letters would have exposed their true religious identity and have subjected them to persecution or execution. But by writing their Decalogue with rare and archaic Phoenician style letters, the “Mystery Mountain” Marranos hoped to hide their identity as practicing Jews. If so, their security scheme failed them. Once recognized as Jews, the Marranos could have been wiped out like other Jews in the pogroms throughout Europe. On the other hand, a deadly disease could have caused the demise of the community. Either way, destroyed by a virus or by violence, the “Mystery Mountain” worshippers of Yahweh perished without a trace, except for their indestructible basalt Decalogue and assorted petroglyphs.

What makes the Los Lunas Decalogue important for the contemporary religio-political debate over the public display of the Ten Commandments is the obvious fact that the conspicuous display of the Decalogue at the base of the “Mystery Mountain” did not guarantee the survival of that religious community which, no doubt, lived obediently to Yahweh’s commandments.

Different Ways to Number the Commandments

Sixteen verbs in Exodus 20:1-17 have an imperative force, whereas in Deuteronomy 5:6-21 there are seventeen such verbs. Different Christian and Jewish traditions reflect several ways to divide these verbs with imperative force so as to come up with exactly ten commandments or ten “words,” (Greek, Decalogue) as they were so designated in Exodus 20:1 and Deuteronomy 4:13; 10:4. The rabbinic tradition recognized “I am Yahweh your God” (a verbless statement in Hebrew) as the first of the ten words and then listed and clustered the sixteen or seventeen verbs in such a way to end up with exactly ten commandments. As a result, the commands not to covet a neighbor’s wife and not to covet anything of one’s neighbor were made into the single tenth commandment. But Roman Catholic and Lutheran tradition followed Origen, Clement of Alexandria, and Augustine who joined together “You shall have no other gods before me” and “You shall not make for yourself a graven image” to make the first of

Teaching Tips

How Is Your Decalogue Numbered?

Discuss the similarities and differences of the following. Can you detect the theological assumptions behind the different arrangements? Note A, 1-3; B, 5, 9-10; C, 2.

A. The Jewish faith:

1. I am the Lord your God
2. No other gods
3. Lord’s name in vain
4. Remember the Sabbath
5. Honor your parents
6. No killing
7. No adultery
8. No stealing
9. No bearing false witness
10. no coveting.

B. Catholics and Lutherans:

1. No other gods
2. Lord’s name in vain
3. Remember the Sabbath
4. Honor your parents
5. No killing
6. No adultery
7. No stealing
8. No false witness
9. No coveting your neighbor’s property
10. No coveting your neighbor’s wife.

C. Protestants (Reformed):

1. No other gods
2. No graven images
3. Lord’s name in vain
4. Remember the Sabbath
5. Honor your parents
6. No killing
7. No adultery
8. No stealing
9. No false witness
10. No coveting. Note: the last arrangement [C] will be followed in this lesson.

the ten commandments. As a result, the prohibition about coveting a neighbor's wife was separated from the one about coveting a neighbor's property, making them commandments nine and ten, respectively. Orthodox, Protestant, and Reformed traditions recognized "I am Yahweh your God" as an introductory statement and made "You shall have no other gods" the first commandment, with the prohibition of graven images becoming the second commandment. And, as in the rabbinic tradition, the two prohibitions about coveting were joined together to form the tenth commandment. In terms of the religio-political debate over the display of the Ten Commandments in America, even the way the commandments are numbered on the plaques and monuments, is a significant indicator of which theological tradition or institution is recognized as normative and authoritative. We will follow the arrangement presented by the Reformed tradition.

The words of Exodus 20:1, "And God spoke all these words, saying" is in Christian tradition an editorial introduction to the entire Decalogue which follows in 20:2-17. The Decalogue itself was an independent literary unit that was inserted into the middle of a separate theophany narrative, now found in the divided texts of Exodus 19:7-25 and 20:18-26. The Decalogue is presented as having been spoken directly by God to the Israelites (who were addressed by the collective singular pronoun "you," as in the *Shema* of Deut 6:5), *without* Moses being a mediator. Thus, the Decalogue in the book of Exodus became revered as a special revelation from Yahweh to the Israelites. They heard Yahweh speak but did not die! But, according to the twenty-eight verses of theophany narrative into which the Decalogue was inserted, Yahweh wanted the people of Israel to hear him but not to see him, saying, "Lo, I am coming to you in a thick cloud that the people may hear when I speak with you" (Exod 19:9). However, the Israelites were so fearful of actually hearing Yahweh ("let not God speak to us, lest we die") that Yahweh reversed himself and made Moses the mediator who would convey the divine words to the fearful tribes (Exod 20:20-22).

Study Bible

See "Special Note" on theophany and also the revelation of God's mercy in *NISB*, 136.

Reflections

Thoughts on Theophany

God appears at decisive points in Israel's history: the promises to the patriarchs (Gen 17; 18; 28), the call of Moses (Exod 3), the exodus and Sinai traditions (Exod 13; 16; 19-20; 24), entry to the promised land (Josh 5), and the call of the prophets (Isa 6; Ezek 1). God's self-manifestations are mostly audible and only partially visible (Exod 33:18-23). How do you experience God's presence today? How is it similar to or different from the biblical accounts back then?

In Deuteronomy 5:4-5, when Moses on the slopes of Pisgah repeated the Decalogue given at Mount Sinai, the Deuteronomist conflated the Exodus 20 variants by having (1) Yahweh speak to the Israelites *directly* (“Yahweh spoke with you face to face at the mountain out of the midst of the fire”) and (2) by having Moses mediating the message (“I stood between Yahweh and you at that time to declare to you the word of Yahweh”). For the Israelites, the hearing of Yahweh’s voice once was enough. The tribal chiefs and elders acknowledged “we have heard his voice out of the midst of the fire, we have this day seen God speak with people and the people still live.” But, terrified that additional hearings of God’s voice could be fatal, they petitioned Moses, “Hear all that Yahweh our God will say; and speak to us all that Yahweh our God will speak to you; and we will hear and do it” (Deut 5:23-27).

Lectionary Loop

(For all Ten Commandments)

**Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost or
Proper 22, Year A, Exodus 20:1-4,
7-9, 12-20**

**Third Sunday in Lent, Year B,
Exodus 20:1-17**

Prologue to the Decalogue

Jewish tradition notwithstanding, the identical words in Exodus 20:2 and Deuteronomy 5:6, “I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage” (used often in the Old Testament) serve as the prologue to the entire Decalogue. Anthony Phillips and numerous scholars have recognized that this brief prologue parallels the use in Hittite suzerainty treaties of a historical prologue proclaiming the suzerain’s prior achievements before the enumeration of the treaty stipulations placed upon the vassals. Here Yahweh is seen as a benevolent overlord who reminds Israel of the accomplishments made on her behalf just before a covenant is initiated. When Exodus 20:2 and Deuteronomy 5:6 are read in a similar manner—as the prologue to the entire Decalogue—it precludes isolating the verse as the introduction to the first prohibition only.

The Decalogue and the Death Penalty

Anthony Phillips presented the case for the Decalogue’s having been Israel’s criminal law code, over against her civil code, stating:

From the point of view of Yahweh, the Decalogue was Israel’s constitution, and any breach of it amounted to an act of apostasy which could lead to divine action against the individual offender and the community. . . . thus breach of a commandment was regarded not only as an offense against Yahweh, but also, since it endangered the community, as an offense against the latter, in other words a crime, for which prosecution must be undertaken in the community’s name. . . . Following the conviction of the criminal, immediate exe-

Reflections

Absolute and Universal

According to Albrecht Alt, the Ten Commandments are apodictic or unconditional, divine laws, in contrast to the secular, casuistic or conditional laws of Canaan. Apodictic laws are a distinct form of Israelite law, according to Alt. They are characterized by the second personal negative imperative, “Thou shalt not . . .” or as a participial phrase “whoever strikes his father or mother shall be put to death” (Exod 21:15) or a curse, such as “Cursed is he who dishonors his father or mother” (Deut 20:16). Casuistic law is applicable only in certain cases; its basic form being “If . . . ‘then . . .’” to which further clauses can be added to make the application more precise (e.g., Exod 21-23; Deut 22:23-29). See: A. Alt, *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1934, 1966) 81-132; W. J. Harrelson, “Law in the OT,” *IDB* 3:80-83; Dale Patrick, *Old Testament Law* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985).

cution was inflicted by the community, for the criminal could no longer be regarded as part of the covenant people. Outside the breach of the Decalogue, the death penalty was never exacted. (1970: 11)

Moshe Weinfeld (1991: 248), in disagreement with Phillips, asserted, “the commandments are not intended to be concrete legislation, rather a formulation of conditions for membership in the community. Anyone who does not observe these commandments excludes himself from the community of the faithful.” Ronald Clements (1994: 328-329), in agreement with Weinfeld and in obvious disagreement with Phillips, stated that “exclusion from the covenant community would be the inevitable and appropriate punishment” for any violation of the Decalogue. Clements concluded, “The attempt to elevate all ten of the commandments to cover capital crimes involving the death penalty must be set aside as highly implausible.” But what seemed “implausible” for Clements was essential for the Deuteronomist. The death penalty was clearly stipulated for nine identical criminal offenses cited in the Book of the Covenant (Exodus 21:12–22:16) and elsewhere in Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy. These other texts dealing with identical criminal offenses, examined below, would have to be either subsequent reiterations based on the Decalogue or earlier statutes about capital crimes that eventuated into the Decalogue. Sixteen canonical texts, one deuterocanonical text, and an extra-biblical passage (to be cited under each commandment in this lesson) support the claim that the Decalogue’s focus was definitely on capital crimes, much like the deadly curses pronounced in Deuteronomy 28:20-27.

In these sixteen canonical texts, only three of them specify death by stoning. The stoning would have been done by all of the men of the community, with perhaps the prosecuting witnesses initiating the stoning. Phillips noted that stoning was the preferred method of execution because it required the full participation of all members of the community, “and so both individually and corporately propitiate Yahweh” (1970: 24).

Source

For Exodus 20:2 and Deuteronomy 5:6 as a historical prologue proclaiming the sovereign’s prior accomplishments before initiating a treaty with his subjects, see two titles by Anthony Phillips: *Ancient Israel’s Criminal Law* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1970) 3-11 and *Essays on Biblical Law* JSOTSup 344 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002) 2-24.

Another reason may well go back to the covenant with Noah, where it was stipulated, “Whoever sheds the blood of human, by a human shall that person’s blood be shed; for in his own image God made humankind” (Genesis 9:6, NRSV). Whereas a single executioner would himself become guilty of killing another person in the act of executing a criminal, no one person could be held responsible for the death of a criminal from a communal stoning, for it was impossible to determine which particular stone or stone-thrower actually caused the victim’s death. An analogy would be execution by a firing squad when one of the rifles fires only a blank; but those who shoot do not know which rifle has the blank, thereby precluding any individual soldier being held accountable for a killing.

However, it cannot be assumed that death by stoning was always the method of execution. In Exodus 19:12-13, it was stated that “any who touch the mountain [Sinai] shall be put to death. No hand shall touch them, but they shall be stoned or shot; whether animal or human being, they shall not live.” According to Exodus 32:27, when Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the tablets of the law and learned that the Israelites had worshiped the golden calf, he quoted God as saying, “Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel, ‘Put your sword on your side, each of you! Go back and forth from gate to gate throughout the camp, and each of you kill your brother, your kith, and your kin.’” In obedience the Levites killed about three thousand kinsmen that day, after which Moses announced, “Today you have ordained yourselves for the service of Yahweh, each one at the cost of a son or a brother, and so have brought a blessing on yourselves this day.” The blessing and the ordination of the Levites upon the slaughtering of their kinfolk initiated, idealized, and institutionalized the zealots’ motto: “Death to the infidels!” Thus, it is quite clear that, be it either pre-Decalogue or post-Decalogue, the execution of infidels was carried out by several methods: stone them; shoot them; stab them, just so they die—the covenant with Noah notwithstanding.

Teaching Tips

Law Codes Past and Present

1. Have someone in the class read Exodus 19:7-25 and 20:18-26 as a literary unit.
2. Select two members of the class seated at opposite ends of the table or room and have each one read alternately, sentence by sentence, from the same translation of Exodus 20:1-17 and Deuteronomy 5:6-21.
3. Have other members raise their hand when they hear something different from either reader.
4. Make a list on the blackboard of all the verbs as the texts are read and have class members decide ones they would use to make up a “decalogue.”

Teaching Tips

Capital Punishment

Read from the “Book of the Covenant,” as found in Exodus 21:12–22:16, and list the crimes which carried the death penalty.

Teaching Tips

Religious Tolerance

Recommend that all class members visit the web page of Religious Tolerance.org which deals with the Ten Commandments, available at http://www.religioustolerance.org/chr_10co.htm, and especially the sub-link http://www.religioustolerance.org/chr_10c6.htm, which deals with constitutional issues in the religio-political debate over the commandments.

Recognition that the Decalogue was Israel's code of capital offenses came not only from post-enlightenment scholars, but it was recognized by others like William Cowper (1731–1768) who penned many hymns and poems including the following lines.

Marshaling all his terrors as he came;
Thunder, and earthquake, and devouring flame;
From Sinai's top Jehovah gave the law—
Life for obedience—death for ev'ry flaw.
When the great Sov'reign would his will
express,
He gives a perfect rule; what can he less?
And guards it with a sanction as severe.
As vengeance can inflict, or sinners fear.
"Truth" 547-554

Death to infidels for violating the commandments of Tablet One, and death to criminals for violating the laws of Tablet Two became normative and routine, with most executions being so insignificant they warranted no historical notice. The stoning of the nameless woman caught in adultery (John 8:3-9) would have taken place without any historical record had it not been for the attempt of the scribes and Pharisees to have Jesus come to the woman's defense and thereby contradict Moses, so that then they could have stoned Jesus along with the adulteress. Similarly, Stephen's being stoned as an infidel (Acts 7:54–8:3; 9:1-2) was just routine business for Saul of Tarsus who, having consented to Stephen's death, proceeded "to lay waste to the church, and entering house after house he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison . . . still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord." The number of and the names of Saul's victims were, for the most part, not worth any historical recognition or record.

The infamous *Malleus Malificarum* ("The Witches' Hammer"), published in 1486 by the Dominican monks Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger, became the vilest extension of the Decalogue's demand for the death of infidels. The document was a manual of operations for the inquisitors and the Inquisition to ferret

Teaching Tips

Criminal Code or Covenant?

Divide the class into two groups, one supporting the thesis of the Decalogue as Israel's criminal code (Anthony Phillips and McDaniel in this session) and the other group advocating the Decalogue as conditions for membership in Yahweh's covenant community. For the covenant position, see: Clements, Weinfeld, and G. E. Mendenhall, "Covenant" in the *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. G. A. Buttrick (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962) 1:714-21. Allow both groups about fifteen minutes to prepare. Have one person from each group present its position (five to seven minutes each). For class discussion: How are the Ten Commandments viewed differently in each position? How does each position impact our understanding of the Ten Commandments in a different way?

Teaching Tips

Death to the Infidels!

Discuss Moses' call for Levites to kill their brothers and sons (Exodus 32:27-28) with the terrorism of today that calls for "death to the infidel!" See also *NISB*, 132-33.

Study Bible

On Exodus 32:27-28, see *NISB*, 132-33, for discussion of Exodus 32:27-28. On Holy War see Excursus in *NISB*, 314.

out and execute witches. Wicasta Lovelace estimates “the death toll during the Inquisition worldwide ranged from 600,000 to as high as 9,000,000 (over its 250-years-long course).”

Saul’s having early Christians “committed” to prison should not be misunderstood to mean that Christians would simply receive a jail sentence. Prisons (for Rome and ancient Israel) were holding pens, so to speak, for people awaiting trial. At trial a prisoner could be (1) found innocent and released, or (2) found guilty of a capital offense and executed (Numbers 15:32-36; Leviticus 24:10-23), or (3) found guilty of a lesser offense and sentenced to some form of corporal punishment, like the forty stripes spelled out in Deuteronomy 25:1-3, or in later times having one’s head, hands and feet placed in the stocks. *A prison sentence*, defined as confinement in a penitentiary for a crime, is a relatively modern legal option invented in America by William Penn and the Quakers of Pennsylvania, who opposed all bloodshed, including the execution of criminals. Quakers assumed that prisoners who were held for an extended period of time in silent solitary confinement would become penitent, thus the name “penitentiary.”

Where there was no Quaker influence, the Decalogue, as the code of capital offenses, was not only idealized and perpetuated by religious communities in England and America but expanded to include a much wider range of capital offenses. While the northern colonies were more lenient with crimes against property, crimes against morality were more harsh in the north, with blasphemy, idolatry, sodomy, and bestiality having become capital offenses in Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire. In Virginia, capital crimes came to include the smuggling or embezzling of tobacco, the fraudulent delivery of tobacco, or the altering of inspected tobacco. Banner noted, “As the New England colonies lost their original sense of a religious mission, they abandoned the death sentence for some of these moral crimes.” For example, “Massachusetts decapitalized blasphemy, adultery, and incest in the late seventeenth century, and New Hampshire decapitalized blasphemy in the early eighteenth centu-

Resources

Wicasta, Lovelace. *Malleus Maleficarum: Introduction to the 1948 edition with Translation and Notes by Montague Summers*, 2003. Available online at [http:// www.malleusmaleficarum.org](http://www.malleusmaleficarum.org).

Source

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Reflections

Legislating Morality

In our recent history conservative movements like Christian Reconstructionism or Theonomy (R. Rushdoony; G. North), the Moral Majority (Jerry Falwell), and the Christian Coalition (Ralph Reed) have advocated a return to the moral and (many) civil laws of the Bible.

1. How do you feel about legislating biblical morality in America in the twenty-first century?
2. How does our First Amendment to the Constitution influence this question?

ry.” But while the some of the colonies were decapitalizing some offenses, in England the “Ten Commandments” (i.e., a code of capital crimes) were expanded twenty-fold to about two hundred crimes which had become capital offenses.

Lectionary Loop

(for all Ten Commandments)

**Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost or
Proper 22, Year A, Exodus 20:1-4,
7-9, 12-20**

**Third Sunday in Lent, Year B,
Exodus 20:1-17**

The First Commandment

“There shall not be to you other gods contrary to my will”
 “Before Me,” or “Besides Me,” or “Against My Will”

The exact meaning of the Hebrew *‘al pānāy*, generally translated as “before besides me” or “in my face presence,” has been difficult to determine. The suggestion here is to follow an insight by Mitchell Dahood (1966: 125), who translated Psalm 19:15 as “May the words of my mouth be . . . according to your will, O Yahweh” Dahood cited Albright, Johnson, and Speiser, all of whom translated *pānîm* in some texts not as “face” (the primary meaning) but as a homograph meaning “favor, will, intention.” The latter word occurs in the opinion of these scholars in Phoenician, in Ugaritic, and in the following biblical texts (with the corresponding word italicized, a.t.)

1. Genesis 10:9 “he was a mighty hunter by the *will* of Yahweh”
2. Genesis 17:18 “Let but Ishmael thrive if you so *will* it”
3. Genesis 27:7 “that I may eat it and bless you with Yahweh’s *approval* before I die”
4. Genesis 43:33 “and as the men took their seats at his *direction*”
5. 2 Chronicles 32:2 “his *intention* was war.”

Several years later Gunther Plaut (1974: 159) concurred in his commentary on Genesis and translated:

Teaching Tips

In Walter Harrelson, *The Ten Commandments and Human Rights, Overtures in Biblical Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 192, Dr. Harrelson updated the biblical Decalogue with the following contemporary moral code:

1. Do not have more than a single ultimate allegiance.
2. Do not give ultimate loyalty to any earthly reality.
3. Do not use the power of religion to harm others.
4. Do not treat with contempt the times set aside for rest.
5. Do not treat with contempt members of the family.
6. Do not do violence against fellow human beings.
7. Do not violate the commitment of sexual love.
8. Do not claim the life or goods of others.
9. Do not damage others through misuse of human speech.
10. Do not lust after the life or goods of others.

Class Project: For each of the Ten Commandments in Sessions 2–11, a “Reflection” box should be given suggesting that the reader compare Harrelson’s
(Continued on Page 172)

6. Genesis 10:9 as “by the *grace* of the Lord;”
7. Genesis 17:18 as “Oh that Ishmael might live by Your favor”
8. Genesis 27:7 as “to eat that I may bless you, with the *Lord’s approval*, before I die”
9. Genesis 43:33 as “they were seated by his *direction*” Similarly, the ‘*al pānāy* “upon my face” in the Decalogue should be repointed and read as ‘*al pānî*.

The prohibition of Israel’s having any god other than the Creator addressed the issue of power. The root meaning of ‘*ēl* (“God”) is “power,” even when the noun is spelled as ‘*elôhîm* or as the frequently used honorific plural ‘*elôhîm*. The expression “God be with you” carried a meaning analogous to the science-fiction salutation “may the Force be with you”—with the difference being that in the former “God” is personal and masculine, whereas “the Force” is an impersonal neuter. The Islamic affirmation (which was added to the flag of Iraq in 1991), “Allahu Akbar,” meaning “God is Great,” has its parallel in Job 36:5, ‘*ēl kabbîr* “God is Great,” which was immediately modified by the phrase *kabbîr koah lēb* “Great, powerful of heart.” The modifiers “great” and “powerful” describe the word “God.”

The Will to Power

The attraction of the forbidden fruit of Eden for Eve and Adam was that by eating the fruit they would “become like God,” which was to say that they would get *power*. The temptation was not about the acquisition of knowledge or holiness; it was about the acquisition of power. The building of the Tower of Babel was about power, the power used for self-defense. But God terminated its construction because “nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them” (Gen 11:6). Israel’s attraction to the fertility cults of Canaan was not about sex per se, it was about power—the power to perpetuate life and to produce food to sustain life. Israelites were as human as everyone else. They gravitated toward winners with power. Consequently, when the gods of Israel’s neighbors won wars

(Continued from Page 172)

paraphrase (1980: 192) of that particular commandment and invite the reader to offer an alternative paraphrase for our time.

Source

See Patrick D. Miller, *The God You Have: Politics and the First Commandment* (Philadelphia: Augsburg Fortress, 2004).

Reflections

The Power Source

The attraction to power and the desire to have power are strong human instincts: e.g., the power to influence, command, subdue, dominate, and control. Power, as we know, can be abused: the damaging control and manipulation of human relationships, the tyranny of abusive misrule in unjust governments. Power can be seized or awarded. Power can often corrupt. Read Exodus 15:2; 1 Chronicles 29:12; Psalm 28:8; 73:26; Mark 10:27; 14:36.

1. How does the first commandment relate to God as the only source of power?
2. In what ways can we be empowered by submitting to God as our true source of strength? See also Acts 1:8; 4:33.
3. What can God’s power accomplish in our lives today?

for their people and provided lands that really flowed with milk and honey, many Israelites who thought Yahweh was powerless transferred their loyalty to where the *power* seemed to be, to a winner like Babylon's Queen of Heaven (Jer 44:17-19).

The first commandment addressed the deceptive deification of power which would prove to be destructive and deadly. The Creator with cosmic power had initiated a covenant with a powerless people through whom all the families on earth would be blessed. As vassals of a benevolent Lord their absolute allegiance was required. There was no need for Israel as the Creator's royal priesthood and holy nation to seek power from any force or source in nature. Having a covenant relationship with the Creator of the sun, moon, and stars, there was no need to worship any of the heavenly hosts. Even the death sentence imposed for violating this commandment was a declaration of the power of the Creator. An Israelite's death would not be determined by the deity of the underworld named *Mot* ("Death"), whom the Canaanites worshiped. Israelites would live and die according to the loving-kindness and justice of the Creator. As noted above, "God is Great" and "powerful of heart" and it was the divine will that Israel rely solely upon the Creator.

Mandate or Monotheism

DeMille's statement, cited in the Introduction to this study, that the Ten Commandments were "the Divine Code of Guidance which was given to the world" echos a sentiment shared by a number of biblical commentators, as reflected in the title of Edwin Poteat's 1953 commentary *Mandate to Humanity*. However, for the Deuteronomist, if not for Moses, the Decalogue was Yahweh's unique present to Israel, not a gift to the nations nor a mandate for humanity. The Deuteronomist presented God and Moses from an ethnocentric viewpoint. According to Genesis 12, Yahweh made a covenant with Abraham promising that through him and his seed *all* the families of the earth would be blessed. But from the perspective of the Deuteronomist, Abraham's descendants through Ishmael and Esau were excluded from the covenant. The "thou" of

Sources

- Dahood, Mitchell, "Psalms 1-50," vol. 16, *Anchor Bible* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday), 1966.
Plaut, W. Gunther, "Genesis," in *The Torah: A Modern Commentary* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations), 1974.

Teaching Tips

The Queen of Heaven

Have members of the class read from Jeremiah 44:1-10, 15-18. Then have some members of the class role-play the men and women who worshiped the Queen of Heaven because she was a winner, whereas the God of Israel was a loser, incapable of saving his people from their enemies. Another member of the class can role-play Jeremiah as he attempts to make it clear that the people of Israel have violated the first commandment and the defeat of Judah and Israel is a punishment from God for their sin, not a sign of Yahweh's weakness.

Reflections

Ronald E. Clements (*NISB*, 252) stated that "The first commandment identified God as Israel's deliverer and *reveals* the basis of the special relationship that made this nation the means of a revelation given for all humankind. The commandments are thereby shown as *universally relevant* (italics are mine)." Discuss when and how the Decalogue became universal. Since Israelites did not evangelize, how could the first commandment have been made universal? See, e.g., Isaiah 42:1-4, 6; 49:6.

the Decalogue was the same as the “thou” of the *Shema*: “Hear, O Israel, Yahweh is our God, Yahweh alone, and thou [Israel] shalt love Yahweh *thy* God . . .” (Deut 6:5, a.t.). The Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32 included a stanza affirming emphatically, “When the Most High apportioned the nations, when he divided humankind, he fixed the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God; for Yahweh’s portion is God’s people, Jacob his allotted heritage” (32:8-9, a.t.). The RSV and NRSV follow the texts of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew) which read here *’el* “God” (“sons of God”) instead of *yisrā’el* “Israel,” which appears in the KJV and NIV (“sons of Israel”).

The gods which Yahweh assigned for *non-Israelites* to worship were designated in Deuteronomy 4:19, in a warning to Israel (addressed with the singular “you” as in the Decalogue and the *Shema*): “And when you [Israel] look up to the heavens and see the sun, the moon, and the stars, all the host of heaven, do not be led astray and bow down to them and serve them which Yahweh your God has allotted to all the peoples everywhere under heaven.” Thus, the Deuteronomist understood that Yahweh through Moses had ordained *monolatry* (i.e., the worship of only one god) for Israel, not a *monotheism* for the entire world. Israel’s monolatry would require the worship of the Creator Yahweh only; but all *other people* would have to worship something from the creation—the sun or moon or an astral deity assigned to each nation by Yahweh. Thus, while polytheism and henotheism were prohibited for Israel, they were viewed as legitimate religious options to be tolerated *outside* of Israel. See Ephesians 2:11-12, “Remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh . . . were at that time . . . separated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenant of promise, having no hope and without God (*atheoi*, “atheist” or “God rejected”) in the world.”

Absent from Deuteronomy was any declaration of absolute monotheism (only one god exists) as found in Isaiah 45:5-7, “I am Yahweh, and there is no other; besides me there is no God . . . I am Yahweh and there

Teaching Tips

God and the World

Have members of the class read Deut 4:9-19 and Ephesians 2:11-22, and then discuss the different theological affirmations found in these texts in light of John 3:16, “God so loved the world”

is no other. I form light and create darkness, I make peace and I create evil—I Yahweh, do all these things.” For example, the “greatest” commandment in Deuteronomy 6:4, “Hear, O Israel, Yahweh is our God, Yahweh alone . . . ” is not really an affirmation of monotheism but of monolatry, for the phrase *Yahweh ’ehad* cannot mean “Yahweh One.” Proper names in Hebrew cannot be modified by numerals; therefore it must mean “Yahweh alone” or “Yahweh only” (not the other gods). The final demise of polytheism, henotheism, and monolatry was envisioned by the psalmist, who, with Deuteronomy 32:8 in mind, penned Psalm 82. In eight verses the psalmist presented the reader with a scene of heaven’s Supreme Court when God, as the Chief Justice, indicted *the other gods* for dereliction of duty in adjudicating justice for the poor in their respective jurisdictions. The gods were convicted and sentenced to death (“You are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you, But you shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes”). With the gods of the nations doomed to death, the psalm closed with a spectator in heaven’s courtroom pleading with the Chief Justice: “Rise up, O God, judge the earth for all the nations belong to you!” Here, in the last verse of Psalm 82 is both monotheism and universalism. But such a view of God will not be found in the Decalogue of Exodus 20 or Deuteronomy 5.

The Penalty for Violating the First Commandment

Reinforcing this commandment as absolute, unconditional law for Israel is the penalty for breaking it.

- “Whoever sacrifices to any god, save to Yahweh only, shall be utterly destroyed”(Exod 22:20)
- “If a prophet arises among you . . . and if he says, ‘Let us go after other gods . . . and let us worship them,’ . . . that prophet . . . shall be put to death” (Deut 13:1-5, a.t.)
- “If your brother . . . or your son, or your daughter, or your wife . . . or your friend who is as your own soul entices you secretly, saying, ‘let us go and worship other gods,’ . . . you shall kill him, your hand shall be the first against him to put him to

Teaching Tips

Assembly of the Gods

Prepare a mini-dramatization of Psalm 82, with a class member taking the role of the Chief Justice in heaven’s Supreme Court, and other class members, except one, playing the role of the “gods of the nations” who will be charged with dereliction of duty. The one person not role playing a “god of the nations” will be the sole witness to the trial in heaven’s court, who rises at the end of the trial and shouts out the words of Psalm 82:8. The dramatic elements of the psalm include: 82:1 sets the stage; 82:2 is the indictment against the gods; 82:3-4 is court Exhibit A, a job description for the gods, requiring them to take care of the poor and needy in their respective domains; 82:5 is court Exhibit B, a status report on the condition of the poor and needy in the various jurisdictions; 82:6-7 is the death sentence for the gods for their injustice to the poor and needy. Thus, monotheism is affirmed with the death of the gods; and, with the shout from the courtroom spectator (82:8), universalism is affirmed.

death . . . you shall stone him to death with stones”
(Deut 13:6-10)

- “But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die” (Deut 18:20, RSV).

The Second Commandment

“You shall not make for yourself a graven image . . .”
 Exodus 20:4; Deuteronomy 5:8
 (cf. Deuteronomy 27:15)

Cain and Graven Images

This prohibition against the crafting of graven images by Israelites may well be grounded in the story about Cain’s killing Abel. The name Cain means “smith,” with the Hebrew word *qāyin* being the cognate of the Arabic *qain* “smith.” In Genesis 4:2 Cain was identified as the “one working the land,” which, in light of his name, no doubt referred to mining for metals. By contrast, the name Abel means either (1) a “skilled shepherd,” being the cognate of the Arabic *’abil*, which Lane (1863:8) defined as being “skilled in the good management of camels and of sheep or goats,” or (2) “farmer,” with the name *Hebel* being a by-form of *yēbûl* “producer of the soil.”

For Cain the “fruit of the land” mentioned in Genesis 4:3 would have been *minerals or metals*, rather than grain or grapes. For Abel the “fruit of the ground” would have been either the fruit of the *field or flock*. Consequently, the present which Cain labored over for some time before offering it to Yahweh would have been something of *metal* from the “fruit of the soil,” perhaps some sort of image or engraving. Abel, on the other hand, offered to Yahweh “from the firstborn of his flock.” Unfortunately for Abel, Cain’s gift was rejected by Yahweh, while Abel’s lambs were accepted. Depressed, jealous, and angry over God’s rejection of his gift, Cain killed Abel. As a consequence, he was cursed by God and told that the land would no longer

Study Bible

For other interpretations see notes on Genesis 4 and “Excursus: Sibling Rivalry in Genesis,” in *NISB*, 13.

yield its *koah* “power” to him. Although most exegetes interpret this “power” to refer to “produce” (fruit and vegetables) it was more likely a reference to *metals* and *minerals*. The story about Cain and Abel reflects the tensions in antiquity between sedentary urban craftsmen on the one hand and rustic agrarians or pastoral Bedouins on the other hand. For the purpose of interpreting the second of the Ten Commandments, the Cain and Abel story makes it quite clear that Yahweh’s dislike of graven images went way back in legend and tradition—his disdain of images did not begin with golden calf at Sinai (Exod 32).

The Image that God Favors

Once the meaning of the name “Yahweh” comes into focus, the contempt of Yahweh for graven images becomes transparent. As we will see in the next session, the word “Yahweh” denotes the English word “Creator.” Nothing in creation—with one exception—can do justice to the Creator. The earth’s most pure gold and silver are but paltry products by which to represent the Creator of the cosmos (Exod 20:23; Lev 19:4; Deut 27:15). Freedman (2000: 35-36), after quoting Isaiah 40:18-25 as a commentary on the Second Commandment, stated:

Nothing of human invention could ever be adequate to capture all that Yahweh is. The one who has made everything and sits as king over the whole earth and its inhabitants could never be comprehended by the human mind, let alone constructed into an image . . . How could a mere creature ever hope to accurately represent the Creator?

Also, because no one had ever seen Yahweh, it was impossible for any image made by mortals to reflect the truth about the eternal. It is true that Numbers 12:8 quoted Yahweh as saying with reference to Moses, “With him I speak face to face—clearly, not in riddles; and he beholds the form of Yahweh.” But a commentary on this verse in Exodus 33:20-23, quoted Yahweh as having said, “You [Moses] cannot see my face; for man shall not see me and live. . . . you will see my

Teaching Tip

The Image that God Loves

Bring several small mirrors to the classroom and pass them around the class with this instruction: “Take a good look at the image which God made and God loves.” Graven images of God are forbidden, but God is so pleased with the men and women, the boys and girls, created as images of the divine that there are billions of them in production.

Reflections

In God’s Image

1. What does it mean to be created in God’s image?
2. How does embracing this conviction affect your understanding of God, your relationship with others, and yourself?

back; but my face will not be seen.” Thus, Moses was granted the same courtesy which Yahweh had earlier extended to Hagar, after which she called Yahweh *’el rō’î*, “the seeing God,” and confessed, “Here have I seen the hinder parts of him that seeth me.” (Douay Rheims, 1899, Gen 16:13). But neither Hagar nor Moses provided a description of the “back” of God which could have benefited artisans or artists. In the words of John 4:24, “God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

The one image in *creation* which can do justice to the *Creator* is the one image made by the *Creator*. As stated in Genesis 1:26, “God said, ‘Let us make humankind (*’ādām*) in our image, after our likeness’ . . .” In the covenant with Noah the sacredness of human beings (*’ādām*) as those in God’s image was reiterated, “Whoever sheds the blood of *’ādām* by *’ādām* his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God he made *’ādām*” (Gen 9:6). As Freedman noted (2000: 36), “Any attempt to make another image of God, especially from an inanimate object such as wood or metal, is to degrade both God and humankind.” Poteat (1953) astutely observed, “Because man is made in God’s image, he thinks man is as worthy of worship as God. This is image worship on its subtlest . . . and its most disappointing level.”

A Jealous God or a Creator God

The first words of the prologue, “I am Yahweh your God,” are repeated in the second commandment in Exodus 20:5 and Deuteronomy 5:9, where they are followed by the title *’l qn’*, which was read as *’ēl qannā* “a jealous God” (in most translations). It is stated that Yahweh claimed this title because, even though he showed steadfast love to thousands of those who loved him (cf. Exod 34:7a; Neh 9:17, 31; Jon 4:2; and Ps 108:4), he visited the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation of them that hated him (cf. Exod 34:6-7b; Num 14:18; and Jer 32:18). However, the title *’l qn’* could *also* be read as *’ēl qōnē* “creator God,” with the participle *qōnē* being a variant spelling of *qōnēh* “creator,” as in “El Elyon, creator of heaven and earth” (Gen 14:19, 22, a.t.). The verb *qānāh* “to create” is found in Proverbs 8:22, as

Teaching Tips

Creator of Heaven and Earth

Have class members look up and read the following texts on God the Creator, Genesis 1:1-3, 26-27; 2:4-7; Exodus 20:11; Nehemiah 9:6; Job 12:9; 26:7; Psalms 102:25; 104:5-6; Isaiah 40:28; 45:12; 48:13; Acts 4:24; 14:15; 17:24; John 1:1-3; Hebrew 11:3.

Discuss:

1. Why is it important to understand God as the Creator of heaven and earth?
2. How does this understanding distinguish God from creation?
3. Is it wrong to exalt creation above its Creator?
4. Why is the constructing of images and idols symbolic of this confusion between creation and its Creator?

Teaching Tips

God is Great and Good

Before dealing with the meaning of the Hebrew words for “god/God” find out how the class members define the English word “god/God.” For the etymology of the English word “God” check online at <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06608x.htm> and share the information with the class (preferably as a printed handout). Note how grace before meals taught to children, “God is great, God is good . . .” begins with an etymologically correct definition of the noun “God.”

translated in the Septuagint and many contemporary English translations (e.g., RSV, NRSV, NJB, NIV, NLT). David Freedman proposed (1986: 515) that the phrase *yahweh qānnā šemû* of Exodus 34:14a, means “He creates zeal in his name,” and the *’ēl qānnā hû* of Exodus 34:14b means “he is a zealous God.” But in Exodus 34:10, the verb *nibrē* “they had been created (v. 10b)” and the phrase *ma’ seh yēhowāh* “the work of Yahweh (v. 10d)” suggests that the repeated “jealous” *qānnā* in our verse 14 could well have been the by-form of *qānāh* “to create” (as in Gen 14:19, 22; Prov 8:22) permitting the translation in Exodus 34:14 “Yahweh Creator is his name” and “Yahweh is a creator God.” Precisely because Israelites have the *Creator* as their God they must not worship any *thing* which was *created*, be it astral or earthly.

Jeremiah appears to have had both definitions of *’l qn’* in focus when he prayed (32:18-19), “Ah, my Lord Yahweh, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great *na dby* your outstretched arm” (which reflects the idea of *’ēl qānnā* creator God”), and then followed the affirmation with, “You requite the guilt of the fathers to their children after them” (which reflects the idea of *’el qānnā*, “a jealous God”). But, surprisingly, Jeremiah continued, “O great and mighty God whose name is Yahweh Sabaoth, great in counsel and mighty in deed; whose eyes are open to all the ways of mortals, *rewarding all according to their ways and according to the fruit of their doings.*” These italicized words reinforce Jeremiah’s prediction found in 31:29-30, “In those days they shall no longer say: ‘The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.’ But all shall die for their own sins; the teeth of everyone who eats sour grapes shall be set on edge.”

Ezekiel was even more emphatic in challenging the statements in Exodus 20:5b and Deuteronomy 5:9b that Yahweh “visited the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation” of them that hated him. However, he did not challenge Moses or the Decalogue directly. Rather, like Jeremiah, he challenged the veracity of the well-known

Study Bible

See Excursus: The Character of Israel’s God,” *NISB*, 134-35. It calls attention to Numbers 14:18, Nehemiah 9:17, 31; Psalms 103:8; Jonah 4:2-3; Nahum 1:2-3; 2 Esdra 7:132-140; and 8:19-36.

proverb that, “The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge” (Ezek 18:2). The justice of Yahweh, as expressed in Exodus 20:5b and Deuteronomy 5:9b, led many Israelites to assert, “the way of the Lord is not just!” (Ezek 18:25). As a result, thirty verses in Ezekiel 18—cited as a direct quotation of Yahweh—affirm emphatically, “The soul that sins shall die;” “the righteous shall surely live;” “the son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son” (18:4, 9, 20).

It is most unlikely that Yahweh changed his mind and message sometime between the time of Moses and the time of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. It is more likely that the ambiguous *’l qn’* in Exodus 20:5 and Deuteronomy 5:9 originally meant “a creating God” but was mistakenly read as *’ēl qannā’*, “a jealous God.” Once the misinterpretation of the *’l qn’* occurred, an explanatory gloss was added to explain why Yahweh became known as a “jealous God.” Subsequently, both Jeremiah and Ezekiel presented Yahweh as correcting the error in perfectly clear statements about the workings of Yahweh’s justice and love of life. Thus, in disagreement with Exodus 20:5b and Deuteronomy 5:9b, Yahweh is quoted by Ezekiel as saying, “Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, . . . so turn and live!” (Ezek 18:32). For Ezekiel this was the true “oracle of my Lord Yahweh,” not Exodus 20:5b or Deuteronomy 5:9b.

The Penalty for Violating the Second Commandment

“If there is found among you . . . a man or woman who . . . has gone and served other gods and worshiped them, or the sun or the moon or any of the host of heaven, which I have forbidden, . . . you shall stone that man or woman to death with stones . . . the hand of the witnesses shall be first against him to put him to death” (Deut 17:2, RSV).

- A death sentence for the idolater lies behind (1) “I will destroy your high places, and cut down your sun-images, and cast your dead bodies upon the bodies of your idols” (Lev 26:30, RSV) and (2) “I

Teaching Tips

Sins of the Fathers

In light of the reality of HIV- and drug-infected babies, discuss the tension between Exodus 20:5b and Deuteronomy 5:9b, on the one hand, and Jeremiah 31:29 and Ezekiel 18, on the other hand. What does it mean to be free from the sins of your parents?

will lay the corpses of the people of Israel in front of their idols; and I will scatter your bones around your altars . . . And you shall know that I am Yahweh when their slain lie among their idols around their altars” (Ezek 6:5 and 6:13).

The Third Commandment

“You shall not take the name of Yahweh your God in vain”

To Swear or Not to Swear

A second imperative must be read in conjunction with this commandment, namely, Deuteronomy 6:13, “You shall fear Yahweh your God; you shall serve him, and swear by his name.” Thus, swearing by Yahweh’s name is a mandate for Israelites; but there was to be no *false* swearing, as Leviticus 19:12 makes perfectly clear, “And you shall not swear falsely (*la āqer*) by my name, profaning the name of your God: I am Yahweh.” The name “Yahweh” occurs in Genesis over one-hundred-twenty-five times, from the time of Cain and Abel down to the death of Joseph. It is therefore surprising to read in Exodus 6:2-3 (a.t.), “I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as *ēl šadday* ‘God Almighty,’ but by my name Yahweh I did not make myself known to them.” It is all the more surprising because *El Shaddai* appears only six times in Genesis. The disparity disappears once (1) the disjunctive “but” is read as the conjunctive “and,” and (2) the negative particle *lo* “not” is read as the emphatic affirmative *lu* “indeed.” Thus, by simply changing one vowel, Genesis 6:3 can be read as “I appeared . . . as God Almighty *and* by my name Yahweh I did *indeed* make myself known.” The noun *sāw* “vain, empty” used in this commandment was used in conjunction with the following words:

- *berak* “to bless” with the antithetical meaning “to curse,” when used in proximity to the name

Teaching Tips

Names Have Their Meanings

Because names have meanings, ask class members to tell what their names mean and for those who do not know, advise them of the internet site <http://www.behindthename.com/>. After discussing personal names, see what the class members know already about the meaning of Jehovah, Yahweh, Joshua, Jesus. Knowing the meaning of the divine name is essential if one is to honestly swear by that name as required in Deuteronomy 6:13. Otherwise, the swearing by the very name of God is meaningless and is one form of “taking the name of God in vain.” Clarify the meaning of the word “fear” in Deuteronomy 6:13, “You shall fear Yahweh your God; you shall serve him, and swear by his name.” The Hebrew word for “fear” is *ya’rē* (YAH-RAY) and has both positive and negative connotations, like the English word “awe” (with the positive “awesome” and the negative “awe-full,” “awful”) and the Latin *terrere* which gives us the English positive “terrific” and the negative “terrible.” Clarify for the class that the command to “fear God” does

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or person of God, as in Job 1:5, 11; 2:5, 9; Psalms 10:3, and 1 Kings 21:10, 13.

- *nāʾaš*, “to blaspheme,” which appears in 2 Samuel 12:14, “you [David] have really blasphemed Yahweh”; Isaiah 52:5, “their masters howl in triumph, declares Yahweh, and my name is blasphemed continually every day”; Ezekiel 35:12, “I, Yahweh, have heard all the blasphemies which you have uttered against the mountains of Israel”; Nehemiah 9:18 “even when they made for themselves a molten calf . . . and committed great blasphemies”; Nehemiah 9:26, “. . . they killed your prophets . . . and committed great blasphemies”; and Psalms 74:10, “Will the enemy blaspheme Your name forever?”
- *qālal*, which appears in Exodus 22:28, “Do not blaspheme God or curse the ruler of your people” (NIB); Leviticus 24:15, “Those who blaspheme God will suffer the consequences of their guilt and be punished” (NLT); 1 Samuel 3:13 “. . . because his [Eli’s] sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them” (RSV, NRSV).
- *nāqab*, “to blaspheme,” which occurs only in Leviticus 24:10-17, which tells of an Egypto-Israelite who blasphemed and cursed “the Name,” and as a result was stoned to death.

In Leviticus 24:10-17, the name “Yahweh” does not appear, only the noun with the definite article, *haššēm* “the Name.” This substitute for *ʾādōnāy* is consistently used by Jews so as not to profane the ineffable name. The care taken to refrain from pronouncing the name resulted in the meaning and pronunciation of the name “Yahweh” being forgotten—with “Yahweh,” meaning “Creator” (see below), being a scholarly reconstruction. Many pious Jews extend their reverence for the holy name to include the noun “God” by spelling it as “G-d.”

Sura 2:224-225 in the *Quran* also provides a commentary on this commandment. It reads,

Use not Allah’s name for your vain oaths, making them an excuse for refraining from doing

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not mean “to be terrified by an awful God,” but to “hold God in awe,” for God is “*terrific/awesome*.”

Teaching Tips

“I Swear to God”

Highlight for the class participants the ways in which

1. A *profession* of faith in Jesus Christ or a *confirmation* of one’s faith in Jesus Christ parallels the practice in ancient Israel of “swearing by the name of Yahweh.”
2. A denial of the divine, analogous to Peter’s denial of Jesus (Matt 26:69-75), is to “take the name of God in vain.”

good and working righteous and promoting public welfare. . . . Allah will not call you to account for that which is unintentional in your oaths, but he will call you to account for the evil to which you have deliberately assented.

In the context of the current American religio-political debate much more is involved than just the prohibition against the profane use of divine names and nouns. In an article on the Pledge of Allegiance, (*Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 28, 2004), Jane Eisner called attention to the prevalent “ceremonial deism” by which some argue that the phrase “one nation under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance is “so conventional and uncontroversial as to be constitutional,” leading some Christian and Jewish clergy to file a legal brief “contending if *under God* isn’t to be taken seriously, ‘then every day, government asks millions of school-children to take the name of the Lord in vain.’”

Yahweh as the Creator

Edgar Park (1962: 980) stated in his exposition of Exodus 20:2, “The LORD does not at the moment name himself as ‘Creator of the universe,’ ‘Lord of the whole world,’ but as the liberator of Israel from the foreign yoke.” However, the *creative* power of God is actually reflected in the name *Yahweh*. Before *Yahweh* became an ineffable name it was pronounced and spelled in a number of different ways. The early church fathers pronounced it as *Iaô* or *Iao* or *Yahô*, all of which point to the holy trigrammaton *YHW* used in personal names like *Yêhônâtân* or *Yônâtân* for Jonathan, meaning “Yahweh has given.” In Greek sources it was pronounced as *Iabe* or *Iae* or *Iaôue* or *Iaôuai*, all of which reflect the more familiar tetragrammaton *YHWH* and point to its original pronunciation as the verb *yahweh* “he caused to be, he caused to exist.”

David Freedman (1986: 500, 513) in agreement with his mentor, William F. Albright, stated, “*yahweh* must be causative The name *yahweh* must therefore be a hiphil [causative]. Although the causative of *hwy* is otherwise unknown in Northwest Semitic it seems to be attested in the name of the God of Israel.”

Source

David, Freedman N., M. P. O’Connor, and H. Ringgren, 1986. “YHWH” in *The Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans) 5: 500-521.

Reflections

What’s in a Name?

What’s in a name? We have brand names that sell products (e.g., Pepsi Cola, RCA, Cadillac). We have famous names that obtain some popular support (e.g., Disney, Buffalo Bills, major Hollywood films). Certain names convey authority (e.g., President of U. S., the Vatican). Emissaries and ambassadors make negotiations and agreements “in the name of” the leader or official whom they represent. The name of God tells us who God is and what God does for us. It also conveys divine authority, prestige, and power. God’s name is to be revered and respected by those who serve God. God/God’s name is honored and revered in thought, word and deed, in prayer, divine worship, and service to others (Mark 12:29-31). See *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1994) 575-79; *An Explanation of Luther’s Catechism*, ed., J. Stump, 2nd rev ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1960) 37-40; *The Westminster Shorter Catechism*, 2nd ed., G. I. Williamson (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R Publishing Co., 2003), Questions 53-56.

Freedman also suggested (1986: 515-516) that the statement *'ehyeh 'ăšer 'ehyeh*, “I am who I am,” in Exodus 3:14 could be read as a causative meaning “I create whatever I create,” to be interpreted as “I am the creator par excellence.” (Shifting from “I am” to “I create” requires the verb *'hyh* to be read as *'ahyeh* rather than *'ehyeh*, with the *a* vowel in the first syllable being needed to make it a causative form.) So as not to profane the holy name of God, the Jewish scribes deliberately mispronounced and misspelled the name of Yahweh by combining the consonants *YHWH* with either the vowels of the substitute title *'ădōnāy* “my Lords” (an honorific plural) or the vowels of *'ēlōhîm* “God” (an honorific plural). Similarly, by vocalizing *'hyh šr 'hyh*, as *'ehyeh 'ăšer 'ehyeh*, meaning “I am who I am,” rather than as *'ahyeh 'ăšer 'ahyeh*, meaning “I create what I create,” the scribes out of piety also deliberately mispronounced the phrase and thereby obscured its true meaning.

The evidence in support of reading *YHWH* as “Creator” and *'HYH* as “I create” is compelling. Most of the six thousand-plus occurrences in the Bible of the verb-based name *Yahweh* could be paraphrased in English by using the noun *Creator*. Consequently, the prologue to the Decalogue could be read as “I, the Creator, am your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.” Israel would be the holy people of the Creator alone—upon pain of death.

The Penalty for Violating the Third Commandment

“He who blasphemes the name of Yahweh shall be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him. The sojourner as well as the native, when he blasphemes the name, shall be put to death” (Lev 24:16).

The Fourth Commandment

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy . . .
[Yahweh] rested the seventh day, therefore
Yahweh blessed the Sabbath . . .”

Exodus 20:8

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy . . .
you shall remember that you were a servant in the land
of Egypt . . . and Yahweh your God brought you out
from there”

Deuteronomy 5:12

According to Deuteronomy 5:15, Yahweh commanded the observance of the Sabbath because of the Exodus, saying in his pronouncement, “Remember that you were once a slave in Egypt, and that Yahweh your God brought you out of there with mighty hand and outstretched arm; this is why Yahweh your God has commanded you to keep the Sabbath day (a.t.)” However, some of the Israelite tribes had never gone down to Egypt. The tribes which became enslaved in Egypt included the Joseph tribes, the Levites, and perhaps Simeon. The other tribes, with Judah being the strongest and largest, were located in the Negeb and the territory of the Kenites; and the concubine tribes (Dan and Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun) evidently remained in the highlands of the north and central hill country. So with about half of the tribes having never been enslaved in Egypt, the reason for observing the Sabbath, as given in Deuteronomy, did not reflect the historical reality of those tribes. In the attempt to give a reason for the Sabbath observance that would embrace all tribal histories,

Teaching Tips

Sabbath or Sunday?

Provide information for a discussion about the debate among some Christians as to the legitimacy of the shift from the Saturday “Sabbath” to the “Lord’s Day” on Sunday. The following Internet links provide the opinions of some who wrestled with the issue:

<http://www.megspace.com/religion/museltof/sabbath.html>

<http://www.religioustolerance.org/sabbath.htm>

Discuss how the issue of keeping the “Sabbath” or “Lord’s Day” holy (i.e., requiring a day of rest for everyone) is related to the issue of eliminating sweatshops around the world. Do Christians who rigorously observe a Sabbath (be it a Saturday or Sunday), nevertheless violate the intent of the fourth commandment when they purchase products crafted the sweatshops which are then sold in boutiques? Raise this question in class, “Is the particular day of rest important or is the rest itself what is important?”

the Exodus 20 Decalogue grounded the Sabbath commandment in the creation story.

Genesis 2:2a can be translated as “And God was *fatigued* on the seventh day [from] his work which he had done (a.t.).” This weariness of God is noted in Exodus 31:17, which speaks of God’s taking a breather: “Yahweh made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he stopped and refreshed himself.” The theme of fatigue among the gods is dominant in the *Atra-Hasis* creation myth, which includes the following lines (I:1-4; III:162-163) as translated by Lambert and Millard (1969:43, 49):

When the gods like men
Bore the work and suffered the toil—
The toil of the gods was great,
The work was heavy, the distress was much—
. . . they suffered the work day and night
. . . Excessive [toil] has killed us;
Our work [was heavy], the distress much.

The threat of a revolt by the work-wearied lesser gods against the high gods of leisure eventuated in the creation of the *lulu*, “human beings,” whose labor would permit all the gods to stop work and rest. The Genesis and Babylonian traditions were in agreement that the *work* of God/gods led to divine *fatigue*, followed by divine decision(s) to give *rest* to the weary. In the myth only the gods were granted rest. But in Exodus 20 not only had God rested, but also those created in his image were gifted with a Sabbath rest, precluding the exploitation through endless labor of anyone in Israel.

A key phrase in the Exodus account is “Yahweh blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy,” which led Weinfeld (1991: 302-303) to point out that in Exodus 20 “the Sabbath belongs to the *divine* sphere and not originally a social-humanistic institution as the Deuteronomic version of the Decalogue seems to present it (Deut 5:15).” Weinfeld further noted

The day of the Sabbath is marked not only by cessation of work but by its sacred character: “to keep the Sabbath holy” means to preserve its dis-

Source

W. G. Lambert and A. R. Millard, *Atra-Hasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969).

Teaching Tips

“True Blue” Laws

The ambiguity of language, addressed already in previous sessions, is well illustrated by the English adjective “blue” (as used in the term “Blue Laws”) which can mean (1) having the color of the clear sky or the deep sea, (2) livid (of skin), (3) sad and gloomy; depressed or depressing, (4) balefully murky, (5) puritanical, rigorous, (6) wearing blue garments (Union soliders) and (6) indecent; risqué, suggestive. Moreover, the terms “blue blood,” “blue nose,” “blue beard,” and “blue devils” cannot be taken literally. The observance of the Sabbath in America brings into focus the “blue laws.” Ask the class members to explain why such laws were modified by the word “blue.” If there is no knowledge of why, refer to the following internet sites

<http://www.snopes.com/language/colors/bluelaws.htm>

<http://www.museumofhoaxes.com/bluelaws.html>

Discuss the history and current status of the blue laws in your local community. The following internet links cover recent court decisions:

<http://www.csmonitor.com/2003/1205/p01s02-usju.html>

<http://www.eckhausolson.com/bluelaws4.htm>

inctive features by positive actions, such as visiting holy places (Ezek 46:3; Isa 66:23), consulting the prophet (2 Kings 4:23), and performing special sacrificial and ceremonial rites (Lev 24:8-9; Num 28:9-10; 2 Kings 11:9).

Jesus' statement, "the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27), suggests that Jesus followed the Deuteronomic version of the Decalogue, giving priority to the social-humanistic institution of the Sabbath.

The Penalty for Violating the Fourth Commandment

- "You shall keep the Sabbath, because it is holy for you; every one who profanes it shall be put to death; whoever does any work on it, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. . . . whosoever does any work on the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death" (Exod 31:14-16,)
- "Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day you shall have a holy Sabbath of solemn rest to Yahweh; whoever does any work on it shall be put to death" (Exod 35:2).

Sources

Radical Kingdom Ethics?

On the reversal of human values and conventions with the dawning of God's reign proclaimed by Jesus, see: N. Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976) 54-206; M. Hengel, *The Charismatic Leader and His Followers* (New York: Crossroad, 1981) 13; G. Theissen and A. Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide*. Trans. J. Bowden (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998). See also "Eschatology of the NT," *IDBS*, 273.

The Fifth Commandment

“Honor your father and your mother”

Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16 (cf. Deut 27:16)

Honor or Hate?

For many Christians the statement by Jesus (Mark 2:27) about the Sabbath has provided the key for the command’s proper interpretation. By contrast, one statement by Jesus about child-parent and family relationships appears to turn the fifth commandment upside down. According to Luke 14:26 Jesus said, “If any one comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.” According to Moses, God said “Honor!” but, according to Luke, Jesus said “Hate!” Many Christians simply ignore Luke 14:26, preferring to live by Matthew’s agreeable version, “Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me (Matt 10:37).” But others, believing that the kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus would require a complete reversal of human values (Matt 5:39-41; Mark 8:35; 10:23, 25; Luke 9:60; 14:11, 26; 16:13) set the teachings of Jesus against Moses (e.g., “You have heard it said [by Moses] ‘but I say to you that’” Matt 5:21-41).

The clarity of the fifth commandment, coupled with a biblical litany of love which is traceable *from* Leviticus 19:17 to “love your kinfolk” (and its quotations in Matt 19:19, 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27; Rom 13:9; and James 2:8) *through* 1 Corinthians 13:13, “the greatest of these is love,” and *culminating* in 1 John 4:21, “this commandment

Teaching Tips

Love and Hate

Have members of the class create “A Litany of Love” by reading the following texts dealing with the commandments to love one another, including kith and kin:

Leviticus 19:17-18 *

Matthew 19:19; 22:39*

Mark 12:31*

Luke 10:27*

Romans 13:9*

James 2:8*

Leviticus 19:34*

Matthew 5:44*

Luke 6:35*

John 13:34-35*

John 15:12-13, 17*

Romans 13:10*

1 John 3:11-4:21*

1 Corinthians 13:13.*

After reading each of these Scriptures—marked with the asterisk—the teacher will interject the reading of Luke 14:26, which calls for would-be disciples of Jesus “to hate themselves and their families.” (See also Jesus and the sword in Matt 10:34; 26:51-52). Following this litany, solicit the opinions of the class members about the apparent contradiction between Luke 14:26 (cf.) and the fifth commandment and the Scriptures read as a litany of love.

we have from him, that he who loves God should love his brother also,” makes the plain meaning of Luke 14:26 questionable.

A misreading of just one consonant or vowel could have created this disparity about *honoring* or *hating* one’s parents. Luke may have used Hebrew and Aramaic sources when writing his Gospel (sources which would have had no vowel signs or vowel points). If so, the Hebrew word *l’* could have been read as either *lō’* “not” or as *lu’* “truly.” Thus, the phrase in Hebrew or Aramaic could have meant “if you *truly* hate . . .” rather than “if you do *not* hate . . .” Moreover, Hebrew spelling in Jesus’s day did not distinguish the *s* sound from the *sh* sound. A verb spelled *snh* or *sn’* could have been read either as *śānē’* “to hate” or as *śānāh’*, “to forsake” or *śānā’* “to give one his rightful due.” The question then becomes, did Luke’s source mean (1) “if you do not forsake” or (2) “if you do not hate,” or (3) “if you do not do right?” The disparity between the Decalogue’s demand and Jesus’ command might be explained by the ambiguities of Hebrew and Aramaic spelling.

Another position regards the meaning of the Greek *miseo* (“hate”) in Luke 14:26 to mean, “to be disinclined to” or “to disregard” in contrast to showing preferential treatment (e.g., Matt 6:24; Luke 16:13; John 12:25; Rom 9:13) rather than “to hate” or “detest” (Matt 5:43; 24:10; Luke 1:71; 6:22, 27; 19:14; John 15:18-19, 23-25; Rev 17:16; *BDAG* 652-53).

In Hebrew the verb *kābēd* “to honor” comes from the stem meaning “to be heavy, weighty, serious.” Its Arabic cognate includes the idea of “struggling, contending with difficulties or troubles.” In a healthy, functional family filial piety would naturally be expressed by *kābōd* “respect and honor” being given by children to parents. But in dysfunctional families where child abuse is systemic—with the World Health Organization estimating that millions of children in the world today are abused—the *kābōd* “honor” must shift its meaning to “difficulty, distress, affliction, trouble,” like its Arabic cognate *kabad* (Lane 1885: 2584). Dysfunctional, HIV-infected, and drug addicted parents *must be taken seriously*, if not honorably. In the words

Sources

On *miseo* “hate” relating to Luke 14:26, see W. F. Bauer, F. W. Danker, et al. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000) 652–53. The Coptic *Gospel of Thomas*, Sayings 55, 101, also reflect the strong language of *miseo* “hate” in Luke 14:26. See also *NIB* 9:292.

of Poteat (1953: 141), “One must take one’s father and mother seriously even if they are altogether dishonorable. It is quite possible that the most valuable lessons for our mature guidance are to be found as much in the failures and vices of our parents as in their success and virtues.”

In Ephesians 6:1-4, Paul recognized that the fifth commandment cuts both ways and added the admonition, “Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.” Wisdom literature provided good advice on how, in a healthy, functional family, to honor one’s parents, including

Proverbs 1:8 “Listen, my son, to your father’s instruction and do not forsake your mother’s teaching.”

Proverbs 19:26 “He who robs his father and drives out his mother is a son who brings shame and disgrace.”

Proverbs 23:22 “Listen to your father, who gave you life, and do not despise your mother when she is old.”

Sirach 3:1-16 is an extended commentary on Exodus 20:12 and Deuteronomy 5:16, including the promise in 3:3 that “those who honor their father atone for sins” (cf., Proverbs 16:6). The admonition in Sirach 3:12, “O son, help your father in his old age” is also found in the *Quran* (Sura 17:23-25):

The Lord has commanded that ye worship none but Him and has enjoined benevolence towards parents. Should either or both of them attain old age in thy lifetime, never say ‘Ugh’ to them or chide them, but always speak gently to them. Be humbly tender with them and pray: ‘Lord have mercy on them, even as they nurtured me when I was little’ Render to the kinsman his due and to the needy and the wayfarer.

The Penalty for Violating the fifth commandment

- “Whoever strikes his father or his mother shall be put to death (Exod 21:15)
- “Whoever curses his father or his mother shall be put to death (Exod 21:17)

- “All who curse father or mother shall be put to death; having cursed father or mother, their blood is upon them (Lev 20:9)
- “Cursed be anyone who dishonors father or mother.” All the people shall say, “Amen!” (Deut 27:16).

The Sixth Commandment

“You shall not murder”

Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17 (cf. Deut 27:24-25)

In Genesis 4 reference was made to two killings: Cain killed Abel, and five generations later his namesake, Tubal-Cain, killed an unidentified attacker for striking him. But such scattered violence accelerated when, according to Genesis 6, the extra-terrestrial “sons of God” impregnated the terrestrial “daughters of men,” resulting in the birth of the Nephalim, who became known in tradition as “the mighty men that were of old, the men of renown.” But in the rabbinic work *Genesis Rabbah* 26, a certain rabbi named Aha interpreted the *'anšê haššêm* “men of the name” to mean “they laid desolate the world, were driven in desolation from the world, and caused the world to be made desolate.” He associated the word translated “renown” with the *šāmēm* verb “to ravage, to terrify.” Rabbi Aha was correct in concluding that the *hšm* in Genesis 6:4 did *not* mean either “the name” or “renown.” For Rabbi Aha they were *infamous*, not famous. (Rabbi Aha missed, though, the proper derivation of the *hšm*, which is the cognate of Arabic *hašama* “to destroy, smash, shatter”). Thus, “the mighty men of yore” were actually *'anšê hāšām* “men of violence.” And, according to Genesis 6:11-13, the violence of this mixed breed of warriors led to the flood, as Yahweh indicated, “the earth was corrupt in God’s sight and the earth was filled with violence . . . I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence.” The rampant violence and

Teaching Tips

Study War No More I

Begin the class with a pop-quiz dealing with God’s covenant with Noah. Reserve the “A” for those in the class who remember not only the rainbow, but (1) God’s prohibition of people killing other people, (2) the institution of capital punishment as a deterrent against people killing people, and (3) God’s affirmation of all people being in the divine image (Gen 9:3-6).

Teaching Tips

Study War No More II

Solicit from class members their opinions as to why God’s covenant with Noah was abrogated by Moses and Joshua, so that killing fellow humans for religious reasons was promoted rather than being prohibited. Have a member of the class read Psalms 46:8-11. Then follow the reading with a discussion about the “hawks” and the “doves” in ancient Israel, calling attention to (1) the dovish passages like Micah 4:24 and Zechariah 2:4-5; 9:9 and to (2) the hawkish texts like Micah 4:13, 5:7 and Zechariah 9:13 and 10:5.

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killings cited in Genesis 6 are reflected in later interpretations of the text, as in

Enoch 9:10, “and the women have born *giants*, and the whole earth has thereby been filled with blood and unrighteousness

Enoch 15:11, “And the spirits of the giants afflict, oppress, destroy, attack, do battle, and work destruction on the earth and cause trouble.”

Jubilees 5:1-2, “the angels of God saw them [the daughters of men] . . . and they bare unto them sons and they were *giants*. . . and they began to devour each other.”

The Covenant with Noah

It was the pervasiveness of the killings in the pre-flood era that led Yahweh to stipulate after the flood in his covenant with Noah, “And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. . . . And from each man, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man” (Gen 9:5-6). In this scheme of governance, capital punishment was to be a deterrent against all killing. From the accounts of Noah’s time until after Israel’s exodus from Egypt, Yahweh never violated the covenant with Noah by requiring Hebrews or Israelites to kill anyone. Whenever killing was required Yahweh retained the prerogative to do it. At the first Passover, “at midnight Yahweh struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt (Exod 12:29)” and at the Sea of Reeds “Yahweh routed the Egyptians in the midst of the sea (14:27).” Thus, the Israelite slaves walked away in freedom from Egypt without a single Israelite having killed a single Egyptian. The covenant with Noah was honored by both parties. Yahweh required no one to kill anyone, and not a single Israelite was put to death for violating the prohibition against shedding the blood of fellow humans who were in the image of God.

But in the wilderness of Sin the covenant with Noah was abrogated. When the Amalekites attacked the Israelites Moses authorized Joshua to marshal a

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Call attention to the statistics from World War I (at thirty-two million [dead, wounded and missing civilian and military] casualties) and World War II (at least fifty-eight million [dead, wounded, and missing civilian and military] casualties). Then invite the class members to estimate the casualty figures for World War III. Then direct the discussion to this question: “Why would God, who prohibited all killing of humans by humans—with a penalty of death—in the covenant with Noah, prohibit only *murder* in the covenant with Israel—and, at the same time, allegedly instigate and promote religious warfare and ethnic cleansing?”

Reflections

Moses, Jesus, Mohammed, and Holy War

Read the following text from the *Quran* (Sura 9:111), “Lo! Allah has bought from the believers their lives and their wealth—because the Garden shall be theirs! *They shall fight in the way of Allah and shall slay and be slain. It is a promise that is binding on Him in the Torah and the Gospel and the Quran*” (italics mine). It seems that the *Quran* built the case for *jihad* and the killing of infidels on the model of Moses, who, according to the Torah (Exod 32:25-29), commanded the Levites to kill in a single day three thousand of their own sons and brothers—immediately after he received and delivered the tablets that stated in part, “You shall not murder!” See also *Sura* II:216 “Warfare is ordained for you although it is hateful unto you,”

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militia. As a result, “Joshua mowed down Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword” (Exod 17:13) with Yahweh’s approval, apparently because the war was in self-defense. Shortly thereafter, at the foot of Sinai, obedient Levites killed three thousand of their own family members in a single day at the behest of Moses upon orders from Yahweh. These Levites were then rewarded with ordination into the priesthood (Exod 32:27-29). Whereas killing of another human had been an offense against God, at Sinai it had become a favor *for* God and was said to be favored *by* God. Warfare and ethnic cleansing became normative in Israel and the belief that God would drive out the Canaanites by hornets rather than by sword (Deut 7:20-23; Jos 24:12-13) faded away. Killing for religious reasons was not prohibited.

Twelve words in biblical Hebrew can be translated into English by the verb “to kill,” but only one of those twelve words appears in the Decalogue, *rāṣāḥ* (“murder, slay”). It was not a general term for killing but a technical word for “murder,” either *with premeditation* (as in Num 35:16-21, 30-31; Hos 4:2; and Jer 7:9) or *without intention* (as in Deut 4:42; 19:3-6; Num 35:6, 11, 12, 25-28; Jos 20:3-6 and 21:13, 21-26). Childs (1974: 420-421) summarized the scholarly debate about the meaning of *rāṣāḥ*, including the opinions that it was used for (1) “illegal killing inimical to the community,” or (2) killing which was related to blood vengeance and the role of the avenger, or (3) killing out of personal malice, hatred, or deceit, which came to include murder and assassination. This verb did not deal with killing for religious reasons. Therefore, Moses was free to command the Levites to kill idolatrous Israelites, Joshua was free to kill pagan Canaanites indiscriminately, and King Pekah of Israel felt free to kill one hundred twenty thousand Jews in a single day (2 Chron 28:6). Holy war, crusades, and *jihād* were not prohibited by the sixth commandment as they had been in the covenant God made with Noah. Noah’s dove was devoured by the hawks.

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and *Sura* IV:74, “Whoso fighteth in the way of Allah, on him we shall bestow a vast reward.” The opponents in holy war are identified as oppressors of the faithful and idolators. See *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran*, expl. and trans., M. M. Pickthall (New York: Mentor, 1953) 52, 155. Support from the Gospel for holy war (according to *Sura* 9:111) may derive from Matthew 10:34 and Revelation 19:11-16 (Christ on white horse as returning conqueror).

Study Bible

On the massacre by the sons of Levi (Exod 32:27-28), see *NISB* 132-33.

Reflections

Jesus and the Sword

The statement of Jesus in Matthew 10:34-36, “I have not come to bring peace but a sword” (which may be the basis for the Gospel being mentioned in *Sura* 9:111, cited in Reflections: Moses, Jesus, Mohammed, Holy War) may go back to a misunderstood Hebrew text meaning, “I have not come to bring the end but a change.” See also what Jesus says about the sword in Matthew 26:51-52 and notes in *NISB*, 1795. Finally, see the study on this saying available online at <http://www.ebts.edu/tmcdaniel/cbbp-chapter30.pdf>.

The Penalty for Violating the Sixth Commandment

- “Whoever strikes a man so that he dies shall be put to death (Exodus 21:12)
- “He who kills a man shall be put to death” (Lev 24:17 and 24:21)
- “But anyone who strikes another with an iron object, and death ensues, is a murderer; the murderer shall be put to death. . . .” (Num 35:16, 17, 18, and 21).
- “Do not accept a ransom for the life of a murderer, who deserves to die. He must surely be put to death” (Num 35:31).

Sources

Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical Theological Commentary*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974) 420-21. See also: Susan Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible: A Study in the Ethics of Violence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

Source

On Exodus 17:8-16, see W. Brueggemann, “Exodus,” *NIB*, 819-23.

The Seventh Commandment

“You shall not commit adultery”

Exodus 20:14; Deuteronomy 5:18 (cf. Deut 27:20-23)

The Need to Know *Who* the Child’s Father Was

According to Exodus 22:16-17, the seduction of a virgin was not an act of adultery, nor was it a capital crime. The penalty for such a seduction was a marriage or a monetary settlement equivalent to the marriage present for a virgin. Detailed lists of sexual sins, which were viewed in Israel as capital crimes, appear in Leviticus 18 and 20. Adultery is sexual intercourse between a betrothed or married woman and any man who is not her betrothed or husband. The sin of adultery heads the list in Leviticus 20:10-16. In comparing adultery with the other sins in the lists, Phillips (1970: 117) noted the prohibition of adultery was “to protect the husband’s name by assuring him that his children would be his own. This explains why the law of adultery is restricted to sexual intercourse with a married woman, but does not seek to impose sexual fidelity on the husband.” In agreement with Phillips, Freedman (2000: 26) added, “One reason for the emphasis placed on virgin brides, along with the harsh punishments toward unfaithful wives, is a grievous fear of mistaken paternity.”

Moreover, in early Israel there was no belief in a life after death in a heavenly kingdom. Sheol was the abode of the dead, the realm of the netherworld, where the deceased slept with their fathers in eternal repose. A kind of personal salvation and eternal life was achieved through one’s *progeny*. All of one’s ancestors

Study Bible

See discussion on adultery under Leviticus 20:10-16, *NISB*, 175.

Teaching Tips

Sex for Eternal Life

For the ancient Israelite the only available “eternal life” was that which came from being remembered by one’s progeny. Were the progeny ever to end, so too would the “living memory” of all the deceased in that family’s ancestry perish forever. This understanding of “eternal life” to a large degree controlled the sexual mores of the Israelites. It was imperative to know who was the father of the child, for through that child a particular ancestral family would live on in the newborn and, in time, through the newborn’s progeny. This idea that ancestors “lived on forever” through the perpetual memory of their progeny

1. Required a woman to have only one sexual partner once married so that paternity of her children could never be in doubt. It was a matter of fidelity to the husband’s ancestors, not just fidelity to the husband.

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lived on in the memories of their offspring, generation after generation. Every birth perpetuated a particular line of ancestral memory. Without progeny there would be no memory; and without memory the last vestige of life would vanish into oblivion, taking with it the newly deceased and all those in the ancestral family. Thus, progeny provided a degree of life after death. Consequently, there was the social pressure to “be fruitful and multiply (Gen 1:28),” and there could be *no uncertainty* about who was the father of the child and whose ancestral family would be perpetuated through the memory of the newborn. Similarly, the levirate marriage (Gen 38:6-11 and Deut 25:5-10) was instituted to provide progeny for the man who died *without a male heir* so that the deceased and his ancestors might live on in family and tribal memory. It allowed a brother of a man who died without a son to impregnate the widow of the deceased, and “the first son she bears shall carry on the name of the dead brother so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel” (Deut 25:6).

Adultery and Idolatry

In Jeremiah 3:8 Yahweh is quoted by Jeremiah as saying “She [Judah] saw that for all the adulteries of that faithless one, Israel, I had sent her away with a decree of divorce; yet her false sister Judah did not fear, but she too went and played the harlot.” Reference here to a *divorce* being Yahweh’s punishment for Israel’s adultery may indicate that adultery was *not always* a capital crime. But even in Hosea 2:3 there is a death threat from Hosea to Gomer when he states, “Plead with your mother . . . that she put away . . . her adultery from her breasts lest I strip her naked . . . and slay her with thirst.”

The fact that neither David nor Bathsheba were stoned to death for their adultery (nor David for his murder of Uriah) indicates that the crime of adultery had not yet been codified or that the law was applied selectively. Childs’ statement (1974: 422), “Even the king, David, falls under the death sentence for his adultery with Bathsheba,” is really a misstatement. So also is Freedman’s statement (2000:134), “And so

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2. Contributed to the profound guilt experienced by barren wives whose “infertility” would be responsible for the “ultimate death” of every ancestor.
3. Legitimated a man’s multiple marriages and sexual liberties in the noble effort to keep the ancestors alive in multiple lines of memory.
4. Made homosexual relations an abomination since there could be no progeny by which the family line could be continued and the ancestors could live on in the family memory.

Teaching Tips

Sex and the Bible

1. To put the prohibition against adultery in context, a review of the major elements in ancient Israel’s sexual laws and mores as recorded in Leviticus 18 and 20 and Deuteronomy 22 may prove helpful—though for some it may be a bit embarrassing.
2. The tangential issues of polygamy and prostitution in biblical literature may come up for discussion. Be prepared to answer questions like “Why did Solomon need a thousand women (1 Kings 11:3, seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines)?” The answer must include the fact that those women needed Solomon—not for sex but for security! So many upper class young Israelite males were killed off fighting King David’s wars that thousands of upper class Israelite young women could not

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David is punished tenfold for his action.” Despite the stipulation in Numbers 35:31, “Do not accept a ransom for the life of a murderer, who deserves to die. He must surely be put to death,” Nathan immediately assured David, “you shall not die.” Instead of being stoned, a *substitutionary atonement* was provided for the king through the death of the infant conceived in adultery and the announcement that unnamed members of his family would be slain by the sword (2 Sam 12:13-23). But the sword never touched David, who, according to 1 Kings 2:10, died of old age. When Nathan told David of Yahweh’s decree, “I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight,” ten innocent women were punished, but not David. When Absalom forced David’s ten women into adultery, Absalom paid for the adultery with his life—but by hanging rather than by stoning (2 Sam 12:11-12; 18:10).

In the NIV translation “adultery” appears twenty-two times in each testament. In the Old it translates not only the technical term *nā’ap* but also (1) *bā’el* “he went into (Bathsheba)” in the superscription of Psalm 51, (2) *zûr*, “strange” in Proverbs 22:14, and (3) *zānāh*, “to be a harlot” in Jeremiah 3:6-9 and Hosea 1:2, 2:4, 4:15. The NRSV and others use “adultery” to translate the *nākēriyāh* “stranger” in Proverbs 2:16; 7:5. The expression in Isaiah 57:3, “you sons of a sorceress, you offspring of an adulterer and a prostitute,” clearly equated the “adulteress” with the “prostitute.”

In addition to *nā’ap* being the technical term for “adultery,” it was used as a metaphor for idolatry, as in Ezekiel 23:37, “for they have committed *adultery* and blood is on their hands; they committed *adultery* with their idols (a.t.)” It was used along with *zûr*, for idolatrous worship in:

Jeremiah 3:8-9, “I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce . . . because of all her adulteries. . . she also went out and played the harlot.”

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find a living male to marry. Solomon provided welfare for these upper class young women by bringing them into the royal household—thereby maintaining the support of the upper class Judahites for the Davidic dynasty. It was for political reasons, domestic and international, that he had a thousand women—not for sexual reasons. Solomon taxed the poor so heavily to pay for this welfare for the rich that the ten northern tribes of Israel rebelled against Rehoboam, Solomon’s son and successor, when Rehoboam followed his father’s tax policies benefiting the rich at the expense of the poor.

Jeremiah 5:7, “Your children have forsaken me and sworn by gods that are not gods. . . . they committed adultery and thronged to the houses of prostitutes.

Jeremiah 13:27, “your adulteries and lustful neighings, your shameless prostitution.”

Hosea 2:4, “Let her remove her whorings (*zēn ûnêhā*) from her face and her adulteries (*na’ăpûpêhā*) from between her breasts.”

The reason “prostitution” was used as a metaphor for idolatry could have been that Canaanite fertility cults made use of cultic prostitutes, and the gods and goddesses of the cult were represented by idols. On the other hand, the association could also come from the coincidence that one of the Semitic words for “idols” was *zun*, which survived in Arabic where the masculine *zûn* and the feminine *zûnat* meant “an ornament, idol, or anything taken as a deity and worshiped beside God” (Lane, 1867: 1273). This *zûnat* would have been spelled in Hebrew as *zēnah*, which was by coincidence the same spelling as the Hebrew word for “prostitute.” The coincidence in speech and spelling made for a powerful *double entendre*.

The Penalty for Violating the Seventh Commandment

- “If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbor, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall be put to death” (Leviticus 20:10)
- “If a man lies with his father’s wife . . . daughter-in-law . . . with a male . . . both shall be put to death (20:11-16).

The prohibition of illicit sex in the Decalogue finds a parallel in Maxim 9 of the *Wisdom of Ani*, which warns against adultery even with a foreign woman. As translated by John Wilson (1955, 420), it reads:

Beware of the woman from abroad whom nobody knows in the town . . .
A woman whose husband is far away, says every day to you:

Sources

E. W. Lane, ed., *Arabic-English Lexicon*. eight volumes. (Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate, 1863–1893; Reprinted 1956. New York: Unger, 1956).

John Wilson, 1955. “The Instruction of the Vizier Ptah-Hotep,” 412-414 and “The Instruction of Ani” 420-21 in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955).

“I am beautiful” when she has no witnesses . . .
This is a crime worthy of death.

Similar advice appears in *The Instructions of Vizier Ptah-Hotep*, dating from about 2450 B.C.E, which is here quoted from Pritchard’s *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (1955: 413):

If thou desirest to make friendship last in a home to which thou hast access as master, as a brother, or as a friend, into any place where thou mightest enter, beware of approaching the women. . . . One is made a fool by limbs of fayence, as she stands (there), . . . A mere trifle, the likeness of a dream—and one attains death through knowing her. . . . Do not do it—it is really an abomination.

The Eighth Commandment

“You shall not steal”

Exodus 20:15; Deuteronomy 5:19 (cf. Deut 27:17)

Martin Luther, in his reflection on the Decalogue in his *Larger Catechism* cited by Paul Lehmann (1995: 179), stated,

A person steals not only when he robs a man’s strong box or his pocket, but also when he takes advantage of his neighbor at the market, in a grocery shop, butcher stall, wine and beer cellar, workshop, and, in short, wherever business is transacted and money exchanged for goods or labor . . . Daily the poor are defrauded, new burdens and high prices are imposed. Everyone misuses the market in his own willful, conceited, arrogant way as if it were his right and privilege to sell his goods as dearly as he pleases without a word of criticism.

Luther’s recognition that defrauding the poor is one form of robbery echoes the prophets: Ezekiel 22:29, “The people of the land practice extortion and commit robbery; they oppress the poor and needy and ill-treat the alien, denying them justice,” and Isaiah 1:23, “Your rulers are rebels, companions of thieves; they all love bribes and chase after gifts. They do not defend the cause of the fatherless; the widow’s case does not come before them.”

Two verses from the Torah that are crucial for the interpretation of the eighth commandment are: Exodus 21:16, “Anyone who kidnaps another and either sells him or still has him when he is caught must be put to

Sources

Freedman, H. 1935. *Sanhedrin: Translated into English with Notes, Glossary, and Indices* (New York: Soncino Press, 1935) II: 569, sec. 86a. Albrecht Alt, 1953. “Das Verbot des Diebstahls im Dekalog,” in *Kleine Schriften zur Geschichte des Volkes Israel* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1953) 333-40.

See also A. Alt, *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion*, (New York: Doubleday, 1966, 1989). Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical Theological Commentary*. OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), 424.

Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 5. (New York: Doubleday, 1991) 314. See Anthony Phillips, *Ancient Israel’s Criminal Law* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1970), 130-31.

On “you shall not steal,” see *Dr. Martin Luther’s Larger Catechism*. Translated by J. N. Lenske (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1935), 179. It is located under the 7th not 8th commandment, following the Catholic/Lutheran order. See also: http://www.ccel.org/l/luther/large_catechism/large_catechism.html. This text was converted to ascii format for Project Wittenberg by Allen Mulvey and is in the public domain.

death,” and Deuteronomy 25:7, “If a man is caught kidnapping one of his brother Israelites and treats him as a slave or sells him, the kidnapper must die. You must purge the evil from among you.”

According to the Talmud (Sanhedrin 86a) the rabbis debated the meaning of the eighth commandment, which included the question, “Where do we find the law against kidnapping?” Rabbi Josiah, repeating what he had been taught, said it was spelled out in the eighth commandment; but he was challenged by another rabbi who argued that the eighth commandment dealt with the theft of money. Arguing back, Rabbi Josiah commanded: “Go forth and learn from the thirteen principles whereby the Torah is interpreted”—knowing that one of the thirteen principles was that a law is to be interpreted by its general context. Rabbi Josiah then pointed out that the context of the Decalogue was a code of capital crimes, concluding, “Hence this too refers [to a crime involving] capital punishment.”

Albrecht Alt (1953: 333-340), independent of rabbinic tradition, came to the same conclusion, arguing that the three short commandments (Exod 20:13-15; Deut 5:17-19) originally must have had an object following the verb just like the other commandments. Therefore, the eighth commandment should be reconstructed to read, “You shall not steal a person.” Childs (1974: 424) was not fully convinced by Rabbi Josiah nor by Alt’s arguments, stating, “The sharp distinction suggested by Alt between stealing a man and stealing his property cannot be easily sustained.” But he concurred in part by concluding, “It does seem clear that the shortened form of the eighth commandment without an explicit object had the effect of expanding the scope of the prohibition beyond its initial object.” On the other hand, Weinfeld (1991: 314) disagreed emphatically with Rabbi Josiah and Alt, stating, “The absolute categorical nature of the commandments of the Decalogue should, therefore, be applied to this commandment too: ‘You shall not steal’ includes all possible objects, people as well as goods.”

However, Phillips (1970: 130-131) offered the most helpful insight about Israel’s prohibition of theft when

Teaching Tips

Stealing Property and People

To put the eighth commandment into context, prepare a responsive or antiphonal reading of Exodus 22:1-14, 21-29, and conclude with the teacher reading Malachi 3:5-10 in an authoritative voice. Follow the Scripture reading with an opportunity for class members to share any experiences of when they were robbed or cheated, or cases of significant recent thefts in the community. Ask if anyone has been subjected to identity theft. Then shift the discussion to the subject of stealing people, i.e., hostage-taking and kidnapping as a terrorist tactic in Latin America, the Philippines, and most recently in Iraq and Saudi Arabia. Show how the eighth commandment covers everything from the collapse of Enron and WorldCom, to shoplifting at Wal-Mart and Kmart, and the enforced prostitution in today’s sex market (as reported and tracked by Johns Hopkins University’s *Protection Project*).

he noted that “theft of property in Israel was not a crime, but a tort [a civil offence] resulting in an action for damages by the injured party. . . . the injured party being restored as far as possible to the position he was in before the damage of which he claims occurred.” The civil offense of theft called only for a compensatory penalty rather than punishment. *Restitution* and *deterrence* were the key issues, with enslavement only for those who did not make restitution—as spelled out in Exodus 22:1-3:

If a man steals an ox or a sheep and slaughters it or sells it, he must pay back five head of cattle for the ox and four sheep for the sheep. If the stolen animal is found alive in his possession—whether ox or donkey or sheep—he must pay back double. A thief must certainly make restitution, but if he has nothing, he must be sold to pay for his theft.

The punitive damages requiring *double restitution* were widely extended beyond just livestock, so that:

If a man gives his neighbor silver or goods for safekeeping and they are stolen from the neighbor’s house, the thief, if he is caught, must pay back double. . . . In all cases of illegal possession of an ox, a donkey, a sheep, a garment, or any other lost property about which somebody says, “This is mine,” both parties are to bring their cases before the judges (*hā ’ēlōhîm* “God”). The one whom the judges (*hā ’ēlōhîm*) declare guilty must pay back double to his neighbor (Exod 22:7-9, a.t.).

Proverbs 6:30-31 called for a seven-fold payback, and Numbers 5:7 required full restitution, plus a twenty percent penalty.

However, there is a hint of a death penalty for stealing property in Ezekiel 33:15, “if the wicked gives back what he took in pledge for a loan, returns what he has stolen, follows the decrees that give life, and does no evil, he will surely live; he will not die.” An even stronger reference to a death sentence for a common thief appears in the Septuagint text of Zechariah 5:3-4.

The NIV translates the Hebrew text as:

This is the curse that is going out over the whole land; for according to what it says on one side, every thief will be banished, and according to what it says on the other, everyone who swears falsely will be banished. . . . I will send it out, and it will enter the house of the thief and the house of him who swears falsely by my name. It will remain in his house and destroy it, both its timbers and its stones.

But the repeated verb “will be banished” was rendered into Greek meaning “will be punished to death” (Greek Septuagint, *thanatou 'ekdikēthēsetai*).

Mass Murder, Kidnapping, and Theft—All for God!

The greatest case of murder, theft, and kidnapping in Israelite tradition is recorded in 2 Chronicles 28:5-8, and alluded to in 2 Kings 16:1 and Isaiah 7:1. For the chronicler, because of the gross idolatry of and child sacrifices by King Ahaz of Judah, Yahweh gave him into the hands of King Rezin of Damascus (Syria) and King Pekah of Samaria (Israel), in what became known as the Syro-Ephraimite War (734–733 B.C.). Though unable to defeat Ahaz, King Rezin “took captive” (i.e., he kidnapped, with the intent to enslave) a large but unspecified number of Jews and took them to Damascus. Then King Pekah, seeing Rezin’s booty, proceeded to attack Jerusalem also. In Isaiah’s words, “but they could not overpower her.” Nevertheless, Pekah decimated Jerusalem even though he did not capture and occupy the city. The chronicler reported (2 Chron 28:6-8):

In one day Pekah . . . killed a hundred and twenty thousand soldiers in Judah—because Judah had forsaken the LORD, the God of their fathers. Zicri, an Ephraimite warrior, killed Maaseiah the king’s son, Azrikam the officer in charge of the palace, and Elkanah, second to the king. The Israelites took captive from their kinsmen two hundred thousand wives, sons and daughters.

They also took a great deal of plunder, which they carried back to Samaria.

Though King Ahaz violated *all five* of the commandments on tablet one of the Decalogue, he survived and died a natural death, at age thirty-six, and was buried in Jerusalem. But one-hundred-twenty-thousand allegedly idolatrous Jewish soldiers loyal to Ahaz were killed by the sword and the killings were done by fellow Israelites—reminiscent of the Levites’ slaughtering their sons and brothers at Sinai (Exod 32:27-29) at Moses’ behest for their dancing before the golden calf. Moreover, two hundred thousand Jews were kidnapped and destined for slavery in Samaria and Northern Israel.

Had it not been for the Samaritan prophet Oded, who protested the slaughter of Jerusalem’s soldiers (“you have slain them in a rage which has reached up to heaven”) and a “peace party” of fellow Samaritans who protested the kidnappings and the intended enslavement of their fellow Israelites from Judah (2 Chron 28:9-15), all of Samaria would have consummated their violation of the tenth commandment, “You shall not covet,” as well as the eighth commandment, “You shall not steal.” Though disguised as doing God’s will, Pekah and his people coveted what Ahaz had and whatever wealth there was in Jerusalem. Thus, they used a religious alibi to legitimate their slaughter and pillage to seize what they *coveted*. Thankfully for the kidnapped Jews, Oded and his colleagues secured their freedom and escorted them safely home as far as Jericho. Oded obviously understood the entire Decalogue and recognized that Pekah’s coveting had caused countless deaths of the innocent. Coveting caused Pekah’s own death, for he was slain by a rival who coveted his throne—and as Pekah sowed, Pekah reaped.

The kidnapping of two-hundred-thousand women and children by Pekah’s troops finds many parallels throughout the histories of warfare and of slavery. To this day the kidnappings continue, though not for any religious reason or alibi. A 2001 report by Protection Project, based at the Johns Hopkins University School

Teaching Tips

The Good Samaritan Oded

Introduce the Prophet Oded to the members of the class by assigning a reading of 2 Chronicles 28:1-15 as homework. F. Scott Spencer presented a good case in the *Westminster Theological Journal* (1984: 317-349) that Oded was the inspiration for Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan.

Summarize for the class the study about Oded, which is available online at <http://www.ebts.edu/tmcdaniel/cbbp-chapter12.pdf>.

of Advanced International Studies in Washington, D.C., has documented the rising trends in the sex slave trade and has provided the following estimates

- ten thousand women from the former Soviet Union have been forced into prostitution in Israel.
- ten thousand children aged between six and fourteen are virtually enslaved in brothels in Sri Lanka.
- fifteen thousand women are trafficked into the United States every year, many from Mexico.
- twenty thousand women and children from Burma have been forced into prostitution in Thailand.
- six thousand Thai children have been sold into prostitution.
- one hundred twenty thousand women are smuggled into Western Europe, mainly from Central and Eastern Europe, and forced into prostitution.
- two hundred thousand young girls from Nepal are working as sex slaves in India.

This slavery mocks all *five commandments* on the second tablet of the Decalogue.

The Penalty for Violating the Eighth Commandment

- “Whoever steals a man, whether he sells him or is found in possession of him, shall be put to death” (Exod 21:16)
- “If a man is found stealing one of his brethren, the people of Israel, and if he treats him as a slave or sells him, then that thief shall die” (Deut 24:7).

Resource

On the Protection Project, see:
<http://www.protectionproject.org/main1.htm>

The Ninth Commandment

“You shall not bear false witness”

Exodus 20:16; Deuteronomy 5:20 (cf. Deut 27:18-19, 25)

Judicial Safeguard for Justice

This prohibition deals with a key element in the judicial process as spelled out in the book of the Covenant in Exodus 23:1-3, “Do not spread false reports. Do not help a wicked man by being a malicious witness. Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong. When you give testimony in a lawsuit, do not pervert justice by siding with the crowd, and do not show favoritism to a poor man in his lawsuit.” A second text providing the judicial context of the ninth commandment is Deuteronomy 19:15-21,

One witness is not enough to convict a man accused of any crime or offence he may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If a malicious witness takes the stand to accuse a man of a crime, the two men involved in the dispute must stand in the presence of the LORD before the priests and the judges who are in office at the time. The judges must make a thorough investigation, and if the witness proves to be a liar, giving false testimony against his brother, then do to him as he intended to do to his brother. You must purge the evil from among you. The rest of the people will hear of this and be afraid, and never again will such an evil thing be done among you. Show no pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

Thus, according to the closing sentence of Deuteronomy 19:21, the sentence for false testimony could even be death. The requirement for two or more witnesses in cases of a capital offense also appears in Deuteronomy 17:6, “On the testimony of two or three witnesses a man shall be put to death, but no-one shall be put to death on the testimony of only one witness,” and in Numbers 35:30, “Anyone who kills a person is to be put to death as a murderer only on the testimony of *witnesses*. But no-one is to be put to death on the testimony of a single witness (a.t.)”

The Lies of Ahab, Jezebel, and Jehu

The well-known story of King Ahab’s acquisition of Naboth’s vineyard in Jezreel (1 Kings 21) provides a commentary on the deadly consequences which *false witnesses* cause. When Naboth politely declined to exchange or sell his ancestral property to King Ahab, Queen Jezebel facilitates the transfer of property from Naboth to the king by having Naboth convicted on a trumped-up charge of blasphemy against God and king—for which he would be executed as the law required. To implement this scheme, she sent a letter, under the king’s name and seal, to the elders and nobles of Jezreel, instructing them to “proclaim a day of fasting and seat Naboth in a prominent place among the people. But seat two scoundrels opposite him and have them testify that he has cursed both God and the king, then take him out and stone him to death.” The queen’s commands were read as the king’s commands and were fully obeyed by the officials of Jezreel. Thus, based upon the false testimony of two scoundrels, Naboth was convicted and stoned to death.

Although Ahab had nothing to do with the plot against Naboth, aside from his coveting Naboth’s vineyard, when Elijah met the king in Jezreel he was to charge Ahab with a capital offense, saying, “This is what the LORD says: ‘Have you not murdered a man and seized his property?’ Then say to him, ‘This is what the LORD says: In the place where dogs licked up Naboth’s blood, dogs will lick up your blood—yes, yours!’ (1 Kgs 21:19, NIV)” The two scoundrels who provided the false testimony were never identified or

Teaching Tips

Lie Detectors

Have three members of the class read these relevant texts: (1) Deuteronomy 27:18-19, 25, (2) Deuteronomy 19:15-21, and (3) Exodus 23:1-3.

Share with the class the way in which the technology of the twenty-first century may make the ninth commandment the most widely obeyed of all the commandments. Summarize for the class the four technologies for lie-detection that are replacing the polygraph test, namely,

1. brain “fingerprinting”—the use of an electroencephalograph that measures the shifts in brain activity when one is lying. This method is currently being used by the FBI and is admissible in court (whereas evidence from a polygraph test is inadmissible).
2. MRI—the use of nuclear magnetic resonance imaging to measure the blood flow in the brain. Lying requires thought, telling the truth does not. Thus, activity in the brain’s calculation center, requiring an increase in the blood flow there, can be detected.
3. face scanners—the small blood vessels in the face become enlarged when one is lying, emitting heat signatures which can be detected by heat scanners.
4. VSA—voice stress analysis. Sound waves of the voice vary when one is lying, and those variations can be detected. VSA detectors are now on the market for about \$100 and they can be plugged into a telephone to let everyone know if the person on the other end is telling the truth.

held accountable, nor were the corrupt elders and nobles of Jezreel—they were all “just following orders.” Even Ahab’s sentence was commuted when Yahweh said to Elijah, “Have you noticed how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself, I will not bring this disaster in his day, but I will bring it on his house in the days of his son” (1 Kgs 21:29, NIV). On the other hand, all participants in Naboth’s mock trial and his murder may have been included in the curse of 1 Kings 21:21 (cf., 2 Kgs 9:8), “I will consume your descendants and cut off from Ahab every last male in Israel—slave or free.”

Ahab actually died on a battlefield when struck by a random arrow (1 Kgs 22:34-38), and the prediction in 1 Kings 21:19 that dogs would lick up Ahab’s blood was reported in 1 Kings 22:38 as having been fulfilled. King Jehu then ascended the throne of Israel and, thanks to a royal commission by an unnamed prophet, he assumed the role of God’s chief executioner in the extermination of the house of Ahab (2 Kgs 9:7-10). Jehu first killed Joram, the son of Ahab and Jezebel, leaving his body unburied in Naboth’s vineyard (2 Kgs 9:25-27). Jezebel then paid for her capital crimes when, on Jehu’s command, she was tossed out of a window and, as predicted, was devoured by dogs (2 Kgs 9:30-37).

But the story about Naboth’s mock trial and the scoundrels who—contra the ninth commandment—falsely testified against Naboth does not end with Jezebel’s death. It ends only with the death of the house of Jehu and the fall of the ten-tribe kingdom of Northern Israel. In 2 Kings 10:30 Yahweh tells Jehu, “Because you have done well in accomplishing what is right in my eyes and have done to the house of Ahab all I had in mind to do, your descendants will sit on the throne of Israel to the fourth generation,” but the prophet Hosea proclaimed a death sentence upon Jehu and his dynasty for all of his violations of the sixth commandment, “You shall not kill.”

When Hosea’s first son was born God commanded, “Call him Jezreel, because I will soon punish the house of Jehu for the massacre (*d mi* literally, “the bloods of”) at Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of

Teaching Tips

On Perjury

Define “perjury” for members of the class and illustrate the definition with notorious examples current in the country/county/city at the time of your teaching (like the Martha Stewart and Larry Stewart convictions for perjury in 2004). See if class members can come up with contemporary parallels to the deceit of Ahab, Jezebel, and Jehu. For example, what will be the long-term ill effects of the false information from a few nameless witnesses about Iraq’s having weapons of mass destruction? How many will die because of little lies? Or ask these question: “What traits and theological perspectives does Osama bin Laden share with Elisha and Jehu?” Are religious leaders who instigate massacres and bloodbaths in God’s name—like Elijah and Jehu—guilty of bearing false testimony about the way and will of God? If so, what is the penalty? For class members struggling with all the violence in the Old Testament, the hermeneutical key available at <http://www.ebts.edu/tmcdaniel/HermeneuticalKey.pdf> may be helpful.

Israel” (Hos 1:4, a.t.). The plural “bloods of (*d mi*) Jezreel” is significant for Jehu’s bloodbaths, according to 2 Kings 10:

- the beheading of Ahab’s seventy sons and a presentation of their heads to him in Jezreel;
- after receiving the heads, “Jehu killed everyone in Jezreel who remained in the house of Ahab, as well as all his chief men, his close friends and his priests, leaving him no survivor”;
- on his way back to Samaria, via Beth Eked, Jehu killed forty-two Jews who had been visiting Ahab’s sons;
- when Jehu came to Samaria, he killed all who were left there of Ahab’s family;
- then under false pretenses Jehu orchestrated a mandatory worship service for all Baal worshipers at which he himself offered a sacrifice to Baal—only to follow it with an order to kill all the worshipers once he made his exit at the end of the service.

Jehu’s killing spree was inspired by Elijah, and both men obviously thought the Decalogue (or its prototype) permitted religio-political killings. Hosea, in clear disagreement, reported Yahweh’s condemnation, “There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God in the land. There is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed.” (Hos 4:1-2). Similar words appear in Hosea 10:7 and 10:13-15 (NIV):

Samaria’s king shall perish, like a chip on the face of the waters. . . . But you have planted wickedness, you have reaped evil, you have eaten the fruit of deception. Because you have depended on your own strength and on your many warriors, the roar of battle will rise against your people, so that all your fortresses will be devastated. . . . When that day dawns, the king of Israel will be completely destroyed.

What began simply as (1) Ahab’s coveting Naboth’s vineyard, eventuated into (2) the death of Ahab, (3) all

Source

Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical Theological Commentary*. OTL, (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), 426.

Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 5, (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 316.

of his family, friends, and royal associates, as well as (4) the end of Jehu's dynasty and (5) the demise of Northern Israel as an independent kingdom a century later (722 BCE). A major catalyst in the downward spiral was *the false testimony* of two measly witnesses in a minor trial in Jezreel convened by corrupt judges. Who would have believed that one incident of false testimony about old man Naboth would become *so deadly and destructive* with such a long term effect! A false witness can bring death to many and in the end can become self-destructive. What a contrast to Jesus' statement, "you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free (John 8:32)."

The Penalty for Violating the Ninth Commandment

"If the witness is a false witness and has accused his brother falsely, then you shall do to him as he had meant to do to his brother . . . Your eye shall not pity; it shall be life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot (Deut 19:21).

The Tenth Commandment

“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house.
You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife . . .
Exodus 20:17

You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife.
You shall not set your desire on your neighbor’s
house . . .
Deuteronomy 5:21 (cf. Deut 27:17)

From Bridled Desire to Unbridled Lust

The last commandment in the Decalogue differs slightly in Exodus 20:17 from the one in Deuteronomy 5:21. The word order varies and the former repeats the verb *ḥāmad* “to covet” (Exod; Deut) but the latter shifted the second verb to *hit’awweh* “to desire, to crave (Deut).” The prohibition *’al taḥmod* in Proverbs 6:25 means “do not lust” and differs from the tenth commandment, *lō’ taḥmod*, “do not covet,” only in the use of a different negative particle. The difference between the “covet/lust” of Exod 20:17 and the “desire/crave” of Deuteronomy 5:21b led Childs (1974: 426) to conclude,

the stress on the emotion of the soul is certainly peculiar to *hit’awweh* in distinction to *ḥāmadō* [but] in closely paralleled passages, *hit’awweh* and *ḥāmad* are used interchangeably without any significant difference in meaning.

Weinfeld (1991: 316) concurred but added, “. . . therefore hmd might sometimes connote more than just intention.” He paraphrased the prohibition as “You shall not plan to appropriate the other’s wife and the other’s property.” But the “appropriation” of a neigh-

Teaching Tips

Coveting Property

To focus on the sin of coveting *property*, review the story of Ahab’s coveting Naboth’s vineyard and the covetous sack of Jerusalem by King Pekah of Samaria and his troops, which were the foci of the previous session. Clarify for the class that the word “slave” in the NRSV and NAB, instead of “servant” found in other translations, is preferable in this context, for slavery was a reality among the Israelites (Exod 21:3-11; Deut 15:12-18) and slaves were property.

Teaching Tips

Coveting People

To shift the focus to the sin of coveting *people* (especially the wives and women of one’s neighbor) read Sirach 9:1-9. Clarify the meaning of “neighbor” by referring to Lev 19:17-18, where “neighbor” appears as a synonym of “brother” and “sons of your own people,” so that in contemporary English it means one’s relatives, family, kinfolk or kith and kin. (This definition will help to explain many of the sexual prohibitions in Leviticus 20 which deal with family members.)

bor's wife puts the sole focus on the wife as a piece of property. The focus was also on the neighbor's wife as a sexual person, so a better paraphrase might be, "Do not *bring to fruition* fantasies of fornication with your neighbor's wife," comparable to Proverbs 6:25, "Do not lust in your heart after her beauty or let her captivate you with her eyes."

Susanna and the Two Lying, Lecherous Judges

As noted in session eleven, King Pekah and his personnel *coveted* the people and portable possessions of Jews in Judah; and the story in 2 Chronicles 28 provides a commentary on the tragic consequences when kinsmen *covet* their neighbor's house, wife, servants, animals, or anything that belongs to their neighbor. Ahab's *coveting* of Naboth's vineyard (1 Kgs 21; session 11), is a case study of the dynamics and deadly results of simply coveting another's property, with no hint of sexual lust.

The story which best illustrates the fatal consequences of *coveting* a neighbor's wife is the Book of *Susanna* in the Apocrypha. According to this short story, a wealthy and revered gentleman in Babylon, with a beautiful and pious wife named Susanna, frequently invited fellow Jews to his garden home and often hosted two elderly Canaanite judges who would hold court at the rich man's residence. The two judges would linger after their court sessions to watch beautiful Susanna as she strolled in her husband's garden. *Coveting* their rich neighbor's wife, they perverted their minds and turned away their eyes from looking to Heaven or remembering righteous judgments. Both were overwhelmed with passion for her, but they did not tell each other of their distress, for they were ashamed to disclose their lustful desire to possess her. And they watched eagerly, day after day, to see her (9-12).

Once the judges became aware of each other's lust, they conspired to seduce Susanna. If she rejected their invitation for sexual intimacy, the two judges—with the authority of their office—would prosecute her on a trumped-up charge of adultery and have her stoned to death. When Susanna rejected their advances, prefer-

Reflections

Keeping Up with the Joneses

1. How does mass media advertising and our capitalist consumerist culture, which drives the American economy, conflict with the tenth commandment?
2. Does one's "keeping up with the Joneses" demonstrate a disobedience to this commandment?
3. What is the difference between getting what you only need and having whatever you want?

Source

F. H. Colson, *Philo: Volume VII*. Loeb Classical Library 320 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1937; 1998 Reprint) 59-62.

Study Bible

On Susanna, see introductory notes and commentary, *NISB*, 1543-46.

ring death “rather than to sin in the sight of the Lord,” the judges proceeded with their threat and publicly announced that they had caught Susanna being intimate with a man who had been hiding in the garden. “The assembly believed them, because they were elders of the people and judges; and they condemned her to death” (41).

But before a stone was thrown a young man named Daniel shouted out, accusing the judges of bearing false witness against Susanna. Daniel called for a retrial in which the judges would be questioned separately. Contradictory testimony by the judges when questioned exposed their treacherous lies and Daniel’s verdict was, “You also have lied against your own head, for the angel of God is waiting with his sword to saw you in two, that he may destroy you both.” Thus, Susanna was saved and the crowd “rose against the two elders, for out of their own mouths Daniel had convicted them of bearing false witness; and they did to them as they had wickedly planned to do to their neighbor; acting in accordance with the law of Moses, they put them to death” (59-62).

The two old men had crossed the invisible line between bridled desire and unbridled lust. Truth set Susanna free and, in truth, coveting can be deadly for the coveter. Philo of Alexandria (20 B.C.E.–50 C.E.) rightly assessed the purpose of the closing prohibitions of the Decalogue, stating:

The fifth [commandment of the second tablet] is that which cuts off desire, the fountain of all iniquity, from which flow all the most unlawful actions, whether of individuals or of states, whether important or trivial, whether sacred or profane, whether they relate to one’s life and soul, or to what are called external things; for, as I have said before, nothing ever escapes desire, but, like a fire in a wood, it proceeds onward, consuming and destroying everything; and there are a great many subordinate sins, which are prohibited likewise under this commandment, for the sake of correcting those persons who cheerfully receive admonitions, and of chastising those

Reflections

How Many?

1. How many times over the ages has an innocent Susanna been falsely charged with a capital offense by lecherous old men?
2. “How many of the six million to nine million women publicly burned at the stake as witches were actually as innocent as Susanna, falsely charged for denying sexual favors to those in positions of authority?”

stubborn people who devote their whole lives to the indulgence of passion. (*On the Decalogue* 32:173-174).

The Penalty for Violating the Tenth Commandment

- “Do not look intently at a virgin . . . Turn away your eyes from a shapely woman, . . . do not look intently at beauty belonging to another . . . by it passion is kindled like a fire. Never dine with another man’s wife, nor revel with her at wine; lest your heart turn aside to her, and in blood you be plunged into destruction (Sirach 9:5-9).
- The “Hymn to the Sun-god” from the library of Ashurbanipal (668-627 B.C.) provides an extrabiblical reference to the fate of the one who covets, stating, “a man who covets his neighbor’s wife will die before his appointed day. Your weapon will strike him and there will be none to save” (Lambert 1960: 130).

Conclusion

It is impossible to establish with certainty that the Decalogue, or its archetype, was widely recognized as the quintessential criminal code in Israel and enforced consistently. The Decalogue may well have shared the fate of the Passover which, according to 2 Kings 23:21-22, had not been heard of nor observed for more than four hundred years. When and where the Decalogue was recognized in Israel and Judah its goal was to keep people alive on earth (“that your days may be prolonged”). But when the Decalogue came into focus in the New Testament the goal had shifted to the quest for eternal life (Matt 19:17-22; Luke 10:25-28). The Decalogue took third place after the *Shema* of Deuteronomy 6:4-5, “Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength,” and its runner-up in Leviticus 19:18, “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-34; Rom 8:10-13). According to John 13:34-35, Jesus said, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my dis-

Study Bible

See notes on 2 Kings 23:21-23 in *NISB*, 565.

Source

W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), 130.

Teaching Tips

The Quest for Eternal Life

Have two members of the class read in tandem Matthew 19:16-22 and Luke 10:25-28, and then discuss Jesus’ assurance to the young man,

1. “If thou wilt enter into life (eternal), keep the commandments,”
2. “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live (eternally),” and
3. “If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.” Then compare Jesus’ assurance with James’s words in James 2:8-10, 14-18.

ciples, if you love one another” (which is reiterated in John 15:12-13, 17 and 1 John 3:1–14:21). The motivation for obeying the Decalogue had been survival—so that one’s life would not be taken away. With Jesus’ new commandment, love was dominant and life was to be given away, for “Greater love has no-one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13).

Teaching Tips

Grounded in Love, Not Fear

Conclude the class and this series on the Ten Commandments with a reminder of the “Litany of Love” (which came into focus in the sixth session), acknowledging that a Christian’s obedience to the Ten Commandments is grounded in love, not fear.

“Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us” (1 John 4:7-12).