

FEBRUARY 4

Exodus 19:16-21:21

This is holy ground. God is forming these people into a nation that was meant to be a beacon of light in a dark world. Everything we read from here until Numbers will take place in the next 11 months. There will be little action, but there is a lot to learn about God and about ourselves.

Exodus 19:16-25

This shows something about the Lord, the way He chose to represent Himself to the people. This might seem extreme, but keep in mind that up until now, they had seen many, many miracles and examples of God's care, but had chosen at every turn to distrust God and gripe at Moses. God has already shown them love and grace in humbling the Egyptians. Now it is time for them to be humbled. God wants them to fear Him. Yet, we will see in Israel that neither God's love and mercy nor His awesome power will persuade them to love and follow Him. Until the power of sin is broken, mankind is helpless.

This event will be used as a lesson showing the contrast of coming to God through the law and coming to God through the redemption in Christ in Hebrews 12:18-22.

V. 22 Notice that there were already men serving as priests. It may have been that during the time in Egypt, different tribes set people apart to lead in worship. In a few chapters God will introduce the Levites as the tribe of priests.

Exodus 20

Vs. 1-17 The Ten Commandments!

Some people have an allergic reaction to them because they are in the negative. Someone else has pointed out that often the negative conveys greater clarity in a few words. Imagine trying to reframe all of these in the positive. Also, imagine trying to convey directions and warnings to your kids by only using positive wording, like "don't run out in the street," or "don't put your hand on a hot burner on the stove."

These 10 "Words" would sum up everything God wanted the people to do. If they followed God in faith, obeying these commandments, the other laws would have been a piece of cake. If the Ten Commandments meant nothing to the people, the other laws would be burdens to them.

The commandments have two parts. Do you see the difference? Also, all but one of these is repeated by Jesus in the NT, the keeping of the Sabbath. Why do you think it is not endorsed and promoted for the church by Jesus?

Vs. 2-3 This is the first commandment. Notice that it is based on God's love and grace to them.

Vs. 4-6 This is the second commandment. Notice too that even here, God's love is mentioned.

V. 7 This is the third commandment to honor the name of the Lord. In Catholic Milwaukee, I grew up thinking it was a commandment to abuse the name of the Lord.

Vs. 8-11 This is the fourth commandment to consecrate the Sabbath and keep it holy. Notice that the Sabbath is connected to the seven literal 24-hour days of creation. God worked on the first six days and rested on the seventh. They would have understood the days of creation as 24-hour days.

Vs. 12-17 Now based on following God in faith and love, you love your neighbor as yourself.

Vs. 18-21 This is the people's response and Moses' explanation for the sound and light show.

If this order is chronological, the Ten Commandments were given to Moses on this short excursion on the mountain. Then he came down to pass on the commandments and to let the

people know that God wanted to make a covenant with them, the commandments being representative of their obedience to the covenant. Moses then went back up the mountain to write the book of the covenant with the other regulations for the nation.

The sight must have been fear inspiring. Earlier it is said that the smoke rising off the mountain was like from a furnace, violent and forceful. Add to this the lightning, thunder, and trumpets, and you can understand why the people were petrified.

V. 20 gives the purpose for this show of power. We'll see that it didn't work.

Vs. 22-26 This section fits with the commandments, restating one of the commandments and adding God's stipulations on how He should be approached in worship and sacrifice. Within the next few months they would begin building the tabernacle, but until the completion of the tabernacle, if they made altars, this was how they should do it.

The main lesson for them here is to approach God in fear and respect, without representing Him in ways that He does not choose. The images and symbols of the worship of Yahweh will come from Yahweh, not from their imaginations. God was always to have been worshipped in spirit and in truth.

For us as disciples, we should also follow this "advice." If you look at what Jesus says we should do, and how "worship" is referred to in the NT, I wonder sometimes if our "worship" isn't more a product of our imaginations and needs. I'm not saying all of it is wrong, but if the things that God desires are missing, if there is no worship in serving Him in the harvest, and it's all to give us a nice feeling, does that really give glory to God? Is any of it really for Him, or simply for us? *By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.* (John 15:8)

Exodus 21:1-21

Now, there are lots of places in the Bible, like Proverbs, where the order and connection between verses or themes defies logic or imagination. Since I enjoy the exercise, I'll suggest some logical connections at times. And if you see something that seems to fit together, go for it. If you can't see the connection I make, maybe you can make your own.

The last block of verses seemed to address the first four commandments, repeating one of them and generally talking about approaching God. These verses seem to address the last six commandments, repeat the commandment regarding parents, and generally talk about issues in living with one another.

Vs. 1-6 The slavery mentioned here is when a person makes himself a slave because of debt or need. It was like being hired under contract for six years. Every seventh year the contracts were voided. This is not forceful oppression and ownership of humans.

V. 1 hints at the cycle of release that God will institute later. The image of the slave wishing to give up his freedom and to stay "enslaved" to remain with his wife and children has been used as a symbol of Christ's sacrifice, allowing Himself to be "pierced through" for love of his bride. It makes a good image for a disciple.

Vs. 7-11 This was "selling" a daughter into marriage, where the daughter became a concubine or servant wife. This is what Hagar was to Abe. She was a kind of wife, but was still referred to by God as the slave woman.

Notice that what is given here is humane and lawful and is probably a corrective to something bad that had been going on in the culture.

Vs. 12-14 This is the 6th commandment with the addition of what to do with someone who accidentally kills someone. It was apparently expected that if one man killed another, even by

accident, someone had the right to kill the killer. God puts the brakes on this. Thou shall not kill means you shall not murder.

Vs. 15-17 This has to do with the 5th commandment, with v. 16 sitting in. I would suggest that the connection with v. 16 is that “honoring your parents” also meant caring for them, financially and physically, in their old age or need. To take a son from his parents by force, so that he could not care for them, was worthy of death. Think about what Jesus said about “Corban” (Mark 7:11). That was similar to this.

Vs. 18-19 This is two men willingly fighting each other, not one attacking another. Notice that the injuring party had to pay for the injured man.

Vs. 20-21 This was a new, better law. It meant death to the slave owner if the slave died. But if the slave survived for a couple of days, it was, I think, to be looked on as God’s intervention, that God could have saved him but didn’t, and there was to be no punitive justice.

From here on, it will only get more random, at times, and you’ll be happy for the NT portion.

Matthew 23:13-39

Jesus is only days before His sacrifice for our sin, and here He is pronouncing His official condemnation of the Jewish leadership. After three years of being hounded by them, showing them mercy and grace, it is time to strongly “speak the truth in love” to these leaders.

So, how many woes are there? This is like Bible Study 101. Take every woe and figure out what Jesus is stating about the Pharisees and leaders. What is the key thing they were doing wrong? What should we be doing better as followers of Christ in the harvest?

I’ll mention some things that stand out to me.

Vs. 13-15 Notice that the first woe has to do with keeping people from finding God. This was the whole point of Israel’s mission, and the leaders were keeping people out. Although God is reaching people now, through the church, do not think that Israel will not fulfill this purpose. There will come a time when the church is removed, and Israel will come to Christ and evangelize the world as all hell is breaking loose upon them. Redeeming a lost world was and is Israel’s mission. It is Christ’s mission and it is His disciple’s mission.

Vs. 16-22 Jesus has told the disciples never to swear at all. Yet, here Jesus is showing that these men were teaching people to worship stuff and not to worship God in spirit and in truth.

Vs. 23-24 I think this image is funny.

Vs. 25-26 We all do this. We think if we don't get in trouble, don't smoke, don't get people pregnant, etc., we are right with God.

Vs. 27-28 Rather than making people holy or blessed or disciples, everyone who touched the scribes or Pharisees became unclean and disqualified from worshiping God.

Vs. 29-36 The last woe puts the entire OT history on the shoulders of these leaders. Just as the law and prophets continued to John, the guilt of hardhearted rebellion against God and killing His messengers continued to these men who were about to kill the ultimate messenger, the Christ, the Son of Man, the Son of God.

V. 33 Imagine, this is God speaking to these men. Whoa!

V. 34 Notice the *I*.

Jesus pronounces judgment on this group of people, this particular generation. The imminence of this coming judgment often gets confused with the second coming of Christ. Paul, in particular, had this judgment in view. You see this reflected in the distress that Paul talks about in 1

Corinthians 7. The judgment with this generation would hit in 70 A.D., when Jerusalem and the temple would be destroyed by the Romans.

Vs. 37-39 This is a second lament of Jesus over Jerusalem. The part of this that hits me is the ending. The nation will not see Jesus again until they are so desperate, that like Israel as slaves in Egypt, the collective cry of the nation will be so intense that they cry out for help and are willing to welcome Him, whom they as a nation have already rejected.

Psalm 28

I wonder if the crying out of Israel in the Tribulation will sound like this psalm. It would be a blessing to be able to write something like this, but it came at a price for David. To deeply know the Lord will mean to suffer for His sake. And the testimony of praise has much more meaning when it comes from those who have been tested and proven in living for the Lord.

You see some very distinct parts of this song to the Lord:

Vs. 1-2 David is calling out to the Lord for help.

Vs. 3-5 David's distress over the wicked and their attempts to harm him.

Vs. 6-7 David's personal praise and confidence in the Lord.

Vs. 8-9 Israel's need for the Lord and His guidance.

Proverbs 7:1-5

Notice again the figurative reference to binding the Word to your body to control your actions. This is how important and close the Word should be to us. We assent to this, but Solomon and the Spirit are saying we should so passionately understand our need and the danger around us, that we intimately connect ourselves to the Word. We ignore this to our own harm.

Notice, too, that sensual pleasure is the great danger again, and attraction to the Word and wisdom is contrasted to the passion and attraction to the desires that will ruin us as disciples.