

Exegetical paper on exodus

Religion



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Exegesis of Exodus 20 17 Introduction: To fully understand this passage it is important to understand it's historical and biblical background. Morality and ethics in the context of the world at large is based on situations. While most cultures would say that lying is wrong, the question that often asked is " In such an such a situation is lying wrong?" By looking at the historical, biblical contexts and then the passage we would be able to understand the ethical and moral values that God wants us to do life with, and if they are to be contingent on situations or not.

Historical Background The good of communities requires that rules and promises be made and enforced or that ethical and moral behavior are specified and adhered to. Over history different cultures undertook this endeavor using different modes. In the Ancient Near East this mode was called a covenant. While there is some argument whether the stipulations of Exodus 20 forms a covenant which has it's origins from the Hittites or Mesopotamia itself, it is sufficient for the moment to know that a covenant was the basis of understanding requirements made of a person or a community, A Hittite covenant in the Ancient Near East had the following components. A preamble with historical summary. This was followed by stipulations and a copy deposited in a secure place for referral and for public reading if needed. A list of witnesses ensued next and was generally the gods they believed in, with the conclusion being and equation of blessings and curses for the adherence and the severance of the covenant. While covenants changed from community to community and the there are differences even amongst the covenants of the Old Testament, it is sufficient to know that this was Gods commands for his community constituting his law. " The covenant then constitutes the heart of God's special revelation...."(Douglas & Tenney, 1984, p 238) for community

building. Biblical Background In the chapters preceding the passage being exegeted we see the story of Gods people in the wilderness as they are redeemed out from slavery. Having entered the wilderness of Shur, they are a discontent community murmuring and rebelling. Nevertheless they experience the care of the Yahweh as seen through the provision of Manna and Quail in chapter 16, deliverance from the hostile Amalakites in chapter 17. Chapter 19 reports them entering into the wilderness of Sinai. Having brought them to freedom God sets the foundation for receiving his revelation through covenant in verse 15 “ Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine,”. The rest of chapter 19 details the preparation for receiving the covenant. Exodus 20: 1-2 states the all-important preamble for the covenant. God asserts and claims the position of the one who has already redeemed Israel, and states what he has already done. On the basis of who he is, and what he has already done, God proceeds to give his revelation of the commandments to be followed through Moses to his people. These two verses are vital to understanding God’s intention and heart. “ The tone for the entire section is set by verse 2: “ I am the LORD, your [sing.] God who brought you Out of the land of Egypt from the house of slaves.” The LORD can call on His people because he has delivered them; the Israelites have changed masters. The Israelite was to view the commandments through a heart, which had been touched by the loving action of the LORD. The commandments were an expression of God's concern for Israel; God's grace was manifest in the demands of the law.” (Worley, 1971, p 195) Structure of the Passage Through out this passage the second person singular pronoun “ you” is used in specifying the commands.

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It could have been concluded that it was intended for Moses if we had not the benefit of chapter 19: 9 where it is mentioned that the people would hear God speak. Despite the singular pronoun the commands are God's revelation for the community at large, but responsibility is laid on every single individual by the use of the singular pronoun. We live in societies today that require ethical and moral behavior from its leaders but the denizens feel they are exempt. God was telling the Hebrews otherwise. It can also be noted that none of the laws carried an individual remedy for failure. While they were individual imperatives it was considered one law. "It is all or nothing – the whole law or a broken thing. One hole in a bowl, one crack in a pitcher, unfits it for its purpose. One flaw in a character mars the perfection God requires under the law" (Mears. H, 1999, p 55). The laws could be considered under to sub categories. A. Laws regarding our attitude in our relationship with God B. Laws regarding our attitude in our relationship with fellow man. While this dichotomous classification is helpful in that it follows the essence of a faith relationship according to Jesus as stated in Matthew 22: 37-40 there is a further three fold classification of these ten laws which are very helpful as well. "Israel's Worship (vss. 2-7); Israel's Work (vss. 8-11); and Israel's Walk (vss. 12-17)" (Deffinbaugh). Given that this paper relates the passage to ethics and morality the second classification is helpful.

Content 1. Israel's Worship Verses 2-7 These commandments specify Israel's expression of faith and relationship with the Lord. The ethical structure of the Israelite community is to be based on the character of God. Worship can be the most transformational community activity or the one that causes the most dysfunction. As such the first of commandment works on getting the foundation right. "You shall have no other Gods before me".

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Advocating monotheism the command declares emphatically that the Lord who redeemed the people from slavery will not tolerate competition. If any other were fronted as gods currently, or in the land the Hebrew's were being led into, they are to be considered as nothing. The second command in verse 4 is an implication as a result of the first. " You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below." In a culture where images of Gods are rampant and considered as the residing places of these false Gods, out of concern for the people he delivered (Jealous) Yahweh commands them that no image in stone, wood or metal is really god and therefore should not be made or worshipped. This would also cover making an image or idol of Yahweh as well, and as such should be considered as a total prohibition. The latter is not because Yahweh is a false god, but the only majestic God of whom any man made image would be an insult. The first commandment deals with the object of worship and the second the mode. The third commandment " You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name (Vs 7). The third deals with our oral worship of God. A name in ancient times as seen though many biblical examples denotes a persons character. To misuse a name therefore is to defame the character. We could do this even in worship by vain repetition, irreverent usage to fill gaps in speech, and in associating the name with behavior, which does not compliment the character of God, like lying or swearing. 2. Israel's work verses 8-11 The fourth commandment has two imperatives, one to rest and the other to work. As shown at the beginning of this paper the commandments are to be adhered to based on what God has already done. This basis is evident again in this section. Human work is

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needed and essential. However if it does not flow from a reflection of the work that God has already done it will serve only human agenda's. A wrong view of work, money and profit has caused tremendous moral bankruptcy all around us. The commandment therefore recalls God's creative work, gets us to reflect on it on the Sabbath day. When our work flows as a continuation of God's creative purposes they serve God, community and us. If not it will serve the selfish purposes of individuals and companies causing much angst and poverty. Work as an imperative impresses us that gratitude to God, as the creator requires us fulfilling his plan through working.

3. Israel's walk verses 12 - 17 If we were to proceed according to the first classification mentioned in this paper the laws pertaining to our relationship with our fellow man would come into this section. It is interesting to note that it starts with the fifth commandment " Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you". It is impossible for our walk with outsiders to be Godly if our walk with our own is questionable. The rest of the laws would be simply notional if this one was not real. The caring process of parents is often cumbersome and has numerous problems, but in this deep human relationship we must learn what is ethically acceptable and morally right. The word " honor" used in this command is of great importance. Honor is esteem given to one person by another instead of thinking them lightly. Though honor is given due to the position, it is to be practical. The children's ages have not been specified here which means that all parents due to their role as fathers and mothers need to be esteemed throughout a child's life. The practices of honoring have not been indicated and could mean that whatever the situation it needs to be done. Given the difficulty this could involve the command is given in <https://assignbuster.com/exegetical-paper-on-exodus/>

positive light with a promise of long life. The sixth commandment in verse 13 “ You shall not murder” brings us to the ethical and moral principles directly acceptable. The word used for murder here in Hebrew is “ rasah”. The word is said to be used mainly for premeditated killing, but also for accidental killing. Interestingly rasah is never used for killing in battle. For communities to be safe premeditated killing needs to be prohibited, for communities to enjoy shalom accidental killing needs to be taken serious. Israel’s walk should protect the dignity of life and its ownership by Yahweh as such when war has been ordered by Yahweh killing is not considered a breaking of this commandment. The seventh commandment prohibiting adultery aims to protect the sanctity of marriage, one’s own and the neighbors. Israel’s walk should ensure the integrity of the moral fabric of society, which is a family, founded by a husband and a wife. The eighth commandment in verse 15 acknowledges that to violate one’s property is to violate the person and therefore says, “ Thou shall not steal.” For those who have been violated in Goshen this needed no explanation. The new society being formed by virtue of God’s laws are to be a society very different from the one they fled. Verse 16 gives the next commandment as “ You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.” While one could consider this prohibition against gossip it is more obviously about truthfulness in affairs of the community like in judicial councils. The last commandment appears to be a catchall of the way Israel should walk upright before the Lord. However the word covetousness in verse 17 in Hebrew is hamad, the meaning of which appears to show a requirement of fair play by officials. “ Herrmann showed that hamad was repeatedly followed in the Old Testament by verbs meaning " to take" or " to rob" (Deuteronomy 7: 25; Joshua 7: 21). He concluded that the <https://assignbuster.com/exegetical-paper-on-exodus/>

Hebrew understood the verb to mean an emotion which led to corresponding actions.” (Worley, 1971, p 203) However Hyatt takes a different view. “ A person in a place of authority or serving as a judge should not be covetous and thus allow himself to be bribed. Since laymen administered the courts of justice, bribery was a common temptation. Hyatt feels an injunction against it was necessary. Conclusion: Exodus 20: 1-17 is revelation of God specifying how Israel should worship, work and walk. Written in covenant forms known in the Ancient Near East it placed an individual and collective responsibility of being a community of God who have already been redeemed by him and brought into a promise of blessing. These laws would help them to remain blessing and not be trapped back into captivity. These ethical and moral imperatives however are not to be interpreted based on the definition and the legal relationship of the words used, but on the character of the one who gave them who brought them out of captivity and dealt with their rebellious nature with grace. Citation Page Deffenbaugh B(N. K) submitted to Bible. org <http://bible.org/seriespage/overview-ten-commandments-exodus-201-17> Douglas J. D & Tenney M. C. (1984) New International Bible Dictionary. Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House. Hyatt J. P, Commentary on Exodus, Publication Date: 19, Publisher: Oliphant Mears. H, (1999). What The Bible Is All About. California: Regal Books. Worley. D Jnr, (1971) Restoration Quarterly 14 (1971) 184-204. God's Gracious Love Expressed: Exodus 20: 1-17