

## Written Sermons and Exegesis, Exodus 20:1-26

### Keep the Commandments

#### *Intro to the 10 Commandments*

#### **Paraphrases of Texts about the Law**

In Genesis 26:3-5, Yahweh made a promise to Isaac that He would confirm the oath which He swore to Abraham, and He said it was because Abraham listened to His voice and kept His mandate, His commandments, His statutes, and His instructions.

In Deuteronomy 7:9, Yahweh proclaims Himself as the faithful Mighty One who keeps His gracious covenant loyalty for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments. (Notice how love and commandment keeping go together.)

In Joshua 1:7-8, Joshua says that above everything, Yahweh's people are to be strong and courageous to carefully observe the whole instruction that Moses, the servant of Yahweh, commanded. Do not turn from it to the right or the left. This book of the law must not depart from your mouth; you are to recite it day and night, so that you may carefully observe everything written in it. For then you will prosper and succeed in whatever you do.

As King David was about to die, he instructed his son Solomon (in 1 Kings 2:1-3): "Be strong and brave, and keep your obligation to Yahweh, to walk in His ways and to keep His statutes, commandments, judgments, and testimonies. This is written in the law of Moses, so that you will have success in everything you do and wherever you turn."

In 2 Kings 18:6 we read that King Hezekiah trusted in Yahweh. He did not turn from following Yahweh, but kept the commandments Yahweh had commanded Moses.

Psalms 111 verse 10 tells us that the fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom, and a good understanding have all they who do His commandments.

Proverbs 3:1-4 says you should not forget Yahweh's law, and let your heart keep His commandments. They will bring you many days, a full life, and well-being. You will find favor and high regard in the sight of Yahweh and man.

In Ecclesiastes 12:13, we read: "Listen to the conclusion of the whole matter: fear the Almighty and keep His commandments. This is the whole duty of man."

In Matthew 5:19 Yeshua says: "Whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches people to do so, will be called least in the kingdom. But whoever practices and teaches these commandments will be called great in the kingdom."

In Matthew 19:17 we read that someone came up to Yeshua and asked him: Teacher, what must I do to have eternal life? Yeshua responded: If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.

In Luke 1:5-6 we read that Zechariah and Elizabeth, the parents of John the Baptizer, were both righteous in Yahweh's sight, living without blame according to all the commandments and requirements of Yahweh.

Yeshua said in John 15:9-10, "If you keep my commandments you will abide in my love, even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in His love."

1 John 2:3-4 says that we know that we know Yahweh, by keeping His commandments. If we say we know Him, but don't keep His commandments, we are liars.

1 John 3:24 says that whatever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do the things that are pleasing in His sight.

And 1 John 5:3 says: This is the love of Yahweh, that we keep His commandments, and they are not a burden.

### **Exhortation to Keep the Commandments**

This is just a short sampling of scriptures that emphasize the keeping of the commandments of Yahweh. We should probably have a little card in our wallet, with all these verses on them, when someone asks us: "Why do you think it's so important that you keep the commandments?"

There is no other way to live. There is no other way to carry on day-to-day life. There is no other way to do business. There is no other way to do anything there is to do. Keeping the commandments of Yahweh is always the right thing to do.

We may come up with all sorts of reasons not to keep the commandments, but they all go back to one reason: man thinks he knows better than Yahweh, and wants to do what he wants to do.

Your flesh; your carnal human nature, doesn't desire to keep the commandments. We all battle with the desires of the flesh. Sometimes the things your spirit man wants to do, you don't do. And sometimes the things your flesh man wants to do, you give in to. It is a constant battle that we have, because we think we know better than Yahweh.

But you are to instead trust in Yahweh with all your heart, and lean not to your own understanding.

It is not loving Yahweh to just believe the parts of the Bible that you want to believe. It is not loving Yahweh to pick and choose what you want to obey. It is not loving Yahweh to talk

yourself out of keeping commandments, or precepts, or instructions that He has given. That's not loving Yahweh.

If you are a believer, Yahweh has forgiven you of all your sins. He has removed them as far as the East is from the West. He's had compassion upon you as man has compassion upon a little child he loves. He has wiped your slate clean. You are saved by His grace and mercy. You aren't saved because you made the first move. You are saved because of Yahweh, not because of you.

So how do we repay Yahweh? Well, we could never repay Yahweh. We could never earn Yahweh's love. We could never do enough good things to take away the bad things.

But... He has given us a way to show Him that we love Him. He has given us a way to say, "Thank you Yahweh. Thank you for everything You have done for me. Thank you for my life. Thank you for my family. Thank you for my friends." He's given us a way to actively say this to Him, and that way is by keeping His commandments.

You don't show Yahweh you love Him by telling Him, "I love you." That's okay to do, but that doesn't prove you love Yahweh.

You don't show Yahweh you love Him by how loud you sing to Him. You don't show Yahweh you love Him by how many words you use when you pray to Him, or how eloquent you speak. No... none of this proves anything. His love language is keeping His commandments.

When you follow His commandments, summarized in the 10 commandments in both Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, Yahweh looks down and knows that you love Him. He says, "There is my child. I know she loves me. I know he loves me. I know they appreciate what I have done for them. I know they really mean it."

So many people in the world today will attempt to get you away from the commandments. They will pull on your heart strings in an attempt to say that some things Yahweh commands just don't go along with how we are supposed to love in 2018. They will pull out all kinds of man-made ideas, and false concepts of love.

And even worse, you have professing Christian pastors that downplay the commandments. They say that we don't have to keep the commandments. They call the commandments outdated, or bondage.

In light of all the scriptures I began with today, how could someone state such a thing? How could someone who claims to believe in the Bible think that keeping the commandments of Yahweh is not really necessary?

Like I said, the flesh often overrides the spirit. Sometimes Christian men can get de-railed due to peer-pressure, and cave into the popular ideology that goes along with the ways of the carnal world.

I want you to know today that I believe in keeping the commandments. I believe in teaching the commandments. By Yahweh's grace, I will never teach you to break a commandment that you have the ability to obey.

Now, I am not perfect. I have sinned against Yahweh in ways that I am ashamed of. I battle with my flesh everyday just like everyone else. But a righteous man falls seven times and gets back up. I am not going to give in. I am not going to give up. I am not going to stop running this race. I am not going to roll over and try to fit in with any ideology that teaches keeping the commandments really doesn't matter.

Today's lesson is an encouragement lesson to keep Yahweh's commandments, and it is also an introductory lesson to the next 10 weeks. Beginning next week, I will be teaching 1 lesson on each of the 10 commandments.

The 10 commandments are 10 ways to love. They are 10 ways to live. They are 10 goals to strive for. None of them are outdated. All of them are for us today, and if we are interested in loving Yahweh, we must be interested in knowing, understanding, and obeying the 10 commandments.

I don't want any of my children, or any child in here growing up and deciding to trash the commandments, because they never heard them taught by the pastor of the church. But if I teach the commandments, and you still walk away from them, I have done my part.

I will talk about how we have broken the commandments, and I will talk about how we can keep the commandments. I will teach both law and grace. I will teach both faith and works. I will teach the whole council of Yahweh. I love you all, and I want you all to love Yahweh. I want to love Yahweh. I want to love Yahweh more and more. The way to do that is by studying His commandments, and learning how to keep His commandments.

### **The First Commandment**

**Read: Exodus 20:1-3; Deuteronomy 6:4-9**

Today we begin our study through the 10 commandments, looking at each of them in light of (1) our failure to keep them, and (2) the requirement to live by them.

The 10 commandments are not the only 10 laws in the Bible. If you are reading them as exhaustive details about how to live, you are reading them incorrectly. They are each summaries of broader law or categories of law.

It is similar to how Yeshua spoke of 2 commands (in Matthew 22:34-40). Yeshua wasn't saying Yahweh only gave 2 commandments. He was saying that every commandment can be *summed up* inside of those 2 (love Yahweh; love your neighbor).

The 10 commandments are more detailed than the 2, yet they are still summaries of the entire law. Each commandment contains within it a wealth of information.

### **The Command Itself**

The first commandment, which we read moments ago, is not just the first in order; it is also the first or primary commandment in rank. It encompasses everything in Yahweh's law. Yahweh says, "Do not have other gods besides me," (HCSB) or "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." (KJV)

Some people read the words "before me" here, and conclude that other mighty ones do exist, but none are as high in rank as Yahweh. Others read the words as Yahweh saying "do not have other mighty ones before my face, or in my presence" because other mighty ones do not exist.

I believe that Scripture teaches that Yahweh is the ***ALL-mighty***, but that there does exist other mighty ones in both the spirit realm and even in the fleshly realm.

This doesn't mean that any of the other mighty ones are equivalent with Yahweh in power, knowledge, and ability... but nonetheless they do exist.

For example: Exodus 15:11 says "Yahweh, who is like you among the gods (elohim)? Who is like You, glorious in holiness, revered with praises, performing wonders?" I don't think the question being asked is: "Yahweh, who is like you among the idols or non-existing deities," but instead, "Who among all the mighty ones of heaven and earth can be compared to Yahweh?" Psalm 86:8 says: "Lord, there is no one like You among the gods," and Psalm 136:2 says that Yahweh is the "God of gods" or *Elohim of elohim*. He's first place.

There exist other mighty ones in heaven and earth, but none can be compared to Yahweh. None have the authority that Yahweh has. None are able to make laws above or beyond what Yahweh has commanded. All authorities are subservient to Yahweh.

### **I Am Yahweh Your Elohim**

This is why you see a theme in the law of Yahweh, whereby laws begin or end with "I am Yahweh your Elohim." You'll find this over 30 times in the Old Testament, when Yahweh is giving authoritative declaration. He is declaring: "Because I am your Mighty One - your unique, sole authority - all other authorities bow to me. No one has the right to over-rule what I have commanded."

This is the first commandment. Yahweh is the Mighty One that stands above all others. He is the Mighty One that is to be first place in our lives, decisions, and in all that we do.

## Putting Yahweh First

Other authorities may exist in our life. Other mighty ones play a part in how we live. We have governments, parents, bosses, etc. We are called throughout Scripture to submit to authority structures. The key is that we understand that no authority structure would exist, unless Yahweh granted their authority.

A parent has authority over their child, but the parent was given such authority by The Supreme Being, Almighty Yahweh. This means that when the parent (or government, or boss) commands something contrary to what Yahweh has commanded, Yahweh still rules. There is no authority before (*in front of*) him, or beside (*equivalent with*) him.

It is ok to be devoted to others. I should be devoted to my wife and my children. I should be devoted to my family and my friends. *There are levels of devotion though.* For example: I am devoted more to my wife than anyone else in here. She's my best friend. I'm more worried about what she thinks of me, than what anyone else thinks of me. But as much as I love my wife, she cannot take top position in my life. Same goes for her with me. She has to be devoted to Yahweh in a stronger way that she devotes herself to Matthew.

## Our Decisions vs. His Word

In so many discussions, I've heard people say something like: "Well... I believe this, or that, or such and such. I think this is the way things should go," and they explain what they think is best or right, never looking to what Yahweh has said in His Word.

Anytime you come to a conclusion on what you think to be right or wrong, without looking to what Yahweh has commanded, you are having another mighty one in your life before Yahweh.

We grow up with ways to live and things to believe. We all inherit something from our parents and grandparents. Some of it is good, but none of it is infallible. It always bows to Yahweh's law. What a parent or grandparent says is always secondary to what Yahweh says.

We read some things in the Bible, and we think, "Ok... I can go along with that," but that's the wrong mentality. That's reading the Bible to see what we agree with, and trashing what we don't agree with. Reading Yahweh's law is supposed to transform us. We are to read it, and the many times it goes against what we think or want, we are to humbly submit to what Yahweh says.

Far too often people begin with their conclusion. I'm talking about Christian people; people who profess to believe in Holy Scripture. We decide what we think is best. We decide what we want to believe, because of various reasons: parents, grandparents, denomination, life experience, what makes us feel good, a dream we had etc. *Then* we go to the Bible to try and find something to back us up. That's beginning with your conclusion. That is the wrong way to read the Bible, and it is a violation of the first commandment.

Obedience means reading the Bible *in order to come to a* conclusion of what to believe; *in order to come to a* conclusion of what is right and wrong. You study, not caring what anyone else thinks, over and above Yahweh. It's not that you don't care about people; you do. You just don't care about people *as much as* you care about what Yahweh.

It is in the times when you are reading and studying Holy Scripture, and you come across something that goes against what an authority structure taught you, or something that isn't popular in main stream culture, or something that is looked down upon by society. You decide that you will submit to Yahweh, in spite of what anyone else may think of you. These are the times when you are loving Yahweh. These are the times when you are saying, "Yahweh, you told me not to have other mighty ones before You, so I'm standing on what You have said."

So you see how this command is the pinnacle and summary of all other commands. This one comes first because it is first. It is a call of ultimate allegiance to Yahweh above anything or anyone else.

### **The SHEMA**

I coupled this commandment with Deuteronomy 6:4-9 to begin the sermon, the passage which begins with the Hebrew word SHEMA, translated as "hear" or "listen." The word SHEMA doesn't mean a mere hearing of the ear. Yahweh isn't saying to just listen to Him audibly. He is saying "Listen *with the intent to obey*." Oftentimes the word SHEMA is translated in your Bible with the English word obey, because that's what it means. Deuteronomy 13:4 says to keep Yahweh's commands and *listen* (shema) to his voice. Listen intently, so you know how to obey. He that hath ears let him hear (Yeshua said). Not hear physically. Hear spiritually, so you obey.

What are we to obey in the SHEMA? So many people read Deuteronomy 6:4, using it in debates on how many persons God is. I've been guilty of this myself in talking with Trinitarians. "The SHEMA says the Lord is 1, not 3" I've said. But this is not the original meaning of the SHEMA. I don't hold to the Trinitarian idea of Yahweh. I do believe Yahweh is one, single person. But that is not the point of the SHEMA.

Deuteronomy 6:4 is not a theological statement of belief. It is an oath of loyalty. It is a command to Israel to have Yahweh as the supreme Mighty One in their life. Listen Israel. Listen with the intent on obeying this: Yahweh is our Mighty One. Yahweh *alone*. That's how some Bibles translate it, and I believe that is the better sense of the passage in context. The SHEMA is not declaring monotheism. It is commanding loyalty.

When Moses penned that down, he wasn't debating Trinitarians. Yahweh was giving a command that the Israelites were to have Yahweh as their sole authority. They were to have no other mighty ones before Him. That is the command to us today as well.

## How We SHEMA

We are to love Yahweh with everything. His law is to be our guide. His law is to be in our heart. His law is to be in our conversation, and even written on the doorpost of our house and upon our gates. Writing His law on your doorpost and gates goes beyond just the writing; it means that Yahweh is the center of your home. He is the Ruler of where you live. What goes on - on your property - is governed by the law of Yahweh. Listen Israel: Yahweh is your Mighty One. Yahweh alone. Serve no other. Pledge your allegiance to no other.

Anytime we say something is a sin that's not condemned in the law, we break the first commandment. Anytime we say something is not a sin, when it is a violation of the law, we break the first commandment. Anytime we read our own bias or personal prejudice into the law we break the first commandment.

We all come to Yahweh with baggage, and we fight hard because we want to keep at least some of that baggage. We fight because we are prideful people that do not want to submit to His authority.

It ruffles our feathers so much when we see something Yahweh teaches that doesn't go along with what we think. We start proof-texting. I've seen it done so much. You scramble to find a way to justify your thoughts. You desperately look for something in the Bible to fit your own thinking. **And if that's what you want, that's what you will get.** If you want to serve yourself or someone else; if you want to have a mighty one before Yahweh, you will have that mighty one.

Yahweh knows how much effort and study you put in. He sees whether or not you are diligently seeking His will. He knows the intents of your heart. He knows if you are submitting or resisting. He knows when you have an elohim before Him.

I believe we've all broken the first commandment, and since we have... we've broken the most important commandment in the law. All other commands fall under this one, and we are all guilty of disobedience.

The key is that you recognize your sin, ask Yahweh to forgive you for your sin, repent of your sin, place your faith in His Messiah who did not sin, and then ask Yahweh to help you put Him first. When you pray, ask Yahweh to help you read His Word with a willing heart. Ask Him to help you not fight what He has said. Ask Him to help you let go of traditions, ideologies, ways of thinking... that don't align with His instructions.

Yahweh must be number 1 all by Himself. No one else gets that spot. Oh how I've fallen so short. I'm thankful He forgives when we repent. I'm thankful He gave His Son as a substitute sacrifice for my breaking the first commandment. Now... I want to strive to obey Yahweh fully. I don't want to have another mighty one before Him.



## **The Second Commandment**

Read: Exodus 20:4-6; Deuteronomy 4:11-19

So today we are going to study the commandment concerning images and likenesses. In the KJV, the first part of this commandment reads: "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything."

If the only passage dealing with this subject was Exodus 20:4-6, we *might* come to the conclusion that *any* images, statues, icons, paintings, drawings, etc. are forbidden. Some people throughout history have come to that conclusion. Others have read the same commandment, and focused on the second part in the commandment where we read: "Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them." This view says that it is ok to make an image, so long as we do not bow down to, or serve the image.

### **Orthodox and Catholic**

The Orthodox Church, along with the Roman Catholic Church uses images and icons in their worship. They explain their use of images by saying that they are not worshipping the images, just venerating or honoring God or saints through the medium of the image.

An Orthodox believer would say that you might carry with you a picture of your spouse or children in your wallet (or in these days on your phone). If you are away from your family for an amount of time, such an image would mean a lot to you.

I remember watching *Hacksaw Ridge*, the movie where Desmond Doss (a 7th Day Adventist) joined the military, but kept a picture of his sweetheart with him to look at.

So... you might even kiss such a picture if you're away from someone you love for a long time, but you know that the picture is not the person. You are not idolizing the picture, you are just using it to help you remember someone you love.

Catholics would say the same, and maybe even go a step further. Some Orthodox believers limit their images to 2-dimensional icons; paintings of Christ and saints who have died in the faith. Catholics allow 3-dimensional images or statues. You've probably seen a crucifix before; a cross with a statue of Christ hanging on the cross. A Catholic believer would tell you that he or she is using such a statue as a medium through which to worship THE Christ. They would say, "I am not worshipping the statue, only venerating or honoring the statue. It reminds me of Christ."

### **Protestant Reaction**

In history, some men in the Protestant Reformation re-acted to the Roman Catholic view by removing all images and icons from their churches. One such Protestant, a Puritan in the 1600's by the name of Thomas Watson, said: "The Church of Rome is reprov'd and condemn'd, which, from the Beginning of its religion to the End, is wholly idolatrous. Romanists make images of God the Father, painting him in their church windows as an old man; and an image of Christ on the crucifix; and, because it

is against the letter of this commandment, they sacrilegiously blot it out of their catechism, and divide the tenth commandment into two."

Thomas Watson got a bit excited when he wrote that, because it's not technically accurate. If you pick up a Catholic Bible you will find the commandment we read at the beginning of this lesson there. They didn't remove it. What they do is number the Ten Commandments differently. They see Exodus 20:3 and Exodus 20:4-6 as all going together for the first commandment, and they explain the part about graven images and likenesses as pertaining to worship, not just the making of the image.

Thomas Watson, among others, re-acted to Rome's theology of images and use of images by removing all images from the church and worship setting. So even today, if you enter into a Protestant Church, you probably wouldn't see any images or icons anywhere. Walking into a Roman Catholic or Orthodox Church, you'd see quite a few.

But should we take a position on this issue by simply re-acting to another's point of view? Sometimes we do that. Sometimes we see how people do things religiously, and we think they are wrong, so we get as far away from their view as possible, and we forget about studying the Bible.

### **Are Images Forbidden? (Examples)**

Does Yahweh forbid the making of any image or likeness? Well... this commandment is found in Exodus 20:4-6, and just five chapters later, Yahweh gives *another commandment* in relation to the building of the Tabernacle. In Exodus 25 Yahweh commands that two cherub of gold be fashioned to go on top of the lid of the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark of the Covenant was the holiest tangible object in Israel's faith, and was housed in the holiest place on earth. In it sat a pot of manna, Aaron's rod that budded almonds, and the Ten Commandment stones. On top sat a lid, sometimes called the mercy seat, and on the lid were fashioned two statues - cherubs, or angelic creatures with their wings touching each other.

Then, in Exodus 26 Yahweh commands that the curtains for the Tabernacle have a design of cherubim (plural) worked into them. These are living creatures in the heavens above, and Yahweh is commanding that images of them be made.

We also see later on in the stationary tabernacle, known as the Temple in Jerusalem, that king Solomon had two 15 foot cherubs built out of olive wood, and the temple walls had carvings and engravings on them of cherubs, palm trees, and flower blossoms. You can read about this in 1 Kings 6.

1 Kings 7 mentions a cast metal reservoir that held water used for ceremonial washing. Ornamental gourds encircled the reservoir, and it stood on top of 12 statues of oxen facing outward in a circle. You can also read here about water carts for the Temple. The carts were framed, and on the frames were pictures of lions, oxen, and cherubim.

In 1 Kings 9 Yahweh told Solomon that He consecrated this Temple that Solomon had built, and Yahweh never said one negative word about all the images and likenesses inside the Temple.

Catholic and Orthodox Christians point all of this out when talking to Protestants. They say, "See, it's not the images or likenesses that are forbidden, but the bowing down to them and the worshiping of them."

### **The Bronze Snake**

They would also point out Numbers 21. Let's go to Numbers 21 and read verses 4-9.

**4** Then they set out from Mount Hor by way of the Red Sea to bypass the land of Edom, but the people became impatient because of the journey.

**5** The people spoke against Elohim and Moses: "Why have you led us up from Egypt to die in the wilderness? There is no bread or water, and we detest this wretched food!"

**6** Then Yahweh sent poisonous snakes among the people, and they bit them so that many Israelites died.

**7** The people then came to Moses and said, "We have sinned by speaking against Yahweh and against you. Intercede with Yahweh so that He will take the snakes away from us." And Moses interceded for the people.

**8** Then Yahweh said to Moses, "Make a snake [image] and mount it on a pole. When anyone who is bitten looks at it, he will recover."

**9** So Moses made a bronze snake and mounted it on a pole. Whenever someone was bitten, and he looked at the bronze snake, he recovered.

Yeshua mentions this account when speaking with Nicodemus. He says (John 3:14-15): "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness so the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in Him will have eternal life." Yeshua is equating himself with that bronze snake. Just like the Israelites were healed of their snake bites by looking on the bronze snake, the Israelites will be granted eternal life by looking upon the Son of Man. (I believe the lifting up here of the Son of Man is speaking of him being lifted up on a pole or cross, just like the bronze snake was mounted on a pole.)

Again, an image was made at the command of Yahweh. This bronze snake was not worshiped here in Numbers 21, but it was looked upon in accordance with the command of Yahweh.

Turn over to 2 Kings 18:1-4 and let me show you something. Let's read:

**1** In the third year of Israel's King Hoshea son of Elah, Hezekiah son of Ahaz became king of Judah.

**2** He was 25 years old when he became king; he reigned 29 years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Abi daughter of Zechariah.

**3** He did what was right in Yahweh's sight just as his ancestor David had done.

**4** He removed the high places and shattered the sacred pillars and cut down the Asherah [poles]. He broke into pieces the bronze snake that Moses made, for the Israelites burned incense to it up to that time. He called it Nehushtan.

Nehushtan simply means "copper." Hezekiah called it "copper" to remind the Israelites that it was just an object. It had no life in it. The people had taken it too far. They were burning incense to it, which was worshiping the image.

### **What's the Answer?**

In studying the Scriptures, it appears that the Catholics and the Orthodox have a pretty good case for what they do. They acknowledge the commandment, but in light of the totality of Scripture, they believe the commandment forbids worshiping the images made, not the making of the images themselves.

*Here's what I think they miss.* There is no positive example in Scripture of any image being made of Yahweh, and then using that image in the worship of Him. There is also no positive example of the early New Covenant church making images or icons of the Messiah to use in their worship of Yeshua. This is where I think the Catholics and Orthodox go overboard.

It can be argued that an image of Yeshua is permitted, seeing he is a flesh and blood human. I can't argue against that, but (1) we must still guard against how it is used, and (2) how do we know what he looked like?

While some Protestants are too strict to have any images inside of a church setting (which is *not* Biblical), some Catholics and Orthodox go to the other extreme, and have images of the Almighty and Christ in the church setting, and set a level of affection on such images that I don't believe Yahweh is always comfortable with.

They might always come back with the rebuttal: "We are not worshiping the icon or the statue." But at what point does it become worship and thus sin? At what point does the *veneration* of images and icons become the *worship* of the image or icon?

I once had the opportunity go to San Antonio Texas, and visit a Roman Catholic Church built in the 1500's. The architecture was stunning, and there was a giant crucifix at the center of the front wall in the main sanctuary area. A young man knelt on a kneeler gazing at the crucifix with great affection. I wondered how long he would kneel there. It seemed like forever. Was this a mere looking upon the crucifix, as the Israelites looked upon the bronze serpent? Or was this overstepping the bounds of looking at the crucifix?

Remember: in 2 Kings 18 the Israelites were burning incense to the bronze snake. Nothing is said about praying to it, or bowing down to it, yet it was still seen as sin, because they had taken it too far.

When a person can look at a statue of the Virgin Mary and say: "Hail Mary Mother of God, full of grace and truth," is that not crossing the line? When a person can kiss a crucifix in a religious setting, is that not overstepping the bounds of the commandment?

None of the images or icons in the Old Testament were used in the proper worship of Yahweh. The images were there. The cherubim were there. The oxen were there. The bronze snake was there. But the most we can say is that these images were looked at. They were not kissed. No one bowed before the image. They were not held in the hand while an Israelite prayed. They were simply there, and in this list of images, there was never an approved image of Yahweh the Creator.

Can we go above and beyond what Yahweh has commanded and approved of? I don't believe so. While some Protestants may be disallowing less than what Yahweh allowed, we can't go beyond what Yahweh allows. According to Scripture, we would be allowed to have an image or icon here in the church setting, but (1) only to look at for its artistic beauty, (2) to bring to remembrance a great person or occurrence in Scripture, and (3) never of Yahweh.

The moment we begin worshiping Yahweh contrary to how He has prescribed, we open up a box that cannot be shut. This is why you see churches today doing everything under the sun in their worship service. I saw two guys do a rap about the UGA-Alabama SEC championship in front of their church during worship service. Then there was this pastor dude that came down from the balcony on a wire in an attempt to depict Christ coming in the clouds.

What has happened is that people have decided how they are going to worship Yahweh, when Yahweh has already prescribed how worship towards Him should go. We don't get to come up with our own images - our own *imaginations* - as to how He should be worshiped. We don't get to make a calf and proclaim (Exodus 32), "This is the elohim that brought you out of the land of Egypt!" No. We are to worship Him in the manner He prescribes. The Israelites were not creating another elohim in Exodus 32, they were depicting Yahweh by the calf. In the ancient near east, the bull was a sign of strength and power. They made this image to worship Yahweh through.

If He allows images and likenesses in the Tabernacle, so be it. But that doesn't mean we can make an image or likeness of Him who is the Creator, nor does it mean we can go beyond looking at the images that He allows, else they should be smashed into pieces like Hezekiah did to the bronze snake.

There are lawful things we may do outside of a church context. You wanna' go zip lining? Knock yourself out, but don't zip line into the pulpit to preach. You want to paint a picture, or make a carving, or form a statue. That is fine, but don't make one of Yahweh, and don't bow down or pray to any of the ones you are allowed to make.

It's about what makes Yahweh comfortable.  
It's not about what you want, it's about what He wants.

Yahweh decides how He is to be worshiped, and we should respect His decision. Do what He says. Allow what He allows. Don't go beyond it, and don't condemn someone who stays in the parameters of the law, even if you personally refrain.

Some Protestants I believe are too strict on images and icons. And some Catholics and Orthodox I believe are not strict enough. We should always examine our practices in light of Holy Scripture, least we be involved in adding to or taking away from Yahweh's law. This commandment says that Yahweh is a jealous Mighty One. Let's not provoke our Mighty One to jealousy with an image or likeness.

As the end of the second commandment says: "For I Yahweh your Elohim, am a jealous Elohim, punishing the children for the father's sin to the third and fourth generations of those who hate me, but showing faithful love to a thousand generations of those who love Me and keep My commands."

### **The Third Commandment**

Read: Exodus 20:7; Leviticus 19:12

I was talking to a fellow one time about the Sacred Name, and he remarked how it grated on him to hear someone swear using God's name. He made a clever statement by saying, "God's last name is not damn." I chuckled, and said, "You're right... and his first name is not God."

In Exodus 20:7, the KJV reads: "Thou shalt not take the name of Yahweh thy Mighty One in vain, for Yahweh will not hold him guiltless who taketh His name in vain."

The Complete Jewish Bible gives an interesting take on this verse that I believe is good. It reads: "You are not to use lightly the name of [Yahweh] your Mighty One, because [Yahweh] will not leave unpunished someone who uses His name lightly."

The First Commandment teaches us that there is no higher authority than Yahweh. The Second Commandment teaches that we should not form idols to represent Yahweh, and that we should worship Yahweh on His terms. The Third Commandment goes right along with these two in teaching that the name of the Almighty should be held sacred. His name expresses who He is. His name is part of who He is.

### **The Sacred Name**

I've used the name *Yahweh* in reading Exodus 20:7 from three versions of the Bible. This is because that is the name that belongs in Exodus 20:7. You'll find it rendered as "the LORD" in all capital letters in these Bibles. While "Lord" carries the meaning of Master or Superior, the letters there in Hebrew are *yod, hey, waw, hey* - coming over into English as YHWH. This is the Divine Name. This is the name that Yeshua spoke of in the prayer he taught us to pray: "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name."

During the second temple period, a Jewish tradition to *not* speak the Sacred Name came about. It started with a noble beginning. People were worried about violating the Third Commandment. They did not want to misuse the Name, take it in vain, or use it lightly. That's a righteous concern. The problem is, oftentimes when we place fences around the law, we end up violating the law in other areas.

You will never find any Patriarch, Prophet, or Holy Man in Scripture that felt this way about the Third Commandment. Psalm 99:6 says: "Moses and Aaron were among His priests; Samuel also was among those calling on His name. They called to Yahweh, and He answered them." At the burning bush in Exodus 3:15, the Almighty said to Moses: "Yahweh is my name forever. It is my memorial to all generations." The word memorial means "my remembrance." Yahweh is telling Moses, "This is how I want to be remembered." The NIV says here: "This is my name forever, the name you shall call me from generation to generation."

It is important that we use the name of Yahweh, because it's how He desires to be remembered. We may say, "When I say 'the Lord,' he knows who I'm talking about," but it doesn't matter how we think He should be remembered. What matters is what He wants, and what He commands.

The name Yahweh means "I will be who I will be" rendered in many Bibles as "I am that I am." The meaning carries with it the idea that He is the Creator. He is the Sustainer of the Universe. He is self-existent. No one brought Him into existence. He is the One who makes everything else happen. Every time we say "Yahweh" we are acknowledging His supremacy over the Universe. Yahweh is not just any name. It is the Supreme Name.

So a first way we take His name in vain is by not using it. The word vain means "nothingness, emptiness, to bring to naught or falsity." The Jewish tradition says: "If we do not speak the Divine Name, we will not have the possibility of mis-using the Name." The problem is: by not speaking it, we are bringing it to naught. We are removing from our vocabulary the very Name the Creator desires to be remembered by.

### **The Taking of Oaths**

A second way we violate the Third Commandment is by taking His name upon our lips in a vow or oath, and not keeping that vow. This is likely the primary meaning of the commandment in the days of old. Deuteronomy 6:13 says: "Fear Yahweh your Mighty One, worship Him, and take your oaths in His name."

In Genesis 24 Abraham required his servant to swear by Yahweh that he would perform a task. In Jeremiah 34 the Israelites are said to have freed their male and female servants in the year of release (the 7th year), but then to have changed their mind and enslaved these people all over again. Verses 14-15 of that chapter read:

Today you repented and did what pleased Me, each of you proclaiming freedom for his neighbor. You made a covenant before Me at the temple called by My name. But you

have changed your minds and profaned My name. Each has taken back his male and female slaves who had been freed to go wherever they wanted, and you have again subjugated them to be your slaves.

Oaths were taken in the name of Yahweh to show forth the seriousness of the oath. No one else could really hold you accountable to an oath. But Yahweh says that he will. He will punish those who do not keep their oaths in His name.

When you promise Yahweh you will do something. When you pray to Yahweh and tell him you are going to do something, and then you back off of that, you've taken His name in vain.

In Matthew 5 Yeshua rebuked the scribes and Pharisees for developing a loophole in this law of swearing by Yahweh's name. Yeshua told them, "Don't take an oath at all: either by heaven, because it is the Almighty's throne; or by the earth, because it is His footstool; or by Jerusalem, because it is the city of the great King. Neither should you swear by your head, because you cannot make a single hair white or black."

Some have taken Yeshua's words as a command to not take oaths, even oaths in Yahweh's name, but that would contradict what Yahweh says in Deuteronomy 6:13.

What is happening here is: the Pharisees had come up with a way of taking oaths that did not *technically* hold them accountable. They would swear, but they wouldn't use the Sacred Name in their oath. They'd swear by heaven, or earth, or Jerusalem, or the hair of their beard, and then when they didn't keep their word, it would be ok... at least in their minds.

Yeshua is saying: "Don't take this kind of an oath at all. Your yes should be yes. Your no should be no." Oaths should be serious. We shouldn't have to go around swearing oaths all the time to prove our word. Our word should be yes and no on a regular basis.

When I was a teenager, I heard of one guy on the construction job site who would always tell a story and then say, "That's the God's honest truth y'all." When he said that, you knew He was lying. As soon as he brought God into it, it got sketchy.

You don't have to swear all the time to back up your word, but we should perform oaths in Yahweh's name, and then stick with those oaths. We have righteous examples of this in Scripture.

### **Using the Name Lightly**

A third way we can violate this commandment is by using Yahweh's name flippantly, in a joking or light manner. His name should be held Sacred. That doesn't mean we can't use His Name in our everyday speech. For example, in the book of Ruth, Boaz came out to greet His workers by saying, "Yahweh be with you." That is acceptable. It's okay to use Yahweh's name in your day-to-day speech.



What we want to make sure we *do not do* is use it lightly. Don't speak Yahweh's name in a joke. Don't use it half-heartedly, or Yah-forbid, in the midst of unrighteous anger or in a curse.

In Leviticus 24 a fight broke out between an Israelite woman's son and an Israelite man, and the woman's son cursed and blasphemed the Sacred Name. The young man was brought to Moses, and when Moses went and asked Yahweh what should be done, Yahweh told him to stone the young man to death. Yahweh told Moses: "If anyone curses his Mighty One, he will bear the consequences of his sin."

This brings me back to the beginning of my sermon where I talked about the man who said "God's last name is not damn." Now I do not believe that "God" is the name of the Creator, but I do believe that when people use the expression "God damn," they are blaspheming the Creator, because that is the intent behind the phrase. In their minds, God means the Mighty One spoken about in the Holy Bible. So when someone uses this expletive, they are violating the Third Commandment in principle. They are using an appellative for Yahweh in a demeaning way.

### **The Way We Live Life**

A fourth way we can violate the Third Commandment is by living a lifestyle that doesn't promote the ways of Yahweh. People who know us know that we stand for the name of Yahweh, and thus what we do shines a big, bright light on His name. If we use His name on our lips and then live a life of wickedness, it brings dishonor to His name.

The Apostle Paul wrote of the Sacred Name being blasphemed among the heathens because of the way certain Israelites were living. Paul rebukes hypocrisy. He says that some Israelites say they uphold the law, and boast in the Almighty, but do not practice what they speak. He says, "You then who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who boast in the law, do you dishonor the Almighty by breaking the law? For as it is written, the name of the Almighty is blasphemed among the heathen because of you." That's Romans 2:17-24.

We are to live in such a way that people see we are different in a good way. In our marriages, child-rearing, business, recreation, etc. People should see righteousness and truth. Our lives should bring honor to the name of Yahweh. People should trust us. People should come to us for help. People should ask us to pray for them. But when we half-heartedly serve Yahweh, or speak His name and then live the opposite way, we cause His name to be blasphemed among the heathen.

### **The Lord Spoke to Me**

A fifth way of violating this command is when people so casually claim the Lord spoke to them about something. It's like some people have a big red phone that they can call the Lord on. I'm not saying Yahweh can't speak to you, I'm just saying (1) I don't believe the majority of the claims, because they are much too frequent and nonsensical, (2) don't say it if you just felt an impulse while reading or studying, and (3) don't say it unless it actually happened.

There's only a handful of people in all of Scripture that Yahweh spoke to verbally. He's not just cavalierly speaking to people left and right today. If you claim He spoke to you, and it didn't happen, you've just used His name in vain. You've just attributed something to Him that is false.

### **Sin, Repentance, Forgiveness**

The first use of the law is as a mirror to show us our sin. Each time I teach on a commandment, if the Holy Spirit lives inside of you, you will be convicted of something. I want you to know that you can repent, and He will forgive you with open arms. He loves those who repent daily and seek to obey Him with their whole heart. While he will not leave unpunished those who take His name in vain, He will reward those who reverence and honor His name. May we be among those who have a high regard for His name, and be a special possession on the day He is preparing. May He have compassion on us as a man has compassion on his son who serves Him.

### **The Fourth Commandment**

Read: Exodus 20:8-11

There are hundreds of commandments in the Bible. Here in Exodus 20 we have a 10 point summary of them. It is difficult to say which of the 10 is your favorite, because they are all good and holy. But, if I had to pick one to call my favorite, it would probably be the 4th commandment.

The Sabbath is a weekly recharge of your natural and spiritual batteries. The old Puritan Thomas Watson said: *"The business of week days makes us forgetful of God and our souls: the Sabbath brings Him back to our remembrance."* It's not that we forget Yahweh throughout the week, but we become *forgetful*. We get involved in life's activities. We have busy schedules. We have things to take care of. The Sabbath brings all of that to a halt. We pause. We remember why we are here on this planet.

The command brings the Creator to mind. Yahweh is not asking us to do something that He doesn't do. He's asking us to follow His example. Genesis 2:2 says that Yahweh **"rested on the seventh day from all His work that He had done."** We are called to do as He did.

### **Slavery vs. Freedom**

The Sabbath reminds us that we aren't slaves. Slaves of man are made to work hard and work all the time. Slave-drivers do not care about their slaves. We *are* servants of Yahweh, but He cares about us. He gives us a day off.

If you have a job you work hard at, and your employer says: "You're doing a great job. You've been working hard. You need a day off. Your job security is fine, I just want you to take a rest day each week." Would you think that employer was a slave-driver, or a nice guy? The allowance of a rest day equals a good boss.

## Everyone Gets to Sabbath

The Sabbath teaches us to respect everyone, regardless of their status. The command says "you must not to any work - you, your son or daughter, your male or female servant, your livestock, or the foreigner who is within your gates." Your children, your servants, and the foreigners get to keep Sabbath. The Sabbath was for anyone who joined to Israel. Isaiah 56 says that the foreigners who keep the Sabbath will be blessed.

Yahweh respects all life, right down to the animals. Horses were used for transportation. Cows and donkeys were used for plowing, or carrying burdens. But on the Sabbath, they all get a rest. We have a righteous Elohim that regards the life of even the animals.

## Is the Law a Burden?

It's amazing that people think and teach the law as a burden, when we have one of the Ten Commandments that says to rest for a whole day each week. How is that a burden?

And on top of that, Yahweh only asks for 1 day and gives us 6 days. We are to live holy everyday, but all days are not holy. The 6 work days are common, meaning we are to labor in them, and do our chores, errands, and mundane things. The 7th day belongs to Him. He blessed in the 7th day in Genesis 2:3, declaring it holy.

He could have asked for 6 days and given us 1, but He didn't. He only asked for 1 day. Is 1 too much? Are we so stingy that we won't remember to dedicate the 1 day that He has blessed and sanctified? That's 24 hours a week y'all. We have 144 hours to work and do what we want to do, within the confines of His law. He only asks for 24 hours to be dedicated solely to Him.

## No Work at All

The Sabbath is a day of no work. Not just commerce or gainful employment, but any work. Doing your laundry. Taking out the trash. Cleaning your home, etc. I'm not saying that if you make a sandwich you can't scrape the crumbs off the counter top, or if your baby has an accident on the floor that you can't get the *Swiffer* out. Let's not get Pharisaical here. Pharisees always complicate things. You get the picture. Stop working. Rest. Don't do what you normally do the other 6 days of the week.

Seeing that work stops on the Sabbath, the commandment includes that no buying and selling take place on the Sabbath. You aren't to work for someone else, and someone else should not be working for you. The clearest place we see this in Scripture is Nehemiah 13:15-22, which I'd like to turn to and read.

**15** At that time I saw people in Judah treading wine presses on the Sabbath. They were also bringing in stores of grain and loading [them] on donkeys, along with wine, grapes, and figs. All kinds of goods were being brought to Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. So I warned [them] against selling food on that day.

**16** The Tyrians living there were importing fish and all kinds of merchandise and selling them on the Sabbath to the people of Judah in Jerusalem.

**17** I rebuked the nobles of Judah and said to them: "What is this evil you are doing- profaning the Sabbath day?

**18** Didn't your ancestors do the same, so that our God brought all this disaster on us and on this city? And now you are rekindling [His] anger against Israel by profaning the Sabbath!"

**19** When shadows began to fall on the gates of Jerusalem just before the Sabbath, I gave orders that the gates be closed and not opened until after the Sabbath. I posted some of my men at the gates, so that no goods could enter during the Sabbath day.

**20** Once or twice the merchants and those who sell all kinds of goods camped outside Jerusalem,

**21** but I warned them, "Why are you camping in front of the wall? If you do it again, I'll use force against you." After that they did not come again on the Sabbath.

**22** Then I instructed the Levites to purify themselves and guard the gates in order to keep the Sabbath day holy. Remember me for this also, my Mighty One, and look on me with compassion in keeping with Your abundant, faithful love.

The Sabbath was a big deal to Nehemiah, because he knew the commandment. Sometimes people wonder why we make such a big deal about the commandments. The answer is simple: they are Yahweh's commandments. He's the Creator. He created us, and knows what is best for us. If He commands us to do something, or not to do something, it's a big deal. If it's a big deal to Him, it should be a big deal to us.

One time a Pastor and I had a conversation about the Sabbath. He asked me: "Don't you think you're being a bit legalistic (by keeping the fourth commandment)?" I asked him if he kept the 7th commandment (don't commit adultery). When he said yes, I asked: "Don't you think you're being a bit legalistic?" It's righteousness, not legalism, when we obey Yahweh's commandments.

## **Our Schedules**

The Sabbath reminds us that we live on borrowed time. Yahweh is the Creator of time. He makes everything tick. In Him we live and move and have our being. If time is His, we should make sure we are using His time, the life He gives us, to honor Him.

Have you ever thought about this? Whatever you schedule around is what is most important to you. When you get out your calendar for the week, and something is top priority to you, you make sure it happens. No matter if it's a ballgame, or your favorite show on TV, or something you need to do around the house. It's ok to have things on our schedule, but when the Sabbath rolls back around, it needs to be the main thing we are scheduling around, because you wouldn't even have any time if not for Yahweh.

If you love your wife, you'll spend time with your wife. And if you love the Lord, you'll spend time with Him. You'll schedule around His Sabbath. "Nope. I can't do this thing on that day, because it's the Sabbath day." "I'm sorry, but I won't be able to make it to that event, we have our

holy convocation for the Sabbath then." The Sabbath should be the most important thing on your calendar.

### **The Sabbath Gathering**

Speaking of holy convocation, that's another aspect of Sabbath-keeping. Holy Convocation is an old, English way of speaking about a set-apart public gathering. The HCSB calls them "sacred assemblies" in Leviticus 23. It's what you might call a church service. What we are doing here. We have set aside a time for the Sabbath to have a weekly public meeting. We pray, we sing, we share testimonies, we read Scripture, and we have the teaching of the Word.

Yeshua always attended synagogue on the Sabbath. Luke 4:16 says: "As usual, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath day." The KJV says "as his custom was." The word *synagogue* means an assembly of people. It's the same as our word church, that doesn't *just* refer to a building we meet in, but also the *people* that meet together.

We do this, right here, to encourage one another. Sabbath service is like pulling back into the gas station to fill up with gas. If you forsake to assemble yourself together with the brothers and sisters on the Sabbath day, you will slowly fade away into more and more of yourself, rather than more and more of Yahweh. The Sabbath gathering is a way to keep yourself in check. It is a way to have accountability in your life.

We come in here and hug one another. We smile at one another. We sing songs to and about Yahweh with one another. *Some of us sing in tune, others out of tune, but we all make a joyful noise to Yahweh.* We listen to a lesson taught from the Word, so that we are taught to obey the Word. We are here for Yahweh, but we reap the benefit. We are here to keep the commandment to assemble, but in keeping it, Yahweh grants us spiritual strength.

Hebrews 10:25 tells us we should not stay away from the assembly, as some people habitually do, but come together and encourage one another. We are here for Yahweh first, and each other second. We are here to promote love and good works. You can't do that if you always stay at home and never attend Sabbath service.

I stand by everything I've just said, but let me say this as well: I realize some people live in areas without fellowship. That's why we offer the call-in number, and live Facebook feed. If that's the best you can do, Yahweh understands. I also realize that people get sick or care for those who are sick in their family. I'm not referring to these people. Forsaking the assembly means that you have the ability to come to the Sabbath gathering, nothing is holding you back, but your flesh. When you do that, you are sinning against Yahweh\*

### **Overlooked**

There's much that can be said about this commandment. It is overlooked in our day and time. You'll often hear things like "The Sabbath has been abolished. Jesus is our Sabbath now. We

don't have to keep a day holy, etc." But none of that is in the Bible. People derive that from certain verses they take out of context.

Yahweh kept the Sabbath. Yeshua kept the Sabbath. They *still* keep the Sabbath. Why in the world would we not keep the Sabbath? I can think of no better examples to follow.

## Cooking?

There are some intricacies in Sabbath keeping. There are some things that you will do as you grow and learn. For example, from reading Exodus 16 I came to conclusion years ago that we shouldn't cook on the Sabbath. Not all the people of Yahweh agree. Some of the brothers and sisters I've met over the years see that chapter as teaching against going out to *gather* on the Sabbath rather than cooking. I honestly can see and understand that position, but I would still say that some forms of cooking are work. There's a difference between making some coffee or a sandwich, and putting together a 3 course dinner. You could just decide to eat raw on the Sabbath, or even fast on the Sabbath, and then you don't have to worry about much of anything.

## Details

What you need to do is study the Torah portions about the Sabbath. Look up the word Sabbath in a concordance, and read every section in the Law and Prophets that talk about Sabbath-keeping. You will grow as you learn, and something you may allow in your life now may be disallowed a year from now, but that's how life serving Yahweh goes. He doesn't plop everything down on us at once. He's gracious to let us learn at a slow pace. This race we run is a marathon, not a sprint.

Never be so tedious about the Sabbath that you make it into a burden. The Pharisees did this during the days of Yeshua. They didn't want Yeshua healing anyone on the Sabbath. *Some Sabbath traditions even later included making sure to tear your toilet paper before the Sabbath arrived.* That's not the heart of the Sabbath. If you want to go outside and take a walk, breathe fresh air, and enjoy Yahweh's creation, that's fine. *Don't put on your running gear... Lol*, but go for a walk if you want to. *If you need to use the bathroom, it's ok to tear the toilet paper.* Yeshua teaches that it's also ok to take care of your animals on the Sabbath. They still have to drink and eat. And he healed people on the Sabbath too.

Life always takes precedent. There's been times where I've went and visited people in the hospital on the Sabbath. A hospital doesn't have to shut down on Sabbath. They are caring for the sick. People are in need. I've bought a parking ticket on the Sabbath so that I could sit with someone in the hospital who needed a friend. It's lawful to do good on the Sabbath.

When it comes to what you do and what you don't do on the Sabbath, **first stick with what is written**, and **second check your heart**. What is your motive? Ask yourself if something is necessary, or can it wait?

Always plan for the Sabbath. In Exodus 16, the 6th day of the week is called "Preparation Day." If we fail to plan we plan to fail. You can make a list of things you need to get done on

Preparation day. Years ago I started working a half-day on Preparation Day, so I could get home and get everything ready for the Sabbath. Run those errands. Get gas. Prepare that meal. Take out the trash. Tidy up. The more you prepare, the more peaceful your Sabbath will be. Then when the Sabbath arrives, rest.

## **Conclusion**

Let me say that this sermon is not meant to be a detailed examination of how to keep the Sabbath, nor a rebuttal to the claim that the Sabbath has now been abolished. This sermon is a broad overview of the commandment. How the commandment is a blessing. What it means. How we can observe it.

There's also the matter of when the Sabbath is. Myself... I'm a lunar Sabbath man. I believe the Sabbath is regulated by the lunar-solar calendar. But if you're not at the same understanding, honor what you see at this time. I respect anyone who actually honors a Sabbath as they understand it. This message is not about Sabbath timing. That's for another message or series.

Don't forget the Sabbath saints. It's the only commandment in the 10 that Yahweh says to remember, but it's the commandment that is most forgotten. If you've been forgetting to keep it holy, you can start at this point in your life. You can commit to keeping this commandment, and you will be blessed for doing so. Yahweh will forgive you for all your breaking of the Sabbath if you ask him to, and repent. Yeshua died for your Sabbath breaking. He wants to renew you, and teach you his ways.

## **The Fifth Commandment**

Read: Exodus 20:12

### **Loving Yahweh**

In the lessons on the first four commandments, we have looked at commandments that apply to our relationship to Yahweh. There is some overlap. For example, the Sabbath day is not *just* about our relationship with Yahweh, but also our interaction with each other. But for the most part, the first four commandments teach us how to love Yahweh.

If we desire to love Yahweh, he will be our primary authority (1st commandment). We will worship Him how He desires (2nd commandment), we will not use His name lightly (third commandment), and we will rest on the day He has sanctified (fourth commandment).

### **Loving Our Neighbor**

We come today to the 5th commandment, concerning honoring our father and mother. This begins a set of commandments that deal with our relationship with each other. This does not mean that these commands aren't about loving Yahweh. All commandment keeping shows our love for Yahweh. It's just that these commands deal more with person-to-person interaction. How we treat others.

Loving your neighbor doesn't mean you have warm, fuzzy feelings toward your neighbor. Loving your neighbor doesn't mean you love what they believe or the lifestyle they choose. Christians sometimes get bent out of shape when they hear me say to love all your neighbors. Your atheist neighbor. Love them. Your Muslim neighbor. Love them. Your gay neighbor. Love them. People get upset at such statements because they are equating love with an affirmation of the life choices of a person. That's not what love is.

Love is keeping the commandments of Yahweh (1 John 5:3). No more. No less. So... let's use our atheist neighbor. We are to love them. That means we respect them as a human being; an image bearer of the Creator. We speak kindly to them. We don't murder them or harm them. We don't steal from them. If they have a spouse we don't cheat with their spouse. We don't falsely accuse them of something. We don't covet what belongs to them. This is all loving your atheist neighbor.

You love your atheist neighbor by how you interact with them, and I will add, in hopes that through your love they will come to believe in Yahweh and Yeshua. Yeshua says that the world will know his disciples by our love. If your atheist neighbor does not receive love from you as a disciple of Yeshua, they will look for love from a disciple of the Devil.

This is what love is. This is what it means to keep the commandments. And this intro about loving our neighbor is a *segway* into the first command that deals with one way we love our neighbor: we honor our father and our mother.

### **Our Mom and Dad are Neighbors**

Our mom and dad are our neighbor? Absolutely, but be honest... you don't normally think of a parent as a neighbor. You think of them as... daddy and mama. But they are your neighbor; some of your closest neighbors.

The hardest people to love are the ones closest to us, because when you get close to someone you start seeing all of their flaws. You meet someone for the first time and you're all like, "Yeah, it's easy to love them! They're so nice and friendly. They're so outgoing. They don't even get mad." But you spend a week, a month, a year, or years with that same person, and the real person comes out to play. This is when we really see if we have love. Love bears all things. Love never fails.

Our family - our parents, our spouse, our children, our siblings - are our closest neighbors. Loving your neighbor begins with loving your family. Loving your neighbor begins with loving and honoring your mom and dad.

### **Disobedience Equals Moral Decline**

When a person, or a nation of people, stops honoring those who have already lived life before them, they are asking for trouble. When you don't see your parents and elders as worthy of respect, get ready for chaos to take place. Your parents are not perfect, and neither are you when it's your turn. Stop making perfection the criteria for honor. People make mistakes. People sin.



When someone asks for forgiveness and repents, forgive them, and always give them the love you are commanded to give.

Your parents have already walked in your shoes. They've already been each age you are and will experience, no matter how old you get. You hit 10, 20, 30, 40... they been there, done that, got the t-shirt. No matter how old you get, your mama and daddy have already lived life through that age. They know what it's like. It's plumb stupid for you to think you cannot learn from someone who has already lived through and experienced life at your age.

The older I get, the more I respect my parents. I don't just respect them for my Christian upbringing, or for teaching me to believe in Holy Scripture, or for taking me to church every week. Yes, I absolutely respect them for those things, but I respect them simply because *they are my parents*.

It's becoming more and more accepted to dishonor your parents or the elderly. "They are old. They don't know what they're talking about. They don't keep up with the times." Get that corn outta' my face. That ain't Biblical. Biblical is: "Listen my son to your father's instructions, and don't reject your mother's teaching, for they will be a garland of grace on your head and a gold chain around your neck." (Proverbs 1:8-9)

### **You Keep Honoring Your Parents**

Younger people are always to respect older people. I'm almost 38 years old, and the command to honor my parents still applies just as much now as it did when I was 10. I haven't lived with my parents for a long time. They no longer take care of me and provide for me. I'm an adult with 5 children, 2 of my children grown and married, and 1 grandchild, but the command to honor my father and mother still applies to me as a grown man.

If I'm at my dad's house, and he says, "Son, can I get you to help me with something?" I help him. I don't say, "I'm older now. I don't live here. Can't you get it yourself?" No, no, no, that's disrespectful. I do what he asks. Same with mama. If mama needs me to move something heavy, I move it. I don't say I'm too tired. I don't say I've gotta' leave. I move it for mama, because she's my mama. Not long ago my Granddaddy asked me if I would stay overnight with him at the hospital. The only answer to that question is: "Yes sir."

I was raised to talk with respect to my parents. I was raised to say yes sir and yes ma'am. I was raised to have a hickory switch comes across my calves if I disrespected my parents or grandparents. Grandmama made me pick my own hickory, and I better get a good one or else she would pick it for me. I was raised not to talk back; not to sass my elders. I was raised to respect people older than me, simply by virtue of the fact that they were older.

### **Some More Scriptures**

Exodus 21:15 and 17 says that a person who hits their parent is worthy of death. It also says a person who curses their parent is worthy of death. Those are crimes in Yahweh's eyes. We might

think that such a penalty does not match the crime, but it doesn't matter what we think. It only matters what Yahweh says. He sees 5th commandment violation as a capital crime worthy of capital punishment.

Leviticus 19:32 says that we are even to stand up to honor the gray hair of a man. As people get older, their hair color changes. It's a sign of an elder. Proverbs 20:29 says **"the beauty of the old men is the gray head."** An elder walks into a room or into our presence, we rise. We rise because they've lived life for a long time. Gray hair is a sign of many miles on a pair of feet. Those feet have walked for a long time. Those hands are rough. They've worked for many years.

1 Timothy 5:1 says: **"Don't rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father."** The NLT says: **"Never speak harshly to an older man, but appeal to him respectfully as you would to your own father."** Us younger people shouldn't talk to elders like we talk among ourselves. Even when we think an elder is wrong, we should appeal to him or entreat him with great respect, never in rebuke or harshness. There is a way to properly discuss with an elder. There is a way to sit still and be quiet and wait our turn while an old man or woman talks. They get first say. They get first seat. They get first in line.

1 Timothy 5:3 says to **support widows who are genuinely widows.** Paul goes on to explain that a genuine widow is at least 60 years old. An elderly woman who has been faithful to Yahweh and to the church should be supported financially; first by her children, or if she has no children, by the church. She has worked for others her whole life, so now it's time that we work for her.

This is where the concept of senior discounts comes from. They get a discount because they've been living for a long time, and using their money longer than you and me. They've bought and bought, so now it's time for them to get a break. Senior discounts is one way to honor the elderly.

### **You Learn as You Get Older**

You see all this clearly as you get older. You realize it some when you are younger, even as a kid. If you're 16 and you have a sibling half your age (at 8), you expect your parents to treat you different than the 8 year old. You expect to have more privilege. You expect the 8 year old to even respect you at 16. Why? Because you are older. With age comes respect.

I remember when I had one child, then two, then three... up to 5... and the more Tisha and I had to parent and train and instruct our children; the more we had to be adults, work hard, pay bills, change diapers, take care of problems, take care of sick kids, rush kids to the emergency room, worry, and do all the other things... the more I was thankful for my parents.

There's been times in my life when I did not realize all the sacrifices my parents made. You just don't until you get older and do life more. I'm not sure you even have the ability to understand how much goes into being an adult and parenting until it's your turn to experience it.

**Submit Unless...**

The only exception to you disobeying your parents or your elders is if they are attempting to command you to sin; to bring harm on others, or if they are going to bring harm on themselves. In all else submit. Whether you agree or not, submit. Whether they are right or wrong, submit. If you don't feel like doing what they ask, do it anyway. They are your parents. They are your authority.

I know some people haven't had good parents. I'm sorry. I'm not here to bring up bad memories or experiences in your life. But no matter who you are, somebody - someone older than you stepped in and helped you as a child. A parent doesn't have to be biological. A parent is whoever steps in and does the work. It might be a Grandparent, or an adoptive father or mother. It might be a counselor. It might be a pastor. Someone guided you and helped you as a child.

**Their Mistakes Don't Exempt Us**

Parents make mistakes. We all do. No one is always going to do the right thing. But your mama and daddy are still your mama and daddy. Your honoring them and respecting them and taking care of them is not giving them a pass on their failures. You aren't honoring them due to their perfection. And your kids will not honor you due to your perfection. It is age we are honoring. It is experience we are honoring. It is the school of hard knocks we are honoring. It is *time* that we are honoring.

**Taking Care of Your Parents**

This command will become mega-applicable when my parents reach the age or stage where they can no longer take care of themselves. There will come a day when that happens, and the roles will be reversed. I was once a little child, and my dad and mom took care of me. I couldn't care for myself.

I would have died as an infant or toddler if my parents wouldn't have taken care of me. I probably would have died as a teenager had they not been there, lol. There will be a time when they need me like I needed them. The older a parent gets the more this is seen. At that point, this commandment takes on another level. It's not that this part of the command hasn't been there, it's just that the honor must be given in a different way.

You may have to bathe your mama or daddy. You may have to feed them, or make sure they eat. You may have to sing to them like they sang to you. You may have to drive them places, or take them to get a hair cut. You may have to do all the things that they can no longer do, just like they did for you when you were little.

When that time comes, you have to forget about yourself. It's not time to take trips, or worry about what you want to do. If you live far away from your parent, it's time to move close to them, or take them into your home. They need you, just like you once needed them.

Elderly people often live out their last years in isolation and loneliness. I sometimes do jobs for older people, and you can tell that they never get any company, because they get excited about the septic tank man coming out to work on their septic tank.

I once had an 83 year old man help me dig up a septic tank, pump it out, cover it back up when I was through, and then say: "Let me get us something to drink and we'll sit right here for a second." I was by myself that day, and I was busy, but I stayed there and drank that sweet tea with that old man, because I could tell he was enjoying himself. And... what is life if we don't live it to bless others? So what if I got behind in my schedule. This man likely worked hard most of his life, and he missed working, and missed having company. We just sat there, and I listened to him talk.

### **The Promise**

Ephesians 6:2 says: "Honor your father and mother - which is the first commandment with a promise - that it may go well with you and that you may have a long life in the land."

A parent's instructions to children are for their good. Within the instructions are embedded blessings for the child. Obedience causes prosperity. Disobedience causes problems.

This doesn't mean people who obey their parents don't have problems, or that everyone who obeys the command lives to be 120 years old. The promise simply means that with obedience to the commandment, comes a more prosperous and longer life than otherwise. Both for the child and the parent.

A parent who gets old or sick will live longer when their child is taking care of them. A child will be more blessed by paying attention to and heeding the instruction of their parent. They will have less trouble by listening to wise counsel.

We learn here that commandment keeping earns something. We aren't earning salvation, but we are earning blessings. The blessings aren't something that comes after the commandment is kept, but are embedded within the commandment. Your life will be better lived by following Yahweh's instruction manual.

### **Law and Gospel**

As I put this lesson together, I had memories come up where I did not honor my parents. Where I thought I knew better than them, or rolled my eyes at their instruction, or lied to them about a certain situation, etc. It made me repent all over again.

The good news of the gospel is that we can ask for forgiveness, be forgiven, repent and do better. Meditating on the 5th commandment this week has reminded me of the need for evaluating how I can honor my parents, and honor the elderly in general, even at an adult age. This is why we are studying the commandments. Studying them causes you to repent, bringing each instruction to the forefront of your mind and heart. May we honor our fathers and our mothers.

## **The Sixth Commandment**

**Read: Exodus 20:13; 21:12-14**

We come today to the commandment that deals with the sanctity of human life; how much life is to be protected, and treasured, and honored.

Life is the greatest of all the commandments. You are allowed to break Sabbath to save life. You are allowed to lie to save life. Nothing comes before life.

The old story of the lake with the sign in front that says "Do Not Swim" comes to mind. A child breaks the law and decides to swim in the lake, but begins to drown as he gets out into the deep. On a walk you come across the lake and see the child drowning. Do you obey the law, or swim out into the deep to save the child? You save the child, because the child's life matters more than the law of "Do Not Swim."

We experience how blessed and treasured life is when someone dies or gets deathly sick. It's not that we don't know it before, it just comes to light in a stronger way when someone we love is sick in the hospital. We wonder if they will make it or not. We sit by their side. We pray with them. We read to them. We see with new eyes that life really is precious, and not to be taken for granted.

When King Hezekiah became sick unto death (in 2 Kings 20), he was told by the prophet Isaiah: "Get your house in order. You are going to die, and not live." Hezekiah turned his face to wall, prayed to Yahweh, and wept bitterly. He wept because he did not want to die. Being faced with bad news like that brings everything to the forefront. His life flashed before his eyes. Life is sacred. Life is to be appreciated.

### **Ways of Murder**

Murder is malicious intent to take a person's life for any reason that Yahweh has not defined as lawful. The obvious kind of murder is when we hear or see on the news that someone gunned down a person, or stabbed a person out of anger or envy or just in a senseless act of violence. We all know that is wrong. Even pagan, atheistic society knows that is wrong. I believe they know it's wrong because they too are created in the image of Yahweh. They deny the Creator, but in their Yah-given conscience they get this law right, because you just can't deny it.

### **Plotting or Planning**

But there are other ways to commit murder. You don't have to shoot someone with a gun, or stab someone with a knife. You can plan for someone to be murdered, and you are complicit in the act. Queen Jezebaal did this to a man named Naboth. In 1 Kings 21, Ahab, Jezebaal's husband, coveted the vineyard of Naboth. Jezebaal (in an effort to take away his vineyard) set up two false witnesses saying that Naboth had cursed the Almighty and the king. Naboth was stoned to death, and Jezebaal never threw one stone, yet she was guilty of murder. Plotting, or being in on planning a murder, is murder.

## **Hatred and Jealousy**

You can hate someone in your heart for no reason, just out of envy, strife, bitterness, jealousy... and it is murder, because it is where murder begins. 1 John 3:15 says: "Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him." Yeshua explains in the Sermon on the Mount that this commandment isn't just one forbidding taking someone's life, but it also forbids hating people. Having hatred in your heart, or wishing ill will on a person is murder of the heart.

## **Cursing, Speech**

Cursing someone, calling someone a fool, or a moron, or an idiot, is murdering them with your tongue. James 3:9-10 says that our tongues are a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With them we bless Yahweh, and yet with the same tongue we curse men who are made in Yahweh's image and likeness. My brothers and sisters, these things ought not to be.

## **The Image of Yahweh**

That verse in James reminds me of why it is wrong to murder a person. It's not just that you are taking away a life, else murder would be something you could do to an animal. But in scripture the killing of an animal is not penned down as being murder. I believe we should respect animal life. I don't believe in hunting for sport. I believe a righteous man cares for the life of an animal. But when we kill an animal for meat, or when an animal was sacrificed as a burnt offering, it is never considered murder.

Murder is taking away the life of a human being, and that is because human beings are made in the image and likeness of the Almighty. When you murder a human being, you are murdering the image of Yahweh. When you curse or slap a human being, you are cursing or slapping the image of Yahweh.

Genesis 9:6 mentions this by saying: "Whoever sheds man's blood, his blood will be shed by man, for the Almighty made man in his image."

## **Capital Punishment**

We get the concept of capital punishment, for murder, here in this text. Capital punishment, the taking of a murderer's life as punishment for what he or she has done, is not murder. Yahweh allows for this, and sanctions this. Murder is a capital crime. There has to be punishment for such a crime, else crime will run rampant. The punishment Yahweh gives is death. Why? Because as Genesis 9 says: "the Almighty made man in his image." When a murderer does his deed, he is murdering the image of Yahweh. Therefore his punishment is that his life be taken away.

Capital punishment upholds the sanctity of life. It says: "You can't take an innocent person's life and not suffer severe punishment. You must pay for what you have done." I believe that neglecting capital punishment in cases of murder, is a violation of the 6th commandment. The old Puritan writer Thomas Watson said it nicely: "A felon having committed six murders, the judge may be said to be guilty of five of them, because he did not execute the felon for his first offense." Denying

capital punishment for a convicted murderer is not protecting life. It is spitting on life. It is saying: "I don't really care about life. This crime is not that bad."

### **Summarizing the Command**

So... murder means more than just killing someone with a weapon out of hatred. We are seeing that "do not murder" includes to save life. Cherish life. Take care of people. Help people. Do good to others. Safety first. Don't harbor hatred and bitterness. Be kind. Love. Speak gently. All of these concepts are incorporated in the simple one line command "do not murder."

### **Stepping In, Protecting Life**

Here's another aspect of this command... you see someone getting beat up on the side of the road? Step in and help protect life. You see someone in danger? Call the police. You see a woman being raped in an alleyway, or wherever, you are obligated to do whatever is in your power to stop the crime. Just walking by a situation like these and doing nothing is considered partaking in the crime. You may not be the active participant, but you are a participant, because you did nothing to stop the crime.

Deuteronomy 22 speaks of a woman being raped out in a field. The law says that this woman cried out, but there was none to save her. The implication is that if the woman cried out, and a passerby heard her cry for help, he would have stepped in and done everything in his power to stop the rape. Stepping in to help someone who is being harmed is protecting life, and thus part of obeying the 6th commandment.

### **We are all Guilty**

So these are all ways we commit murder. Murder can be a crime (whereby innocent life is physically removed from this earth), but murder can also be by the heart, or by the tongue, or by plotting, or by not protecting, or by not helping. I think if we examine our hearts, we will find that while we may not be guilty of committing the crime of murder, we are indeed guilty of the other offshoots that fall under this command. May we admit our sin, ask Yahweh to forgive us for where we have failed Him, repent of our sin, thank Yahweh for sending His Son to remove our sin, and then strive not to practice such sin, but instead to live like the Messiah.

### **The Abortion Issue**

I would like to spend the remainder of this sermon discussing the issue of abortion. Abortion is a hot topic in our country at the moment, and should be a top priority topic at all times. I think the word abortion is an adequate word explaining the termination of a pregnancy, but the word does take the edge off what is happening. If what is inside of the woman is a human being, then to take the baby's life is not just "abortion," but indeed murder.

### **Development is Still Life**

It is not different at 10 years (like my son David), or 10 days or 10 weeks. The development of the human being inside the womb is just not as far along. But even David at 10 years outside the womb is still developing. He'll get bigger, and taller, and change in appearance as he keeps

growing. That doesn't make him less human at 10 years. A baby that is 10 days old or 10 weeks old isn't less human because he or she is less developed. They are growing just like David. They will grow into a more developed human, but they are still human inside the womb, just less developed.

### **Scriptures on Children Inside the Womb**

Scripturally speaking, when a woman becomes pregnant, what is inside of her is a living, breathing human being. It is not potential life, it is life. It is not anything less than a person.

In Genesis 25 the Bible says that Isaac (Abraham's son) prayed to Yahweh on behalf of his barren wife. Yahweh heard his prayer, and Rebekah conceived. The text says that **"the children inside her struggled with each other."** Yahweh told her, **"Two nations are in your womb, and two people will come from you."** Being inside a mother's womb does not mean you are not a person. Your location doesn't negate personhood.

Exodus 21:22-23 says that when men get in a fight, and hit **a pregnant woman** so that her **children** are born prematurely, but there is no injury, the one who hit her must be fined as the woman's husband demands from him, and he must pay according to the judicial assessment. If there is injury, then you must give **life for life**, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, bruise for bruise, wound for wound.

What is inside of a woman is called a child, and is able to be injured. An unborn baby is a life. He or she develops a tiny nose and fingers and toes. They wiggle around inside that womb. When a woman goes to get her first ultrasound, and the tech shows that little baby up on the screen moving around, the mama gets excited and often cries tears of joy, because they know what is inside of them is their child.

Listen to Psalm 139:13-16: **"For it was You who created my inward parts; You knit me together in my mother's womb. I will praise You, because I have been remarkably and wonderfully made. Your works are wonderful, and I know this very well. My bones were not hidden from You when I was made in secret, when I was formed in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw me when I was formless; all my days were written in Your book and planned before a single one of them began."**

### **Legal does not Equal Lawful**

Those verses are not hard to understand. I believe every single person, Christian and non-Christian, theist and atheist, knows what takes place inside a mother's womb. Some have just deceived themselves into thinking that if it is legal it is okay. Brothers and sisters, everything that is legal is not lawful. There have been many unjust things pronounced legal in history. Slavery and abuse of black people was once legal in this country. That doesn't make it lawful. Abortion is legal now, in some states up to the day of birth. That doesn't make it lawful.

I honestly do not believe that anyone thinks what happens inside of a woman's womb isn't a human life. I think everyone, even the most staunch abortion proponent, knows that what is



growing inside a woman is a baby human. My reason for thinking this is not hard to see, because when *anyone* tries to get pregnant, and gets excited when a pregnancy test shows up positive, what are they excited about? What does an atheist actress or singer who gets pregnant, and poses as pregnant for a magazine; what does she get excited about? A clump of cells? Something that is not life? Something that doesn't matter?

### **Does Choice Change Things?**

The way the abortion argument is framed ends up with this way of thinking: "If you want the baby it's a baby. If you don't want what is 'growing inside of you,' it's not a baby." They leave it up to the choice of the woman. Does anyone really believe the choice of an adult woman decides whether what is growing inside of her is a baby or not? No one really believes that. People just suppress knowledge. They deny what they know deep down inside to be true.

### **Pro-Life Outside the Womb**

"Well if you are against abortion then you need to be helping mothers with babies, and adopting unwanted children." Okay... I agree. How does that argument go in favor of abortion? No one person or one family can help everybody, but we can all do our part. In our communities we can help struggling families, or single mothers (financially, watching babies, welcoming them into church, etc.) Christians are actually the greatest percentage of people who adopt. Twice the number of Christians (in the US) choose to adopt, when compared to the number of all other people.

The answer to such a statement about being pro-life outside the womb, **is to be pro-life outside the womb**. The answer is not to start being anti-life inside the womb.

### **It's My Body!**

"Well it's my body!" No, it is not. You are created. You belong to your Creator. Your Creator gave you your body. He formed your body. You may only do with your body what He allows you to do.

The argument that "it's your body, so you can do with it what you want" ultimately leads to an acceptance of suicide and euthanasia. Someone wants to take their own life? It's okay, and it's okay to assist someone else who wants to die in taking their own life. Is that the road we want to go down? Do we want to start playing Yahweh?

### **It's Dependent on Me!**

"But what's inside of me is dependent on me! Therefore I decide whether it lives or not!" Is that how we normally treat things dependent upon us? My grandson Bowen is dependent upon his Mama to live, and he's almost 8 months outside of the womb. If she stopped taking care of him, and left him in an abandoned field he would die. Does the fact that he is dependent upon her now, mean his life doesn't matter?

Do we normally treat people or even animals that are dependent upon us with neglect or care? We care for them. When someone depends upon us, we give them extra care, going above and beyond to help them, and protect them. If what is inside of a woman depends upon the woman for life, that should be an argument *in favor* of doing everything possible to take care of that little, bitty human.

### Problems with the Baby

What about finding out there is something wrong with the baby in a womb? Women in my own family have been told by doctors that something *could be* wrong or that something *was* wrong with their baby. I don't want to make light of this. It is devastating, at any stage of a child's life, for the mother (and father) to find out that their child may be sick, or disabled, or have special needs when they are born. It's devastating because we want our children to have the best life possible. We don't want our children to suffer in any way.

But let me ask you? Why would we NOT want to give a special needs child life? Sure, they may not be able to hear, or see, or talk. They may have to be pushed around in wheel chair. Some are not able to stand. But some of the most special moments I've ever seen, is when parents with special needs children care for their children.

I'll never forget the time I saw a daddy lift his two special needs daughters from a van into wheelchairs, and push them into the movie theatre to enjoy a movie. You think that daddy doesn't want those girls? Special needs people *are people*, **and they are special people**. Oftentimes special needs people are vastly more appreciative of life than someone who is entirely healthy. They need a shot at life too. We shouldn't decide to take it away from them.

### The Mother's Life?

What if the mother's life is in danger? This is an argument you hear a lot from the pro-abortion side, as though it is the main reason they want abortion to be legal.

Did you know that cases of the mother's life being in danger are less than 1% of abortions? This isn't the primary reason behind the legality of abortion in our nation or other nations on the earth.

That being said, there are some extreme cases where the difficult choice must be made between the life of the mother, and the life of the baby. I realize that there have been people that have had to make such a decision. **And such a decision would be so awfully hard to make.** If Tisha and I had been faced with that decision, it would have been done in the midst of sorrow, and weeping, and utter devastation. I don't know what we would have done, but regardless, I hurt for any mother, and father, that has had to go through that. I do not treat it trivially, and if anyone listening to this sermon has gone through such, I am terribly sorry for any loss you've had, whether mama or baby.

But this is not the primary concern for lawmakers that are pro-abortion. We recently had a pro-abortion bill passed in the state of New York, that allows for a mother to abort her baby up to the

time of birth. And when it passed, there were cheers... and claps... and smiles. That's disgusting. Had such a bill been passed with sorrow and weeping... then I would believe that such lawmakers were genuinely concerned with the unborn life. But such is not the case.

## **Forgiveness**

As I close let me say something to the women who have had an abortion in the past, and now regret it. You've prayed over and over for forgiveness. You wished you had made a different decision. You long to hug your child in your arms now. You long to be able to teach your child to say mommy and daddy. You wished you could sing to your child, and hear them laugh. Dear mother... you are forgiven. The blood of Messiah cleanses you from this sin. Yahweh sent Yeshua so that we could be forgiven of this sin, and many other heinous sins against His law. That's the gospel. That's the good news. If we confess our sin, and repent of our sin, the blood of the Son of Yahweh cleanses us from all unrighteousness.

I know it's hard, because in spite of me trying to reassure you of your forgiveness in Christ, there are some days you don't feel forgiven. I know this, because it happens to me to. I know I've been forgiven of my sins. But some days, I just don't feel forgiven. The weight of my past sins in my conscience haunt me. I don't feel like getting out of bed. I don't feel like going to work. I just feel like laying there crying, because I hurt my Creator, and my neighbor, and I want a do-over. It's just something I deal with, so I know how it feels, to feel un-forgiven.

So... I preach the gospel to myself, just like I preach it to other people. We are far away from Yahweh, but through the blood of Messiah we are brought near. He has not dealt with us as our sins deserve. He has not repaid us according to our offenses. He's removed our sins as far as the east is from the west. He forgives us, because His perfect Lamb that died sacrificially, was resurrected from death, and then went to heaven as our high priest.

I'm not saying your hard days will ever end. I have stretches of time, sometimes months, that I'm good, but then a hard day comes. I'm not saying some kind of magic words will make it all stop. I'm just saying that when these days come, and you don't feel forgiven, know that salvation is not dependent upon how you feel, but upon what Yahweh the Savior has done for you in and through His Son Yeshua. Salvation is not a feeling. It is a reality in spite of bad feelings.

Mother... if you've confessed your sin, and repented of your sin, you are forgiven of your sin. I say that as a minister of the gospel. I love you, and most importantly Yahweh loves you.

Almighty Yahweh, forgive us of our murders. Forgive us of our wicked tongues, and mean thoughts, and the hatred and bitterness in our hearts. Forgive us for not valuing life as most sacred. May we be stronger than ever to protect life, both inside and outside of the womb. May we show forth kindness and speak life with our words, using our mouths to heal instead of kill, and using our actions to help instead of hinder. Thank you for putting these good desires within us. Thank you for saving us from our sins. Through Yeshua I pray. Amen.

## The Seventh Commandment

Read: Exodus 20:14

I want to discuss this commandment today from a slightly different angle. We read the "thou shalt not's" and our focus is mainly on what we should NOT do, and we should focus on what is forbidden. But we sometimes forget that just as much can be learned by focusing on the *positives* of the commandments.

With this commandment, "do not commit adultery," the positive is: **cherish and respect marriage. Honor the sanctified relationship that Yahweh created to take place between male and female. Honor the commitment. Honor the vow. Honor your spouse. Love marriage. Love intimacy within the marriage bed.** Focusing on all of these things will give us a disdain for adultery. We will see the ugliness of adultery, and the harm that adultery brings on individuals, families, and society as a whole.

### The Beginning of Marriage

So I'd like to turn to Genesis 2, and focus on what Yahweh created, ordained, and commanded from the beginning, beginning at Genesis 2:18:

18 Then Yahweh Almighty said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is like him."

In Genesis 1, we have the days Yahweh advances upon the heavens and the earth, and at the end of each day we read that He *saw it was good*.

Here in Genesis 2 where we get more detail about the creation of man back on the 6th day, we have Yahweh saying that something is *not good*. "It is not good for the man to be alone." Yahweh saw Adam alone, and he said "This isn't good. I'm going to make him a helper. I'm going to give him a counterpart."

The old, KJV of the Bible says "a help meet for him." Not a "helpmeet" with just one word, but two words, "help... meet." The word meet carries with it the idea of similarity, but opposite. Comparable, but not the same. A compliment. The Amplified Bible gives a good rendition of this verse: "Now Yahweh Almighty said, 'It is not good (beneficial) for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper [one who balances him -- a counterpart who is] suitable and complementary for him.'"

So then in Genesis 2:21 we are told what Yahweh did:

21 So Yahweh Almighty caused a deep sleep to come over the man, and he slept. The Almighty took one of his ribs and closed the flesh at that place.

22 Then Yahweh Almighty made the rib He had take from the man into a woman and brought her to the man.

The counterpart who would be complimentary to Adam, was made from *a piece of Adam*, yet it was made into something *different than Adam*. Yahweh didn't make another man for the man. Scripture calls who he made for the man "woman." Notice the word man is still there, but there is something *different* about the word. The word has something added to it. Wo-man. It works the same in Hebrew. Man is *iysh*. Woman is *iyshah*. The same, but different.

The text says that Yahweh brought the woman to the man. I don't think people always see it this way, but this is the first Father of the bride, giving her to her husband.

I realize this is the beginning of everything, and Yahweh didn't biologically father Eve like men do today. But Yahweh did create Eve, and he created her for the man. He created her to be a helper comparable to, but balancing out the man, because us men need balance!

Look what the man said when the woman was presented to him:

23 And the man said: This one, at last, is bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh; this one will be called woman, for she was taken from man.

24 This is why a man leaves his father and mother and bonds with his wife, and they become one flesh.

Bone of my bone. Flesh of my flesh. These are familial terms in Scripture. When someone is your bone and flesh, they are your physical family. They aren't just a friend anymore. When you get married, you go beyond friendship. You go beyond just hanging out or spending time with each other. You go to the next level. You become one flesh, as verse 24 stated. Yeshua quoted this section of Genesis in Matthew 19:4-6, and he commented on it by saying, "So they are no longer two, but one flesh."

No longer two? If you stand my wife and I up next to each other, you will count 1, 2. There are two of us, yet Yeshua says, "They are no longer two." It's because in marriage there is a oneness that takes place. There is a bond that takes place. There is a joining together of mind, heart, will, purpose. You no longer live for yourself. You live for each other.

### **My Experience in Marriage**

I've been married now (2023) for over 25 years, and Tisha is my absolute best friend. I'd rather be with her than anyone else. I love spending time with her. I love reaching over in the middle of night and feeling her laying next to me. She loves putting her cold feet on me to warm them up. Lol

I love holding her hand while we walk down a street, or through a store. I enjoy talking to her, and seeing her smile. We've grown closer to each other every day that we've been married. We've been through a lot. We've had good times and bad times. We've had mountains and valleys. We had times where we've laughed together, and times where we've cried together. We've had times

where we've repented together, holding hands, in tears. I'm one flesh with my wife. We are no longer two. We haven't been two for a pretty long time.

This is marriage. This is what the 7th commandment is about. Do not commit adultery includes everything I've just said. Do not commit adultery is a commandment that is saying, "Love marriage. Be faithful to your spouse. Don't abuse your position. Serve your husband ladies. Honor your wife husbands. Be intimate and close with the one you've married. Don't go outside that boundary. Don't look elsewhere. Be committed to who Yahweh gave you."

### **Adultery Defined**

Anything outside of what Yahweh ordained, created, and designed is adultery. I know we often speak of adultery as cheating on your spouse, or more specifically lusting after or sleeping with another man's wife. There are texts that speak of adultery in that way. **Adultery is that, but it is not limited to that.** Adultery is anything that adulterates or pollutes what Yahweh has ordained and created in marriage. So yes, cheating on your spouse is adultery. Sneaking around, or going behind the back of the one you committed to is a pollution. Nothing good comes from that at all. I've seen it done, and it does so much harm and wreaks so much havoc on people's lives.

Adultery is a sin that has a vast amount of effect and consequence. It harms the people immediately involved, but it also brings harm to children, and to family, and to friends. It makes a mockery of marriage, and it is the arch-nemesis of marital righteousness. The effects will be felt for years and years to come.

### **Be Extra in Your Marriage**

One way to prevent adultery from happening is to be **extra** in your marriage. I realize some people are going to run around and cheat regardless, because they just have an old, stony heart, but I do believe we can do things in marriage to cultivate a better relationship, and prevent wandering eyes and roaming hearts.

So, married couples... don't stop being "love-y dovey" with each other. Don't let yourself go, and quit caring. Us men need to keep holding doors open for our wives. Keep holding her hand. Cherish her as a fine ruby. Keep kissing her and looking into her eyes and telling her you love her. The same goes for the wife to the husband. Us men like to be served and flattered. Don't deny it. We like to feel like a strong protector. I love to hear my wife say, "I sure love how you take care of me." That makes me want to buck out my chest and grunt a little bit. Lol

But seriously, don't stop making extra effort. Go out on dates. Take each other out to do things. Surprise each other, and it doesn't always have to be big. Big is good. Sometimes big is needed, for special occasions, but small is good too.

Tisha and I will sometimes go to Home Depot together, alone, to get materials for a project. Oh she just lights up about that. That's her favorite place, lol. She loves projects. We walk through Home Depot in our tattered work clothes, sometimes with paint in our hair or on our arms, and

we're just holding hands enjoying ourselves. Then I take her to Arby's or Chick-fil-a or wherever (I'm a high roller, lol), and we sit down together in a booth and eat lunch. We hold hands and pray after we've eaten. I walk her to the car. Sometimes I open the door for her, sometimes I forget.

I'm talking about marriage. All of these things are adultery prevention. The same things you did before you were married. When you felt madly in love. Those things don't have to stop. You might have to put some more wood on the fire. You might have to pour a little gasoline on the fire to get it going, lol, but do it. Do what you have to do.

### **Have a Lot of Sex**

1 Corinthians 7:34 says, "A husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise a wife to her husband. A wife does not have authority over her own body, but her husband does. Equally, a husband does not have authority over his own body, but his wife does." When you get married, you belong to your spouse, and you are called by Yahweh to nurture, and care, and serve your spouse. This isn't a call to overpower or abuse your spouse. This is a call to recognize you are not your own, and this call goes just as much to the man as it does to the woman.

This same chapter says that intimacy in marriage is a strong way to prevent infidelity or adultery. It says that a husband is not to deprive his wife of intimacy, or the wife her husband. Any times of abstinence are to be agreed upon, only for a time of devotion to prayer and fasting, and then you come back together again in the marriage bed, lest you be tempted elsewhere, because of your lack of self-control.

One of the reasons Yahweh created marriage was for our pleasure. It is ok and even righteous for a husband and wife to enjoy intimate, romantic pleasure. Yahweh did not make it pleasurable for no reason. It is something to delight in, but in the confines of marriage. It is a way to become close with your spouse, over and over and over again.

### **Marriage Under Attack**

Marriage is being attacked around the world today. Even the male/female distinction is being attacked. Some people are saying and teaching that there is no such thing as biological gender. Everything is just subjective. If a man wants to be a woman, he can act like a woman, and even do things to his body to look like a woman. They teach the same for women as well. The world thinks it's okay for a woman to want to be a man, and then walk around acting like a man. Then you have men going with men and women going with women, and calling that love.

Let me say this in the plainest of terms: this is nothing but Satanic, demonic lust of the flesh. It is an abomination to neglect the Yahweh ordained differences between male and female. It is an abomination for a man to be intimate with a man, or a woman to be intimate with a woman, and try to call that a marriage. It flies in the face of Yahweh's law, and it flies in the face of natural, common sense.

Yahweh created male and female with different anatomy for a reason. A woman compliments a man. That is something a man cannot do for another man. A man and woman pro-create. They make babies together. The command to be fruitful and multiply cannot be carried out by two men or two women laid up in a bed somewhere acting like they are married, because an anti-Christ state gave them a marriage license. All of that is adulterating the marriage bed.

Sleeping around does the same thing. When people are out there sleeping with different men and different women on different nights of the week, or different weeks of the month, with zero commitment and fidelity... there's nothing righteous about that. That's not what Yahweh ordained in Genesis. Illicit, loose sexual activity is having an act of intimacy with someone you aren't going to devote your life and time to. It's sharing a special, precious act with a stranger. If you aren't interested in marriage, don't fool around with someone's emotions and life, and keep your britches zipped or your skirt on. Sex is designed for marriage. It is something special Yahweh created to be enjoyed and cherished between a husband and a wife.

### **The Gospel for the Broken**

Now I've spoken with so many people over the years since I've been ministering, and I know that so many of us have failed in this area of obedience to the law. Sexual immorality is rampant in the world, and it is attractive to our fleshly man or woman. But it brings nothing but heartache, problems, and strife. It makes a lot of promises that it doesn't keep, like all sin does. It looks good, and is pleasurable for a short season, but in the end it stings like a viper and bites like a serpent.

I want you to know today that no matter how far you may have gotten off track in marriage, or in sexual immorality, Yahweh can deliver you from it all. What Yahweh promises is prosperity. I'm not talking about the prosperity gospel hogwash, but Biblical law-keeping prosperity. It begins with the gospel message; that good news that you can be forgiven of your sin by repenting of your sin and placing faith in the Messiah who lived for you, died for your sins, and was then raised from the dead, victorious over sin and death.

Then it continues with the beauty of the commandments. The commandments that bring health to your body and marrow to your bones. That bring joy, and peace, and goodness, and love into your life. Yahweh can make all things new for you. It's not too late to change your mind. It's not too late to say I'm sorry. It's not too late to get on your knees. It's not too late my friend. It's not too late. Yahweh can and will forgive you of all your sin and filth if you admit it to him, repent of it, and confess Him and His Son for salvation. He is that merciful.

He's so merciful that a practicing adulterer or fornicator can be forgiven. A porn star can come clean and experience the forgiveness of Yahweh. A person involved in a homosexual relationship can repent and be forgiven. Someone who is cheating on their spouse can stop, repent, and be forgiven. Yahweh can wipe all of that uncleanness away, but you must admit and confess your sin, and repent of your sin, and place your faith in Christ. Devote your life to Christ. Vow your ways and your conduct to him. He is all you need. He is more than enough.



## **The Eighth Commandment**

Read: Exodus 20:15, Deuteronomy 5:19

So we open today with a simple, straight-forward Scripture. "Do not steal," or "You shall not steal." People read that and think, "Ok, I shouldn't take my neighbor's wallet," or "I shouldn't rob a bank." Seems pretty simple.

And yes, in one way, this is a simple command, like all the commandments. I believe all ten of the commandments are straight-forward. But, we must not forget that the ten commandments are not an exhaustive list of Yahweh's commandments, but rather *headings* or *summaries* of hundreds of laws that fall under each of the ten. Ten categories or principles, we might say.

While "you shall not steal," definitely means I'm not to sneak up beside my neighbor and pick-pocket their wallet, there's more to it than that. There are other ways to steal from my neighbor. There are ways I can take something that doesn't belong to me.

### **Property Rights**

At the start, we should recognize that the 8th commandment assumes the property rights of an individual. One person can own something that belongs to him or her, and no one else. Or, a family can own something that belongs to that family, and no one else.

Property rights means that you are not obligated to share what you own with just anyone who wants you to share. If someone who is a reckless driver asks to borrow your car, you don't have to let them. It is not stealing to refuse to lend your car to someone who will damage it.

It is the same with money. You are not obligated to give money out willy-nilly. Just because someone asks for it doesn't mean you're required to give. You may have someone who has the ability to work, yet chooses not to, because they free-load or mooch off of people. If they come up to you asking for 50 bucks, you don't have to give them the 50 bucks. You might think of and share the Bible verse with them from 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12: "In fact, when we were with you, this is what we commanded you: If anyone isn't willing to work, he should not eat. For we hear that there are some among you who walk irresponsibly, not working at all, but interfering with the work of others. Now we command and exhort such people by the Master Yeshua Messiah, that quietly working, they may eat their own food."

My point is: we all own things that are solely ours. Basic property rights are assumed in the 8th commandment, you shall not steal. Being commanded not to steal doesn't make sense if we are obligated to share any and everything with everybody.

### **Stealing Someone's Time**

Here's a verse you may not have thought of before in relation to this command, Deuteronomy 24:5 - "When a man takes a bride, he must not go out with the army or be liable for any

duty. He is free to stay at home for one year, so that he can bring joy to the wife he has married."

Israelite men were exempt from the military for the first year of their marriage, or from anything that would *permanently* take them away from their wife. This doesn't mean the man could not go out to work or do day labor, although it is probably not a bad idea for a man to save up enough before marriage to take the first year off, (a honey-year instead of a honey-moon). What this means is the man should not be made to remove himself for a long period of time from his new bride for a particular duty. He is to spend that first year especially, getting to know her better and cheering her up.

To send the man away from his new bride, as is done sometimes in our modern American military, is to steal this year from this man and his wife. You aren't stealing gold, silver, or money. You aren't stealing an object that belongs to the man. You are stealing his **time**.

So in principle... to tell someone you will meet them at a certain time, and then not show up, is stealing. I once came home early, and waited for fellow to show up to my house for 4 hours. I could have kept working, or ran needed errands in town. Never got a call, a text. Nothing. My time was stolen.

To say to a person, "I'll be there at 5," but not make it until 6, is stealing. You may justify it by saying, "Well I was running late," or "there was traffic," and at times that might be the case. But, a phone call or text is in order in such cases. Things come up, but we need to respect our neighbor's time.

For an employee to "ride the clock," or goof off during his hours of work is stealing time from the employer. I remember someone telling me about a guy on a construction site who would just stop working when the boss wasn't there. When you asked him what he was doing, he'd say "I'm ridin' get in!" He meant he was riding the clock. Let's say he was paid \$12 an hour, and sat there for 2 hours doing nothing. That's \$24 he got for free when he was hired to work, and agreed to work.

### **Stealing Livelihood**

Look at verse 6 in the same chapter (Deut. 24): "Do not take a pair of millstones or an upper millstone as a security for a debt, because that is like taking a life as security."

A pair of millstones were used to grind grain to make bread. It was a common household item to the ancient Israelite. So common that in Jeremiah 25:10, the sound of the millstones are mentioned with the light of a candle. Millstones were used to provide food for the family. You had the base stone (which stayed stationary), and the upper millstone which moved. As the grain was dropped into a hole in the top stone, the top stone was moved (by a hand crank) and the grain was ground into flour.

Sometimes a person would need a loan, and you could give them a loan, and you might take something of theirs as security for that loan. Security was to insure that they would pay you back. So lending and borrowing was practiced in the community of Israel, but Yahweh here says that you are NOT allowed to take a person's livelihood as debt security. That's stealing. Even though you can take some things for security, a man's livelihood is out of the question. He needs that to continue supporting himself and his family.

It would be like you taking a family's stove or oven for security, or a man's work truck for security. That's what he uses to get to and from jobs, and to carry his tools. You take that from him as security, and he can't keep working.

### **Stealing Dignity**

Look down to verses 10-11 (Deut. 24): "When you make a loan of any kind to your neighbor, do not enter his house to collect what he offers as security. You must stand outside while the man you are making the loan to brings the security out to you."

Here we see a command against stealing a man's dignity. I realize loans are common today, but it used to be looked upon as more of a degrading thing to have to take out a loan in order to move along in life. Men worked hard, and counted it as righteous to always provide for themselves with whatever they needed. So when a man had to take a loan out, it was somewhat saying, "I can't do this without someone else's help."

Yahweh realized this and forbid the person making the loan to enter into the man's house to receive security. Yahweh was saying, "Respect the man. It's still his house, and he is still a decent human being. Let him bring the debt security out to you."

It would be like you loaning some money to someone and agreeing that they pay you back by a certain date next year, but you call them up every single day to remind them they owe you money. It lowers a person's dignity to hound them when they still have time allotted to pay back the debt.

I will add here that the borrower shouldn't have to be hounded when the money is due. If you owe someone something, you should pay them on time. To neglect to do so, and then make yourself hard to get in touch with, is also stealing. Psalm 37:21 says: "The wicked man borrows and does not repay, but the righteous one is gracious and giving."

In certain cases, if something truly came up and you just couldn't make the payment on time, a simple phone call explaining your situation is the decent thing to do. We are all human, and run into hard times. Being open and honest with your lender is righteous.

### **Stealing Man's Comfort**

Look at Deuteronomy 24:12: "If he is a poor man, you must not sleep in the garment he has given as security. Be sure to return it to him at sunset. Then he will sleep in it and

bless you, and this will be counted as righteousness to you before Yahweh your Mighty One."

A poor man may only have one blanket, so to take that garment from him permanently until he pays off his debt to you, would be stealing his comfort and warmth at night. We are required to respect and take care of the poor, and in this case, it is stealing to not give him his means of peace for a good night's sleep, even though you hold it for security during the day.

Notice something else here. This poor man is taking out a loan, and he is giving something in security (to the lender) to pay back that loan. A righteous poor man is not a moocher. He doesn't expect to just be a couch potato and receive hand-outs. He works if able and when able, and even pays back loans.

### **Stealing a Man's Pay Day**

The next verses (14-15) say: "Do not oppress a hired hand who is poor and needy, whether one of your brothers or one of the foreigners residing in a town in your land. You are to pay him his wages each day before the sun sets, because he is poor and depends on them. Otherwise he will cry out to Yahweh against you, and you will be held guilty."

There are a couple things to notice here. First off, like I was saying, the poor people were required to work (if able). This law shows that a poor brother or foreigner is working daily and earning a daily wage.

Secondly, a poor day-laborer must be paid daily, because he's counting on that to get him by. To not pay a poor laborer at the end of a day's work, could mean him possibly not getting to eat that night. You are stealing what rightfully belongs to him.

You are not allowed to make a decision to withhold his pay if he needs it at the end of the day.

There's a parallel text to this in Leviticus 19:13: "You must not oppress your neighbor or rob him. The wages due a hired hand must not remain with you until morning."

I believe that we have a principle here where we are required to pay someone on a daily basis if they need it or ask us to. It doesn't appear that this text in Leviticus is only dealing with a poor person.

I realize that this doesn't go over well with big businesses and commerce. But that's a problem with commerce. We get so caught up in the rat race that we begin to ignore Yahweh's righteous way of doing things.

I'm not saying a boss can't have an agreement with their employee to be paid once a week. That's pretty common in our day, and some people like to be paid weekly. Some places pay out once every two weeks, and I've talked with people before who get paid like this, and they've told me

that it stretches them thin at times. If a boss is withholding pay that an employee has worked for, and needs, it is stealing, even if there's an agreement for weekly pay. When a man works a day, and needs his money, you give it to him.

My children have pulled this verse out on me at times when they've done some work for me that I agreed to pay them for, and I forgot to pay them that day. I think it was Elijah that said to me once, "Am I going to have to pull Leviticus out on you dad?" lol... And you know what? He's right. A laborer is worthy of his hire, and if he wants to be paid at the end of the day, he is to be paid. It's his money.

### **Stealing Food from the Poor**

Look back with me now to the end of Deuteronomy 24, verses 19-22: "When you reap the harvest in your field, and you forget a sheaf in the field, do not go back to get it. It is to be left for the foreign resident, the fatherless, and the widow, so that Yahweh your Mighty One may bless you in all the work of your hands." (Also the edges of the field, Lev. 19:9-10.)

In ancient Israel you had gleaners. They were the poor in the community who would come behind the harvest workers and pick up what had been left. Notice again that the poor are working when able. They are physically going out to gather. They did not plant the field. They did not take care of the garden. But, they did go out to get what they need. It was not brought to them.

This text shows us that we are to be mindful of those who do not have as much as we do. Particularly the foreigner, the orphan, and the widow.

A foreigner may be looked down upon by a local community, because they don't look the same or sound the same. If they are a law-abiding citizen, they are to be treated the same as the local law-abiding citizens. There is to be no difference in the native-born Israelite and the foreigner who joins himself to Israel. You are to watch out for him and his well-being especially.

And the same goes for orphans and widows. Orphans have no parents. They've been abandoned by someone who hasn't done their duty. Widows have lost their husbands, and need provided for, especially older widows. Psalm 68:5 says that Yahweh is a father of the fatherless and a champion of the widows. Exodus 22:21-24 says that if we mistreat any widow or fatherless child that they will cry out and Yahweh's anger will burn against us.

When we do not take special effort to look out for the foreigner, orphan, and widow, we are stealing. No one can help everyone, but everyone can help someone. Those of us whom Yahweh has blessed with more than enough (which is probably all of us) should actively look for poor people to help on a regular basis. Part of your earnings should go to help someone in this category.

### **Stealing by Charging Interest**

I just mentioned Exodus 22, and in verse 25 of this chapter we are commanded against charging usury to our poor brother. In Deuteronomy 23:19 it appears that Yahweh commands against charging *any* brother usury. It just says: "Do not charge your brother interest on money, food, or anything that can earn interest." I think it's safe to not charge any brother interest, but especially look out for those who are poor.

So if you loan a brother \$100 for something, you aren't to require him to pay back \$110, or even \$101. You just require the \$100. The same goes for anything that can earn interest, as the law says. It's stealing to charge usury to a brother. Psalm 15:1-5 says the man who does not lend out his money on interest will live on Yahweh's holy mountain. Ezekiel 18:8-9 says that the righteous man does not lend at interest or for a profit.

It must be stated here that lending to a stranger or unbeliever with interest is not stealing according to Deuteronomy 23:20. This doesn't mean you have to lend to an unbeliever with interest, but you are permitted to do so.

### **Stealing by Not Allowing Snacks**

Look at another one in Deuteronomy 23, verses 24-25. "When you enter your neighbor's vineyard, you may eat as many grapes as you want until you are full, but you must not put any in your container. When you enter your neighbor's standing grain, you may pluck the heads of grain with your hand, but you must not put a sickle to your neighbor's grain."

One, it's stealing to not allow your neighbor to come by and have a snack off your garden. But likewise, you are allowed to go have a snack from his garden. Two, it's a sin to go to your neighbor's garden and start harvesting. The garden doesn't belong to you (remember, property rights). You can have a snack, but you can't start harvesting.

### **Stealing by Keeping Something You Find**

Look at Deuteronomy 22:1-3: "If you see your brother's ox or sheep straying, you must not ignore it; make sure you return it to your brother. If your brother does not live near you or you don't know him, you are to bring the animal to your home to remain with you until your brother comes looking for it; then you can return it to him. Do the same for his donkey, his garment, or anything your brother has lost and you have found. You must not ignore it."

There's no "finders keepers, losers weepers" with Yahweh. When you find something someone lost, it is theft to take it and act like nothing ever happened. We have set up modern day lost and found boxes for cases like this. Our family has placed things we've found in the lost and found, and found things we've lost. This is a lawful practice.

You might say, "Yea but the person's coat I found or hat I found... that person is so hateful. He or she doesn't deserve to get it back." Look at Exodus 23:4-5, "If you come across your enemy's

stray ox or donkey, you must return it to him. If you see the donkey of someone who hates you lying helpless under its load, and you want to refrain from helping it, you must help with it."

Yahweh covers everything doesn't he? It's stealing even if the person is someone you don't get along with, or who hates you. You are to respect their property too.

### **Judgment for Stealing**

How are we to handle it if someone does commit theft? Yahweh's law says that the thief is to make restitution. Not to the government. Not by staying in a prison cell. But by paying back the person they stole from. Exodus 22:1 says, "When a man steals an ox or a sheep and butchers it or sells it, he must repay five cattle for the ox or four sheep for the sheep."

Verse 3 says, "A thief must make full restitution. If he is unable he is to be sold because of his theft." In other words, he is to work off his restitution, so that the person he or she stole from is completely compensated according to Yahweh's standard. Verse 4 says, "If what was stolen - whether ox, donkey, or sheep - is actually found alive in his possession, he must repay double."

Why the different amounts of restitution? Well, in the case of verse 4, the thief is found **with** the object that he stole, so the object itself isn't lost. By the way, this isn't just for animals. This is case law that applies to any object. Animals are being used here because ancient Israel was predominantly a farming society.

So, in a case where a sheep was stolen and then sold or butchered, the owner completely lost that sheep. Sheep provided clothing from their wool for people. Goats provided milk. Both sheep and goats provided meat. Cows provided milk and meat as well, but they could also be used for plowing and pulling. This is probably why the restitution is 5 ox for an ox and 4 sheep for a sheep. An ox was like a work truck (with tools) compared to a simple car for transportation.

But the point is that some form of restitution to the injured party is the judgment. You might ask, "Well what if the thief is caught, and refuses to make restitution?" Ha. Well...

Deuteronomy 17:9-13 teaches that a thief who refuses to obey any righteous judgment the law demands is to be put to death.

I think if a thief is given the option of death or restitution, he will pick restitution, even if it means he is an indentured servant for a few years to the person he stole from.

### **The Positive Side**

Every negative commandment has a positive. Do not murder means to regard and save life. Do not commit adultery means love your spouse. And do not steal means work, labor, and give when you are able.

Ephesians 4:28 (NLT) says, "If you are a thief, quit stealing. Instead, use your hands for good hard work, and then give generously to others in need."

When a thief repents his lifestyle changes from a taker to a giver; from a free-loader to a worker. A repentant heart does not desire to take what doesn't belong to you, it desires to work diligently in order to have things, and then use some of what you earn to bless others, especially those who don't have much.

## **Conclusion**

There's a lot more to this commandment than we initially think huh? It's like that with all the commandments, and I'm only scratching the surface with one sermon on each of them. May Yahweh bless us to be able to respect each other's property, to take care of the poor, be gracious in our lending, and be generous with what we have.

## **The Ninth Commandment**

Read: Exodus 20:16, Ephesians 4:22

In Exodus 20:16 we read: "Do not give false testimony against your neighbor." The older KJV reads "Do not bear false witness against your neighbor." The specific commandment here is to not speak something about your neighbor that is dishonest or untrue. Whether in general, or in a court of law.

This is why courts make people swear to tell the truth prior to giving a testimony. I'm not against swearing or taking an oath, in Yahweh's name. The Torah actually commands such. After such oath, to bear false witness is to commit perjury, which means lying under oath.

The point of this command is: tell the truth. As Ephesians 4:22 says: "Since you put away lying, Speak the truth, each one to his neighbor, because we are members of one another." Zechariah 8:16 says: "These are the things you must do: speak truth to one another; render honest and peaceful judgments in your gates. Do not plot evil in your hearts against your neighbor, and do not love perjury, for I hate all this, declares Yahweh."

As I've said with all the negative commands there is a positive side. If we are commanded against being a false witness, we are commanded to be a true witness. If we are not to lie to harm others, we should speak the truth to help others.

## **The Small Tongue**

Our tongue is a small part of our body, yet it can be the most *damaging* part, or the most *healing* part. James 3:2 (NLT) says: "For if we could control our tongues, we would be perfect and could also control ourselves in every other way." The tongue is a small thing that makes grand speeches. The tongue can start a tiny spark that sets a great forest on fire. James also says that if you think you are religious without controlling your tongue, you are deceiving yourself.



I was taught this little saying growing up: *sticks and stones can break my bones but words will never hurt me*. I think whoever came up with that was trying to make their self believe that words didn't matter. You have to force yourself to believe that, because the reality is: **words matter a lot**. How we speak. What we say. Blessings or curses. It all begins with our tongue.

### **Proverbs About the Tongue**

Proverbs 10:31 says: "The mouth of the righteous produces wisdom, but a perverse tongue will be cut out."

Proverbs 12:18 says: "There is one who speaks rashly, like a piercing sword; but the tongue of the wise brings healing."

Listen to that. Your words can heal someone who is hurting. Your words can make a person who is having a bad day (or a bad month) turn around and begin to think positive, good thoughts. Or... your words can pierce someone through like a sword to the gut.

Proverbs 15:4 says: "The tongue that heals is a tree of life, but a devious tongue breaks the spirit."

Proverbs 18:21... listen to this: "Life and death are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit." You can literally speak life into a person, or speak death into a person. You can build a person up, or you can tear them down. You can help them make it through the day, or make them want to crawl back into bed.

### **My Wife Encourages Me**

Sometimes my phone will ring and I'll see Tisha's name and picture pop up. She's my best friend, and I love her, but I'm not always having a peachy day if you know what I mean. Stuff happens. It's hot outside. I'm pouring sweat. I'm out of breath. I'm tired. And she'll call.

There's been many times I've answered the phone and said, "Hey honey," and she'll answer back with an enthusiastic "Hey! How's my handsome husband doing?" Or "Hey sweetie!" And when she says that, it just brightens up my whole day. I'm sure she doesn't always feel peachy herself, but she uses her words to encourage me so often, and it helps.

### **The Gentle Answer**

You have, right there in your grasp, a power that Yahweh has given you to bring forth life or death. To heal or to kill. It's right there in your mouth. You say, "Really brother Matthew?" Absolutely. Listen to this verse in Proverbs 15:1: "A gentle answer turns away anger, but a harsh word stirs up wrath."

I think about this Scripture often, and I try to remember to obey the gentle answer part, but I don't always do the best that I could. But I can assure you that it works. You can have someone

who is hell bent on being upset, and you just begin apologizing and speaking gently, and they may want to keep being mad, but they can't. They calm down because of the gentle answer.

It is good for us to examine ourselves whenever a conflict arises in our life. I realize that sometimes you may be the person in the right and the other person in the wrong, but surely that can't be in all cases. Usually, honest self-examination helps you see that there is always something you could do better on. This will help you give those gentle answers.

All of this falls under the 9th commandment. Any Scripture that has to do with the proper or improper use of the tongue hangs off of "Do not bear false witness against your neighbor."

### **False Accusations**

Let's talk about falsely accusing your neighbor. In Luke 3, when the soldiers listening to John the Baptizer asked what they needed to do, John said: "Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely." We are not allowed to just make accusations against others without proof that they have committed a wrong.

Yahweh's law forbids a person to be convicted unless there are 2 or 3 witnesses to a crime (Deuteronomy 17:6). He does not allow a person to be put to death by the testimony of just 1 witness. Even if Yahweh in heaven knows the person is guilty, a single witness upon the earth is not enough to charge a person.

Why? This is both the *wisdom* and the *mercy* of Yahweh. He knows that all men are liars by nature. Paul said "Let the Almighty be true, and every man a liar" (Romans 3:4). It is easy for 1 person to rise up and claim that someone committed a wrong. It is more difficult to get 2 people or 3 people to rise up and make that same claim. It is even more difficult to get 2 or 3 people's testimonies to agree with one another.

One of the best ways to determine if people are conniving with each other in a lie is to separate them and question them. You can examine story lines and pertinent points. You can't do that with a single witness, so Yahweh is so merciful that he lets guilty people go free here on the earth, in order to protect innocent people from being falsely accused by a single witness.

1 Timothy 5:19 picks up this principle by saying: "Don't accept an accusation against an elder unless it is supported by two or three witnesses." Ruling church elders are the subject here, but this goes for anyone. You shouldn't accuse someone of something without witnesses. You also shouldn't receive an accusation against another person unless there are eyewitnesses. You can harm a person's name that way, sometimes to no remedy.

It is just as wrong to *listen* to a false accusation as it is to *speak* a false accusation. If someone comes to you wanting to accuse another person of a sin against them, or a crime, your first reaction should be: "Are there witnesses to this?" If the answer is no, it should be stopped immediately.

Better to have your wallet stolen, or the goods from a family store, than your name. And if you want your name protected from being tampered with, then you do the same for your neighbor. Even if you personally saw your neighbor commit a sin, and you were by yourself, you are only 1 witness. You aren't allowed to make it public. According to Matthew 18:15, you should go to them in private to offer help and hopefully provoke repentance. Our goal should always be a person's repentance, not a person's downfall.

### **The Love of Bad News**

It's such a shame that we love bad news more than good news. It's awful that we feel vindicated if our neighbor gets in trouble or caught doing something wrong. It puffs up our chest, and makes us feel good to not be the one that got caught. You know you've done wrong things in your life, but not gotten caught. Shame on us for feeling proud instead of sorrowful when our neighbor gets caught up in a sin, and it is found out.

### **Stand Up for Your Neighbor**

When we see a brother or sister, or even an unbeliever, be falsely accused, this commandment requires us to stand up for them. We must take up the torch of Yahweh's law and speak out for those who are unjustly spoken against.

When the Apostles were accused of being drunk on new wine in the book of Acts (2), Peter stood up and said, "These men are not drunk as you have supposed." He spoke the truth for his fellow brothers. When Saul went on an unlawful manhunt for David, Jonathan (David's best friend) told his father Saul (1 Sam. 19): "Don't sin against David. He hasn't done anything to you. Why would you seek to kill him for no reason?"

When you see or hear of a brother or sister having their name drug through the mud, take up for them. A lot of people today love to talk down about others, in order to make them selves look good. Some people make a habit of it. If your neighbor is being talked about rudely, unseemly, or just down right dirty, speak up for your neighbor. Don't allow that false witnessing to take root.

### **Study to Be Quiet**

I think a lot of us talk too much as it is. We could refrain from a multitude of sins if we studied more to be quiet and peaceful. If we took time to concentrate on ourselves rather than other people. If we spent more time praying, or meditating, or reading our Bible. If, when our neighbor does do us wrong, we took it to Yahweh in prayer, rather than to our other friends in gossip.

### **Gossip Brings Trouble**

And I guess I shouldn't leave gossip out of this sermon. That's a sin of the tongue as well, and we are all guilty of that sin. We get caught up in that filth and don't want out, so long as the gossip isn't about us. *Did you hear what she did? Did you hear about what happened to him?* There we are again loving that bad news because it makes us feel better about the things we do in secret.

Even if the gossip is true, how in the world is sharing it with another person in secret going to help the situation? How is having your friends over for coffee and sitting around and talking negatively about people going to help anything? You know what that's called? Meddling in other peoples affairs.

**If someone gossips to you about somebody else, they will also gossip about you to somebody else.** "Oh brother Matthew... talk about stealing some more. I'm not guilty of that. Talk about murder, so I can feel better about myself because I've never murdered anyone. Please don't preach on gossip."

### **A Repentant Attitude**

Let me say something else here in general about the commandments. If you hear the commandments be preached, and it doesn't drive you to repentance, you're not listening properly. If you just sit there and think, "Grace got me covered. I'm good," you might not be a child of Yahweh.

I believe in grace and mercy. I believe that Yahweh receives us in spite of our flaws. But Yahweh's children are repentant, penitent people. Part of heart-felt obedience is hearing the law, and repenting of sin, not continuing in it. I hate it that I sin. After it happens, after I catch myself using my tongue in a wrong way, I hate that I just did that. I don't think, "Well that's what grace is for." I think, "I shouldn't have done that. Yahweh forgive me, and help me do better." Sometimes it takes a day. Sometimes it takes weeks. But the child of Yahweh will not just sin and holler "Here's my grace card!" That's not how life serving Yahweh works.

### **More on Gossip**

Back to gossiping. I know you thought I was through with that, lol. Proverbs 11:13 says: "A gossip goes around revealing a secret, but the trustworthy keeps a confidence."

You ever had someone tell you something in confidence and then you spread it to someone else? Sin. You just lied to the person who trusted you.

Proverbs 16:28 says: "A contrary man spreads conflict, and a gossip separates friends." Don't be the person that keeps a conflict going. Be the water that stops the fire. Proverbs 26:20 says: "Without wood, a fire goes out. Without a gossip, conflict dies down."

Proverbs 20:19 says: "The one who reveals secrets is a constant gossip; avoid someone with a big mouth." No commentary needed.

### **Take Your Pick**

We have a choice to make. We have this small member of our body called the tongue, and it has power. We can wake up each day and use it to speak truth, bringing peace, comfort, healing, wisdom, kindness, and hope. Or, we can wake up each day and bear false witness causing destruction, pain, wounds, stupidity, meanness, and despair. It's up to you.

## Double Your Encouragement

Brothers and sisters, sometimes things need to be said to your neighbor that hurt, but there is always a way to say them more gently. Sometimes we need to give a person constructive criticism, but there is always a way to do it where we don't crush another's spirit.

I have fathered 5 children. It is not easy. Anyone who says it's easy is breaking the 9th commandment. They lying through their teeth. I have made many mistakes. I have had to apologize to my children. But one of the things I've learned to do is speak positive to my children. Tell them I love them. Tell them I'm well pleased in them. Send them a good text to encourage them.

You have to discipline children so they learn, especially when they are little, but for all the discipline and chastisement and constructive criticism we give to them, we should give double the amount of positive, healing words of encouragement. Nobody wants to just hear about what they do wrong all the time. They need to be encouraged. Encouraging our children, and speaking well to people in general for their good qualities will help them work on their bad qualities.

## Conclusion

This is all the 9th commandment, and I believe everyone one of us here today needs to repent of something in regards to this commandment. I sure know I do. I want to do better, but the only way I'm going to is make a conscious effort everyday to use power of life that Yahweh has given me.

May we all use our speech wisely. May we learn to be more quiet than we've been. Help us Yahweh to shut our mouths more than we open them. May we use our words to heal instead of kill. That is my prayer, for me, and for everyone here.

## The Tenth Commandment

Read: Exodus 20:17

Today we come to the end of our study through the Ten Commandments. I hope you've learned some things. I certainly have grown in knowledge myself, on all of the commandments.

Each time I sat down to read and study about a commandment, I'd wonder if I was going to come across anything new. Not new to everyone, but new to me. And each time, it happened. I'd run across something I had not seen before.

Aren't you glad Yahweh's Word is fresh? It doesn't matter how many times you've read a text, there is always more to it than meets the eye. It's really amazing. I don't know how Yahweh does that, but He does.

## The Command

We begin today with Exodus 20:17, which says: “Do not covet your neighbor’s house. Do not covet your neighbor’s wife, his male or female slave, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”

In the second giving of the law in Deuteronomy (5:21), it reads: “Do not desire your neighbor’s wife. Do not covet your neighbor’s house, his field, his male or female slave, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”

In Exodus, the house is mentioned before the wife, because in order to have a wife, you must provide a place for her to live. In Deuteronomy a man’s wife is mentioned first, because she is most precious to the man.

Thereafter follows a list of other things we should not desire or covet. Your neighbor’s field, land, or property. His servants or workers. His animals. And just in case we want to say we are allowed to covet something, it says “or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”

## The Heart

The 7th commandment forbids taking another man’s wife. The 8th commandment forbids taking another man’s ox, or truck, or money. The 10th commandment goes deeper. It deals with the desires of the heart.

This shows us that when someone says Yeshua came along in Matthew 5 and strengthened the law, that is incorrect. Preachers sometimes say that the old law forbids adultery, but Yeshua’s new law made it stronger by saying you can now commit adultery in your heart.

Do people really believe that Yahweh allowed you to desire your neighbor’s wife in the Old Testament? I don’t think they’ve thought that one through.

Yeshua didn’t make anything stronger. He just shined a flashlight on the parts of the law that were being neglected. He showed the people of his day that while the letter of the law is good, the spirit with the letter is better.

The 10th commandments teaches us that Yahweh doesn’t just want your actions, He wants your heart. This law deals with our internal desires rather than just our external actions. No one can see us mentally desiring what our neighbor has, yet Yahweh sees and knows, and He wants our desires to be pure.

You may wonder how actions would not be enough with Yahweh. Surely a man’s actions portray his heart, right?

Well... it is possible for us to fool people with the way we act in public, and yet be far away from Yahweh in private, in our heart and mind.

A person may choose not to steal because a cop is watching, not because he wants to do right. A person may choose not to commit adultery, because their friends would find out, not because he doesn't want to hurt his own wife or his neighbor.

Works by themselves are not good enough. They must flow from a faithful heart. If the heart desires something unlawful long enough, it will eventually make itself known by a wicked act. The problem then is your heart or your desires.

If we would guard our hearts, it would stop many sins from manifesting. We act upon what we think about. Our behind follows our mind. None of the other nine commandments are violated without first having an unlawful desire.

Your life is ultimately a manifestation of your heart. The tenth command is all about your heart. It makes sense then that Yahweh would begin the Ten Commandments with Him having top priority in the first command, and then Him ruling in our hearts and desires in the last command. The first and last commandments are bookends that explain it all, and tie everything together.

Proverbs 4:20-23 says "My son, pay attention to my words; listen closely to my sayings. Don't lose sight of them; keep them within your heart. For they are life to those who find them, and health to one's body. Guard your heart above all else, for it is the source of life."

Guard your heart. How do we do that? If we guard our property, we may put up a fence. We may put up cameras in certain locations. We may have an alarm system, or a watch dog.

If we guard money or jewelry, we may put it in a lock box, or a safe hiding place. Guarding something means you go to extra lengths to protect it.

I think that guarding your heart means you spend time with Yahweh. You turn off the TV to read the Bible. You pray and fast to draw closer to Yahweh. You don't allow unlawful things into your eyes or ears, because you know they will cripple your spirit. You protect your heart, for from it flows your desires.

### **A Desire for More**

Coveting is a desire to have what your neighbor has, and not *just* the actual possession of your neighbor, but the desire to keep up with your neighbor. When you look around at what other people have, and you try to keep up with them by gaining more and more and more, because you want to be liked, or accepted.

Coveting would not just be me desiring my neighbor's truck, but also me being jealous of my neighbor's truck, and trying to outdo my neighbor, and be better than my neighbor. The "*keeping up with the Jones*" mentality. The insatiable desire for more, rather than a state of contentment, and being satisfied.

It is ok to live a successful life. It is not wrong to be wealthy. But that doesn't mean it's wrong to be poor either. Christians have erred on both sides of the pendulum. Some Christians think it's a sin to be rich, so they preach plainness and simplicity. Other Christians think the kings kids shouldn't be poor, so they preach a prosperity gospel.

The truth is that it's not a sin to be rich or poor. It's all about desire and priority. It's all about where your heart belongs.

### **How We Spend Our Time**

Psalm 19:7-10 says that Yahweh's commandments are more to be desired than much fine gold. Do you chase after learning His commandments more than you do your gold? Do you spend time in His law, studying to learn the parts you do not yet know, and better yourself in the parts you do know? Or, do you instead work extra hours, and spend your time doing those things you want to do? You may be battling with a spirit of covetousness.

If you are too busy for Yahweh, you are too busy.

It is not wrong to have recreation time, so long as it is spent doing something lawful. But it is wrong to never spend time with the Almighty, because you take all that time for yourself. We overburden our lives with so much stuff that we sometimes neglect Yahweh. It is a result of covetousness.

Psalm 119:36 says, "Turn my heart to Your decrees and not to material gain." There is nothing wrong with being wealthy or successful, but there is something wrong with an unsatisfied desire to be rich. A desire that always wants more, so that you are viewed as better or prestigious. A righteous rich man is a humble man who has much, but is willing to be generous as the law requires, and still spends much time with Yahweh, carrying out His will.

Luke 12:13-21 says this: "Someone from the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.

"Friend," He said to him, "who appointed Me a judge or arbitrator over you?" He then told them, "Watch out and be on guard against all covetousness, because one's life is not in the abundance of his possessions."

Then He told them a parable: "A rich man's land was very productive. He thought to himself, 'What should I do, since I don't have anywhere to store my crops? I will do this,' he said. 'I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones and store all my grain and my goods there. Then I'll say to myself, "You have many goods stored up for many years. Take it easy; eat, drink, and enjoy yourself." ' "But Yahweh said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is demanded of you. And the things you have prepared — whose will they be?' "That's how it is with the one who stores up treasure for himself and is not rich toward Yahweh."

What do you chase after? Does your heart belong to Yahweh?



The entire key is what is driving you. Could you lose all of it and still serve Yahweh? Could you be like Job and say, “Should we accept only good from the Almighty and not adversity?”

And also, how rich are you towards Yahweh in comparison with the possessions you have? How much time do you spend in prayer, study, fasting, and meditation on Him in comparison with time spent working for self?

It is required for you to work in order to provide for yourself and your family, but to do such and neglect the spiritual matters is a sign of covetousness and greed. You want and want, because others have. You may not be taking what they have, but you are jealous of others, and covet what they have, so you try to keep up.

### **Be Satisfied**

You should live your life at your own pace, being thankful for your neighbor if they have more, and being generous to your neighbor if they have less.

Life isn't about keeping up with anyone. It's about loving Yahweh and loving your neighbor. Stop worrying about what your neighbor has or does. Stop coveting their life-style. Begin to be satisfied with where Yahweh has placed you.

Do honorably with what you have. Be content. Holiness with contentment is great gain. You didn't bring anything into this world, and you will take nothing out of this world. Craving the possessions or lifestyle of others brings about turmoil. You begin living for something other than Yahweh. You begin focusing on storing up treasures on earth.

Hebrews 13:5 says this: “Your life should be free from the love of money. Be satisfied with what you have, for He has said, ‘I will never leave you or forsake you.’”

Money or wealth can be a good thing, because you can accomplish much for Yahweh and your family. But is money or possessions what we love? Is this where our heart is focused? We ought to be content with whatever state we find ourselves in. When something goes wrong and we have to spend that money we've been saving, it's ok. It's just money.

### **Wealth is Uncertain**

Proverbs 23:4-5 says, “Don't wear yourself out to get rich; stop giving your attention to it. As soon as your eyes fly to it, it disappears, for it makes wings for itself, and flies like an eagle to the sky.”

Wealth is uncertain. It can be stolen in an instant. It can be taken from you in one moment. But your relationship with Yahweh is enduring. A man may steal your money, but he cannot steal your faith. A man may murder you so that this life is over, but you'll have a new body in the resurrection.

Covetousness forgets this. Greed places focus on material things rather than eternal things. This life is just a vapor. It is a drop in a bucket. You won't be around here for long. So many believers have come and gone for thousands of years. We don't live forever in this flesh.

Work hard, provide for you and yours, be generous with others who have less, and leave a inheritance to your children, but don't be so busy doing these things that you forget the one who gave you the power and ability to work and have wealth.

### **“But I Don't Have Time”**

Don't build a bigger barn while your Bible collects dust on the book shelf. Don't go to an extra job, while your prayer life suffers because you just don't have enough time.

It's not that you don't have time to pray or read your Bible. You *choose* not to pray or read, because you'd rather do something else. You always have time to do what you want to do.

Sometimes I'll complain about the situation I find myself in, and then I'll realize, “Matthew... you put yourself in this situation, and only you can take yourself out of it.”

Are you struggling to find time for Yahweh? It's probably because you have not been guarding your heart.

### **Life is So Short**

I attended a funeral the other day where it was said how short and quick life is. This lady had worked for the USPS her whole adult life, and yet only drew one retirement check before she died.

If you could talk to her now, for just 5 minutes, what would she say? Would she tell you to work more and more so you can keep up with everyone? Would she tell you to spend less time with your family so you could spend more time making money? Or would she tell you to worry less about money and more about Yahweh? I think she would say: “Put the Father first. Spend time loving your family, and don't worry about that extra job, or that extra money.”

### **Is Coveting all that Bad?**

We don't normally view coveting as being a really bad sin, but I noticed this week that it's listed in a group of sins that the Apostle Paul names, where he says that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom (1 Corinthians 6:9-10).

Don't you know that the unrighteous will not inherit [Yahweh's] kingdom? Do not be deceived: No sexually immoral people, idolaters, adulterers, or anyone practicing homosexuality, no thieves, greedy people, drunkards, verbally abusive people, or swindlers will inherit [Yahweh's] kingdom.

It says greedy people in the HCSB, but it says covetous in the KJV. Lexicons and Dictionaries give the definition of covetous as: “One eager to have more, especially what belongs to others. Greedy of gain.”

The covetous are right there with the homosexuals, adulterers, drunkards, and thieves. Yet, I can guarantee you that in the Christian community, covetousness is more of an acceptable sin than these others. You may hear a sermon from time to time against these others sins, but rarely if ever will you hear a sermon that deals with peoples hearts, and greed, and money.

You know vandalism stems from jealousy and covetousness. If you can't have what someone else has, you destroy those things that they have. This violates loving your neighbor as yourself, which is also part of this commandment. **The opposite of coveting what your neighbor has is being thankful that your neighbor is blessed materially, even if it is more so than yourself.** We are to rejoice when we see good things happen to our neighbor, and not be bitter and envious thinking, “Ugh, that should have been me.”

There is no earthly punishment for the sin of coveting. It is a heart matter, and sins of the heart are not criminal activities upon the earth. For example, you can't put a man to death for desiring another man's wife, but you can put him to death for taking another man's wife. One does lead to the other, but only one is a criminal activity upon the earth.

However, coveting another man's wife is just as bad on the eternal scale of things, according to 1 Corinthians 6:9-10. Yahweh knows our hearts, and we must be a repentant people, always asking Him for our forgiveness, and striving to kill this sin in our lives.

If we want to change our actions we have to change our hearts and thoughts. This means more of Him and less of us. If you have a problem with this sin, you can't keep doing the same things and expect the problem to lessen. You have to change something. You have to cut something off. You have to do something different that gears your mind and heart in another direction.

## Final Conclusion

After going through these commandments, especially this last one, I feel like hitting my knees, so that's what I'm going to do now. Not because I want to be seen among men, but because I want to be an example today to the congregation. Brother Matthew needs to repent just like anyone else. I need Yahweh's forgiveness. I need His mercy. These commandments don't make me feel better about myself. They drive me to the Savior.

I'm thankful that Yahweh sent Yeshua so I could be forgiven on the eternal scale. Christ became a curse for us. He gave himself as a ransom for us, and he could do so, because he's the only man to ever fully obey the commandments of Yahweh.

As I lead the prayer, you ask Yahweh to forgive you and help you. You ask Him to create a clean heart in you. Be open with Him, because He already knows everything about you. A broken heart and a contrite spirit He will not turn away.

Help us all Yahweh.

### ***“Trembling Before Yahweh”***

**Read Exodus 19:9-25 and 20:18-21 ::** So today we are going to begin our study through the law of Yahweh found in the book of Exodus, particularly here at the end of chapter 20, and then through chapter 21, 22, 23, we'll probably do 24 as an end cap, and then we'll go from there to Exodus 34 where we find the new stones of the Covenant, and the renewal of the Covenant with its obligations.

That's a lot of verses; there's plenty of good material here, and a variety of it, and we are going to take our time and just go verse-by-verse.

I do want to encourage everyone to take the time to go back over the first two lessons in this series where I taught on why our focus should be on the Law of Yahweh given through prophet Moshe. These are lessons you can listen to over and over, so that you build a good foundation in your mind as to why we are taking the time to go through these instructions.

### **Lights, Smoke, and Noise**

We'll begin today looking at Exodus 20:18-21. I opened by reading much of chapter 19 as well to get the context, and because what is mentioned in Exodus 20 began to take place in 19, moving into 20 with the giving of Ten Commandments. I'm not going over the Ten Commandments in this series, simply because I taught through them just a few years ago.

In 18 again we read: “All the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain [surrounded by] smoke. When the people saw [it] they trembled and stood at a distance.”

This is a reiteration of what began taking place in Exodus 19, and it happened because Yahweh Himself came down on Mount Sinai. He told Moshe He was coming down, and then twice we are told (in 19:18, 20) that He came down on the top of the mountain. When Yahweh shows up there is thunder, lightning, a thick cloud, smoke, and the sound of a loud trumpet. We read that the whole mountain shook. I thought about trying to duplicate this noise but then I thought, “Matthew, that's silly, you can't duplicate what Yahweh did.”

### **See = Experience**

I should point out here that the word saw (in verse 18) is the Hebrew word ra'ah, but it's the same word used at the beginning of the verse where it says “the people witnessed.” This is

because the word carries the meaning of experiencing something with your senses. You can *ra'ah* by seeing, hearing, touching, or even smelling and tasting.

So they experienced what was taking place; they did not *physically see* Yahweh - they witnessed the *effects* of Yahweh coming down on the mountain. You can make a note here at verse 18 to refer you to Deuteronomy 4:9-19. There we learn at the recounting of the giving of the law, that the people did indeed *hear* the voice of Yahweh but they did not *see* a form. We'll talk more about this in the next lesson, but it's important to recognize that Yahweh showed Himself by voice - with no form - for a reason.

## **Fear Yahweh**

Now the point in all this flare is to show the power and holiness of Yahweh - that He is separated from us. He deals with His people. He includes us in His plans. He mercies us and forgives us of our sins, and He is compassionate, slow to anger, and rich in faithful love. But none of that means He is not a force to be reckoned with. He shows that here. He is to be feared. By feared I mean revered and awed for His greatness and might; a recognition He is the self-existent One, and could wipe us all out if He so desired.

So at the beginning of the Covenant, He gives Israel something to fear. Proverbs 1:7 says, "The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction." In Proverbs we also read that the fear of Yahweh prolongs life, is a fountain of life, and that we should fear Yahweh all the day long. Psalm 19:9 says, "The fear of Yahweh is clean, enduring forever."

Yahweh doesn't come down on the mountain casually and wave at everyone and say, "Hey guys!" He shows up in power; in a way that strikes fear in the hearts of the people. So all this is happening and the people tremble and stand at a distance. They fear Yahweh, and I believe it is appropriate. Listen to what Yahweh tells us through the prophet Isaiah (66:2):

"This is Yahweh's declaration. I will look favorably on this kind of person: one who is humble, submissive in spirit, and who trembles at My word."

We never want to veer too far into fear, as though Yahweh is some kind of ugly monster that scares us, because He's not like that. Too much fear is bad. It must be balanced with love. We serve Yahweh out of both fear and love, but I'm afraid that in our day the balance of many has gotten off kilter because we've veered too far towards the love side. We need to walk back towards the middle, and balance it out with a good dose of the fear of Yahweh. But don't walk past the middle. Don't think fear should outweigh love. Find the middle and stay there as best you can. We serve Yahweh not just out of love and not just out of fear - but out of both.

When I was a kid I knew my dad loved me. He told me pretty much every day, and He'd smile or laugh with me, take care of me, I even vaguely remember him picking me up and hugging me when I was still little enough for that. But... I feared him as well, because he was strict on me in

some ways. I knew that doing wrong would get me in trouble. I wasn't allowed to back-talk, pitch a fit, lie, etc. If I did those things I would be disciplined. It wasn't always pleasant, I was learning... but I had both a love for and fear of my dad, in a good way.

Yahweh wants this, and so He interacts with us in *both* ways. He comes down on the mountain with lights, smoke, and noise, *yet* He doesn't hurt anyone. He didn't come down right then to unleash His wrath, because He loved His people He had just delivered from Egypt.

### **Wrath and Love**

Something to take note of here is that, for example, when we want to show how strict Yahweh is we often bring up Numbers 15 where a man was put to death for violating Shabbat. We say, "See, Yahweh means business so straighten up!" We forget though that back earlier here in Exodus, Exodus 16, that a whole bunch of people directly violated Yahweh's command and went out to gather manna on the Sabbath day. What did Yahweh do? He scolded them, but no one was put to death. He told them they needed to understand the Sabbath, and respect the day of rest they'd been given, and then He moved on.

This is important because it shows the balance of Yahweh right here in the Older Testament without going to the Newer Testament. Everyone here knows I love the NT, but I get tired of people thinking we've got to go to the NT to see the patience, mercy, and love of the Creator. No, we see it in Exodus 16, and we also see it in Exodus 19 right in the midst of all the lights, smoke, and noise. Yahweh wants to put fear into the people, but He doesn't do this like a criminal killing a hostage so everyone shuts up and listens. No, He comes down in power, and He speaks with authority, but He does not harm anyone.

### **The Man of Elohim**

Now, let me point something else out here. Notice that while the people tremble and stand at a distance, Moshe does not. Moshe is the one who speaks with Yahweh directly, and in verse 21 we read "And the people remained standing at a distance as Moshe approached the thick darkness where Elohim was."

This doesn't mean that Moshe was not humble. It doesn't mean Moshe did not fear and tremble before Yahweh. He respected Yahweh too, but... he was a special vessel Yahweh had chosen to represent Himself to the people. Exodus 19:9 even says that one of the reasons Yahweh came down on the mountain with such pomp was so the people would hear the voice of Yahweh talking directly to Moshe, and this would cause them to realize Moshe was anointed and appointed, and they would believe Moshe *forever*.

Yahweh has leaders. He appoints them. It doesn't mean they are more saved. It just means they've been chosen and given gifts and abilities to lead. When Yahweh puts a leader in your life, respect them. When you see Yahweh's hand upon someone in a special way, get behind them and flow with that current.

It's sad that in our movement or community leadership is often looked down upon. I see it just about every week on Facebook, somebody says they don't need a teacher because they have the Holy Spirit. Somebody talks about a bad experience they had with a pastor so they start throwing off on all pastors. Listen, if you run across a bad doctor it doesn't mean all doctors are bad. If you get ripped off by septic tank man it doesn't mean all of us are bad.

When Yeshua ascended up into heaven, he himself gave gifts to men. He gave some to be apostles, others prophets, some evangelists, and others pastors and teachers, and all this was for the perfecting of the saints. We see that in Ephesians 4, and we also see it here in Exodus, in chapter 18 where Jethro (Moshe's father-in-law) instructs Moshe to select from the people able men who fear Elohim, are trustworthy, and who hate bribes. Moshe chose able men from all Israel to lead the people. He set some over thousands, and others over hundreds, fifties, and even tens. There was structure.

If you are doing a job with 5 men, and there's no leader, you're going to run into problems. There can be delegation, appointment, and everyone can be skilled and do work, but there has to be someone to lead. Everyone can't be in charge. The old saying is "Too many Chiefs and not enough Indians." I told brother TJ the other day that you can't get anything done with a committee. You have to appoint someone to lead, and then trust their gift.

### **Don't be Afraid, yet Fear**

Let's look at verses 19 and 20: "You speak to us, and we will listen,' they said to Moshe, 'but don't let Elohim speak to us, or we will die.' Moshe responded to the people, 'Don't be afraid, for Elohim has come to test you, so that you will fear Him and will not sin.'" So the people are afraid, but Moshe tells them not to be afraid, yet he says Elohim has come so that you will fear him. Once again, a balance. Fear can be healthy, but fear without love is unhealthy.

When Yahweh does this to make the people fear Him, He is inviting them worship and serve Him. He isn't cowering over the people to try and make them feel dumb or stupid. He's wanting to teach them something. Moshe says He's come to test you.

The test here is probably the instruction given back in chapter 19:10-15 about getting ready for Yahweh's arrival, but not coming too close to the base of the mountain. There was a 3-day preparation for the arrival of Yahweh. The people were to sanctify and purify by washing their clothes, and even refrain from intimacy. They were told not to go up on the mountain or touch its base, not even an animal. Yahweh gives them an instruction to test the loyalty they just pledged.

### **Fear Produces Obedience**

Now think about the part after that - He does this (vs. 20) "so that you will fear Him and not sin." All the lights, smoke, and noise was there so that the Israelites would remember the occurrence, fear Yahweh, and be motivated to not transgress His law.

Victor Hamilton, in his commentary on Exodus has something great here to say. He writes this: "The fear of God... is to help deter the people from sinning. Moses is not advocating for sinless perfection. But neither is he excusing sin in believers nor suggesting that a little bit of sin is okay... a lapse (where we fall into sin) must not become the norm, something with which we can be comfortable, and something we can tolerate and condone."

Yahweh understands we are frail creatures. He even implemented a system of forgiveness and atonement within His law (reminding us that He knows we will sin), but at the same time He wants us to be focused on Him - His power and might - so much, that we live righteous lives. The more time and focus we devote towards Him the stronger we advance in the spirit. The more you pray the closer you will be to Yahweh. Same with time in His word, and meditating upon His commands. You tune in to the frequency of the Spirit (so to speak). To hear what a channel is broadcasting you've got to tune into that channel. If you aren't "around Yahweh" He will not rub off on you.

You get good at what you practice. You start improving on something that you spend time doing over and over. Have you heard people say "I've fell out of practice" when they haven't done something in a long time? It's been a while since I picked up a basketball and played, even though that was a big part of my life in high school. But, it's not important to me now, so I stopped playing or practicing, and I'm certain I'm not as good as I once was.

When we slack or stop reading and studying Torah, when we stop experiencing Yahweh coming down on the mountain with thunder, lightning, cloud, smoke, fire, a trumpet blast... and we take our focus off Yahweh for other things (sports, politics, entertainment, etc.) our walk of righteousness will suffer. All of that other stuff will rub off on you and you'll start putting out what you've taken in. You can't portray Yahweh to others if you haven't spent any time with Him yourself.

Yahweh has come to you today, in this holy convocation, He has come into your life so that you will fear Him and will not sin. Stop making excuses for sin. I know we all sin. I'm not denying that (from 1 John), but don't use that as a crutch. You should never be comfortable in sin, and the way you'll be an over-comer is by making it a habit to eat from Yahweh's table - in some way - every day of your life. We stand at a distance from Him, we tremble before Him, but at the same time we can be close to Him and experience His love if we just submit to His authority.

## **Closing**

In our next lesson we will begin looking at verses 22-26, where Yahweh begins speaking to Moshe about what to tell the people of Israel. This is part of the "book of the law" that we are not to let depart from out mouth.



## **“Idols vs. Altars”**

**Read Exodus 20:21-24** :: It's an absolute joy to be back here today teaching the Law of Yahweh, especially to a group of people as wonderful as you all. I consider myself blessed to know each and every one of you. As we go through all these verses, remember that this world is passing away and the desires thereof, but the person who does the will of Yah will live forever. Never forget that. All of this will be over someday, and only what's done for Yahweh will last.

### **Recap + Israel**

We ended last week with prophet Moshe approaching the thick darkness where Elohim was, and now Yahweh calls out to Moshe. Verse 22 tells us He spoke directly to Moshe, but it was to be relayed to the people. These laws are for Yahweh's Israel people, and by Israel I mean both physical as well as the stranger who joins himself to Israel. Whether you have Israeli blood running through your veins, or do not but have said, "I'm going to follow the Mighty One of the Israelites, because what great nation is there on earth who has such righteous statutes and ordinances as this?" Whichever of those two people you are, these laws are for you.

### **From Heaven?**

At the end of verse 22 Yahweh says, "You have seen that I have spoken to you from heaven." Now we've already seen that in Exodus 19 Yahweh came down on the mountain and spoke to the people, so the word heaven here does not mean the ultimate abode of Yahweh, but is probably better understood and even translated "the sky," meaning at the top of the mountain. The Israelites are at the base of the mountain, but they look up and they *ra'ah*, they experience this voice speaking from the sky.

### **Voice vs. Shape**

It's on the basis of the speaking voice that Yahweh speaks verse 23 here. They heard thunder and saw lightning. They heard the sound of the shofar grow louder. They both saw and smelled the smoke, and they felt the mountain shake. They heard the very voice of Yahweh speak the Ten Words there in Exodus 20:1-17, but... they saw no shape or form of Yahweh. The JPS Torah Commentary on Exodus renders verse 23 as, "You yourselves saw that I spoke to you from the very heavens: With Me, therefore, you shall not make any gods of silver, nor shall you make for yourselves any gods of gold."

Notice that the command to not make gods of silver or gold comes on the basis of them hearing Yahweh's voice but not seeing Yahweh's shape. We need to link up another text with this, in Deuteronomy 4, where this same account is remembered and spoken about. Deuteronomy 4 beginning at verse 10, watch carefully:

(10) The day you stood before Yahweh your Mighty One at Horeb, Yahweh said to me, 'Assemble the people before Me, and I will let them hear My words, so that they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth and may instruct their children. (11) You came near and stood at the base of the mountain [sound familiar], a mountain

blazing with fire into the heavens and enveloped in a dense, black cloud. (12) Then Yahweh spoke to you from the fire. You kept hearing the sound of the words, but didn't see a form; there was only a voice. (13) He declared His covenant to you. He commanded you to follow the Ten Commandments, which He wrote on two stone tablets.

Now notice what he says in verses 15-18: "(15) Be extremely careful for your own good - because you did not see any form on the day Yahweh spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire - (16) not to act corruptly and make an idol for yourselves in the shape of any figure: a male or female form, (17) or the form of any beast on the earth, any winged creature that flies in the sky, (18) any creature that crawls on the ground, or any fish in the waters under the earth."

Now, a little further down, verses 33, 35, and 36: "(33) Has a people ever heard the Mighty One's voice speaking from the fire as you have, and lived? ...(35) You were shown these things so that you would know that Yahweh is the Mighty One; there is no other besides Him. (36) He let you hear His voice from heaven to instruct you. He showed you His great fire on earth, and you heard His words from the fire."

The command to not make an idol in the shape of anything is directly tied to the Israelites only hearing the voice of Yahweh, but not seeing the shape or form of Yahweh. Exodus 20:23 in the HCSB puts it well, "You must not make gods of silver to rival Me." This is a reiteration of the second commandment in the Ten. Yahweh is not against making images and likenesses of things. What He commands against specifically is the making of and/or bowing down and worshiping of images and idols that attempt to depict Him. Because He did not show the Israelites His shape or form, they should not try to depict what the Almighty looks like, nor make some kind of statue to represent Yahweh on the earth.

Sometimes I see pictures in magazines, or children's books, or religious memes, or even in secular cartoon comics, depicting the Almighty as an old man in picture. That is a direct violation of this command. Even if a company that prints picture Bibles is trying to do something good, it is not good, because Yahweh Almighty is meant - in this way - to be kept at a distance. This is part of fearing Yahweh, and this is the exact point the second commandment is making. "Don't try and depict Me. Don't make something to represent Me and bow down to it. You didn't see my shape on the mountain, you only heard my voice."

So now we are beginning to get into specific laws. The first specific is: don't try and depict what Yahweh looks like, because no one saw his shape when He came down on the mountain and spoke the Ten Commandments.

### **People Have Gotten Off Track**

Now, there is a flip side to this here if we keep reading verse 24. Verse 23 tells us what not to make or how not to worship Yahweh, and then verse 24 tells us what to make or how to worship

Yahweh, and this is where it's going to get strange for a lot of people, because we are so far removed from true worship due to the traditions and doctrines of men.

What I'm about to say I do not say to belittle anyone, but it needs to be said. What is taking place in many churches in the world when a man gets up to speak to the people is not preaching. It is because people have turned the exposition of the Word into a pep-talk that sounds cool, or to their own rant about something they want to talk about, and that is why people can leave a church over-and-over and never be at a higher level of learning.

These verses we are going over today have been in hand-written scrolls for thousands of years, and now printed Bibles for hundreds of years, and they were once believed by followers of the Almighty, but people are never taught these things because the office of pastor/teacher is becoming more and more rare.

I am here to do my part to try and reverse that. I do not want to be guilty of NOT teaching you Yahweh's law. I want you to leave the assembly each week with something practical to chew on. We are not here to just fellowship; that is part of it, but ultimately we are here to learn how to love and serve our Creator. And we do that by following what He says.

As brother Sandy has said, if your wife likes roses - and you know she likes them - and she does not like carnations, you don't bring home carnations to your wife because it's what *you* want. You bring your wife what *she* likes and wants. We don't serve Yahweh based on what we think He will like. We read what He likes and wants, and then we do the best we know how to put that into practice. Then as we learn better we do better, more and more.

### **Contrast/Altars**

So again, verse 23 says you must not make gods of silver or gold to rival Me, but instead (verse 24) "You must make an earthen altar for Me and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, your sheep and goats, as well as your cattle. I will come to you and bless you in every place (all the places, KJV) where I cause My Name to be remembered."

Yahweh tells us here, right after the giving of the Ten Commandments, what He wants his followers to make and how He wants to be served. Make an altar of earth (soil, dirt) and sacrifice clean, domesticated animals on it - both burnt offerings (*olah* - a gift of ascension) and fellowship offerings (*shelamim* - gift of peace/alliance/friendship). He then says He will come to you and bless you... in what place? Not in one place, but in EVERY place where He causes His name to be remembered, recorded (KJV), mentioned (JPS).

The Anchor Bible Commentary, by William Propp says here: "This verse articulates the popular and presumably original notion that one may sacrifice spontaneously to Yahweh wherever one chooses, rather than resorting to a temple and priesthood... An alternative interpretation of 'azkir is 'I cause to be pronounced' (compare the exegetical variant 'you pronounce'). If so, wherever a person calls upon

Yahweh's name, it is as if Yahweh has commanded him to do so. Forthwith, Yahweh draws near, and the site becomes a sanctuary and source of blessing." The point he is making is that some manuscripts here from the Syriac and Aramaic have Yahweh saying "in every place you pronounce" instead of "in every place I pronounce." I think either reading is fine, because ultimately it is Yahweh who is causing us as worshipers to remember or pronounce His Name in our speech.

### **Gonna' Get in Trouble**

Now, I already know I am gonna' get in trouble by teaching this, because it already caused a firestorm on a Facebook post where I wrote one small sentence about Yahweh loving animal sacrifices, and then just quoted Exodus 20:24. But isn't this what the verse teaches? Yahweh doesn't want us making images of Him, even if we use precious metals like silver and gold. That's how pagans approach their mighty ones. The way Israelites approach our Mighty One is out of a simple, primitive altar of dirt. Worship to Yahweh doesn't have to be extravagant or complicated. We can find Him in the simple. "Go get some dirt" He says, "and make an earthen altar."

This shows that it's okay to worship Yahweh while exiled, or by yourself, or apart from an established government under Yahweh. I look forward to a genuine "one nation under Yahweh" in the future, but right now Yahweh's people are scattered. We are blessed to have this little fellowship, but we are in a wilderness experience, wandering in our land like strangers and pilgrims in a desert. *I just had a couple stare at me the other day walking though a parking lot. I could tell they were thinking, "Where did this guy come from?"*

### **Your Sacred Ground**

Where Yahweh has placed me is sacred ground, because I have dedicated it to Him. I do my best to maintain His rule of law on my little 3 acre plot. The Shema is on my gates and doorpost. The land lays rest on the seventh year. The first-fruits and firstlings born on my property are dedicated to Yahweh. As Shabbat begins I close the gate and everything stops. We hallow His name in song. My place is one of those "in every place where I cause my name to be mentioned." Your place should be dedicated in the same way. It's holy because you serve Yahweh there. All the world around you may be doing their thing, but you can dedicate your place to Yahweh; you make sure Yahweh's rule of law is followed on your place, no matter how small it is.

People have asked me about the command in Deuteronomy 7 about going into the land and smashing the pagan pillars and idols that you find. That was an initial command to the Israelites who were given the land of Canaan by Yahweh due to the inhabitants being such an evil, debauched people. The land they were given, they were to purify. The way you obey that is not by going up the capital and trying to tear down an obelisk. No, you do that by purifying the land Yahweh has given you. When you plant yourself and your family on a piece of land, get rid of everything there that is not of Yahweh, and then start implementing Yahweh's rule of law on your property. Write them on the doorpost of your house, and on your gates.

The gates of an Israelite's house represent entering holy space. Someone drives up and they know a worshiper of Yahweh lives there, because His very Name is on the gate. They walk up to the door and they see the commandments on your doorpost. You have dedicated your entire life to the Creator, and you're not moving. He is causing His Name to be remembered or mentioned where you live.

### **Abram in Canaan**

These altars harken back to the worship of Yahweh by the Patriarchs in Genesis. In Gen. 12:6-8 we read, "Abram passed through the land to the site of Shechem, at the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. But Yahweh appeared to Abram and said, 'I will give this land to your offspring.' So he built an altar there to Yahweh who had appeared to him. From there he moved on to the hill country east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to Yahweh and worshiped (lit. 'invoked the Name') him." Abram was in the land of Canaan, and idol worshiping Canaanites were there, but when Yahweh appeared to Abram (*ra'ah* - Yahweh came to him and spoke to him) Abram realized the place that he stood was hallowed, so he dedicated it to Yahweh. It didn't matter what was going on around him. He marked the territory with an altar and pronounced the Sacred Name. What was the altar for? To offer sacrifice.

### **Noah's Offering**

In Genesis, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are all recorded as building altars to Yahweh in various places they dedicated to Yahweh. Noah's is one of my favorite accounts. Yahweh tells him to come out of the ark after the flood waters rescinded, and bring out your family and all the animals, and then we read (Gen. 8:20-21) "Then Noah built an altar to Yahweh. He took some of every kind of clean animal and every kind of clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar. (21) When Yahweh smelled the pleasing aroma, He said to Himself, 'I will never again curse the ground because of man, even though man's inclination is evil from his youth. And I will never again strike down every living thing as I have done.'" There was no temple there, there was no government, it was just Noah and his family. They were over their on the mountains of Ararat, which is what we call modern day Turkey, over in the ancient east where all this true religion actually began, and Noah dedicated that ground to Yahweh with an altar, and offered the *olah*, the ascending offering, to Yahweh. He was so thankful Yahweh had brought them safely through the flood waters.

### **Closing, More to Come**

Now, I've got so much more to say, and I will continue this next week, but as I close today remember this: this is how Yahweh says He wants to be worshiped. I know people today think it's crazy, especially in things like PETA and the modern, worldly vegan movement. And I'll address all of that, and I'll even talk about how we should not be cruel to animals because they are Yahweh's creatures too. But at the same time, they - the clean ones at least - were created to be received with thanksgiving. Even in Genesis 1, before the fall into sin, man and women were given dominion over the animal kingdom, to both rule and subdue the animals. We'll talk more about altars animal sacrifices, eating meat verses vegetarianism, and we'll just take our time and

go through all of it. I'd just like to ask you to read these verses, Exodus 20:22-24 every day and ask Yahweh to help you believe what they say.

### ***"The Better Blood of Messiah"***

**Read Exodus 20:22-24** :: So everyone left the service last week, and I went to bed that night meditating on what I had taught. I woke up realizing that it was some pretty heavy stuff. I mean, it's right from the Bible, from the very voice of Yahweh, but it's so foreign to the traditional, Christian world.

### **Levels of Understanding**

Sometimes I forget that people are at different levels of understanding, and I'm not talking about saved people verses lost people. I'm speaking about that within the community of believers (in Yahweh, the Messiah, the Torah, and even traditional Christians) there exists tiers of knowledge. Think about it like this: on a job you have people who are training, people who've been there 5 years (then 20 years), people who are 30 year veterans, and people who have retired. All work the job (or have worked the job), and all are considered employees and important, but the skill level and understanding varies. *I want to encourage you today to never stop learning and growing. Keep stepping on the next step of the ladder.*

There was a time in my life when I would not have received what I taught last week. But now, I've been in the Torah Community for about 25 years, and I've developed a greater level of understanding, because I stepped out of my comfort zone, over and over again.

I remember once telling Tisha, who was my girlfriend at the time, "I love you, and I believe in Yahweh, but I'll never sacrifice a lamb for Passover." Boy was I ever wrong.

I meant well, and I loved the Creator at that time, but I wasn't ready for that truth just yet. I realize that in here we have all different kinds of people, from all walks of life, with all sorts of backgrounds. I don't want anyone to feel like I'm trying to push something onto them. I'm here to instruct you in the Scriptures, as a teacher, but I'm also here to shepherd you as a pastor, in meekness.

### **A Healthy Church**

You can come to me if you don't understand something, or if you disagree with me about something, and I promise that I will not belittle you. I'm not here to be an authoritarian or domineering. I'm here to guide you in gentleness, and be patient with you as YOU study.

We've got all kinds of different views on things in here, yet we are all here. We don't all see things exactly the same way, but we love each other. There has to be order in an assembly, which means someone has to lead. For whatever reason Yahweh has picked me to lead this little flock at the present time, so there are some decisions I make for the assembly as a whole. That's just the

structure of Yahweh, but I do still look to other teachers here for guidance in that process, especially my co-laborers, brothers Jerry Kendall and TJ Martin.

But... what this structure doesn't mean is that I think you have to agree with me because I'm up here. Far too many churches treat the pastor like he can't be questioned or can't be wrong. That's not healthy. I encourage and welcome the open-sharing of ideas and understandings you get from studying Scripture. There are things we must be in agreement on: belief in Yahweh, in His Messiah, Holy Scripture, confession of sin, repentance, a life of obedience... things like that. But it is okay for us to have different understandings at times because we aren't all on the same step of the ladder. It's okay to give people time to grow, and during that growth process be assured that your relationship with Yahweh and Yeshua is secure while you are learning.

### **A Touchy Subject**

The subject of animal sacrifices is so touchy with Christians, because most of us have been taught (whether directly or subconsciously) that if we slaughter an animal *in a religious sense* we are denying the work of the Messiah - his death on the cross. It's like we are saying, "What Yeshua did for us is not sufficient, so we have to sacrifice this lamb to make up for where he lacks."

**I believe that is a very wrong understanding of everything inside of this subject**, and I think that the reason Christianity doesn't properly understand this issue is due to beginning with the premise that "the law has been abolished in Christ," - therefore, they haven't spent much time (if ANY) studying the Torah, much less the sacrificial system within the Torah.

### **Two Separate Things**

You need to realize that the *blood of animals* and the *blood of Messiah* are two separate things that work in two separate ways. Think of a cup and a fork; two different tools for two different jobs. Both do what they are designed to do, but do not do what the other tool does. (*Getting something to drink vs eating spaghetti.*)

The blood of animals never took away sin on the eternal, heavenly scale. Hebrews 10:4 says "For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin." So that is true, but what's missed here is that the author of Hebrews is contextually speaking of *eternal redemption* in the heavenly, not temporal purification in the earthly. You can read Leviticus 16 and see that the blood of animals DOES forgive sin, so we have to believe both Leviticus and Hebrews, and not pit one against the other.

Believe it or not, right here in Hebrews, the author actually explains the harmony for us, in Hebrews 9:11-14.

Now the Messiah has appeared, high priest of the good things that have come...

There's a variant reading here, in that some manuscripts of Hebrews read "high priest of the good things *that are to come*." You'll get different readings in different Bibles, depending on which manuscripts they are pulling from. I think both readings hold weight, because in one sense the Messiah brought in the realization and fulfillment of good things at his first coming, but we await complete realization and fulfillment of all the good things at his second coming. Let's keep reading:

In the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands (that is, not of this creation).

So the author is referencing the heavenly tabernacle, which is greater and more perfect than the one built by human hands back in the book of Exodus. That tabernacle in Exodus was commanded by Yahweh. He was particular in those instructions, and in Exodus 40 when it was all put in place the glory of Yahweh filled that tabernacle, so much so that Moshe was unable to enter into it due to the thick glory cloud that rested upon it. So that tabernacle was indeed great, it's just that it's not AS great and perfect as the tabernacle in heaven. One is great, the other is greater.

### **A Pattern**

In Exodus 25:9 and 40 Yahweh tells Moshe twice to make the tabernacle after the pattern/design/model Yahweh showed him while he was on the mountain. When prophet Moshe went up the mountain, and entered the cloud, and spent 40 days and 40 nights with Yahweh, he was entering another realm. There Yahweh didn't just tell him what to do, He brought heaven down on the mountain and showed him a pattern, and escorted him around the heavenly tabernacle.

I was never taught about the heavenly tabernacle growing up, but it's there in both Exodus and Hebrews; both books speak of it. The earthly is a copy and shadow of the heavenly, but the archetype or original is the heavenly. The earthly is great, but the heavenly is greater.

### **Good and Better**

An illustration would be that chocolate ice cream is good, but vanilla is better. Some of ya'll won't agree with me on that... and you'd be wrong... LOL - But you get my point. We aren't talking here of bad and good, we are talking about great and greater.

Nothing Yahweh commands is bad, it's all good, but some commands or concepts are greater than others. Even in the law, which is all good, we have this concept of lighter and heavier commandments. The Sabbath, for example is pretty heavy, but it's not as heavy as saving life. If someone's life is in danger on the Sabbath we are allowed to break the Sabbath to save their life. We learn this in the teaching ministry of Yeshua where he performed acts of healing on the Sabbath.



## By His Own Blood

So in Hebrews 9, the greater tabernacle is not made with human hands, and it's not of THIS creation. So we go back to Hebrews 9... Verse 12 says:

He (speaking of the Messiah from verse 11) entered the holy of holies once for all, not by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood, having obtained ETERNAL REDEMPTION.

The contrast here is blood of clean, sacrificial animals vs. the blood of Messiah. When Yeshua entered the holy of holies, he wasn't entering the one on earth that the Aaronic High Priest entered into once a year on Day of Atonement. He entered the one in heaven, based upon the shedding of his own blood. There is a way that the blood of Messiah - which refers to his death - obtains ETERNAL redemption. His blood does not purify our flesh, and really, it's purpose is not to cleanse our sins in the earthly realm. It's more powerful than that.

I want to be careful here, because I'm not saying we aren't forgiven right now based on the work of Messiah. We are, but the right-now forgiveness we have in Messiah is a forgiveness that allows us entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven and to be a partaker in the greater, more perfect tabernacle (*John 3:16 death is second death*). To enter the earthly tabernacle, the blood of an unblemished, clean animal was needed for purification of sin. But that animal blood doesn't work when it comes to inheriting the heavenly. Verse 13 and 14...

## Lesser to Greater

For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who are defiled, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, (14) how much more will the blood of the Messiah, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to the Almighty, cleanse our consciences from dead works to serve the living Almighty?

This is a key verse. The argument presented here by the author is one from the lesser to the greater. If THIS is true, then THAT is true.

It's like when Yeshua told the Jewish leaders that if they will loosen their animal on the Sabbath day to take it to the watering hole, then why shouldn't a daughter of Abraham be loosed on the Sabbath day? (Luke 13:15-16) - Both are true, but there's a greater and lesser. A human being's life is greater than an animal. Catch this... that doesn't mean the animal's life isn't important, it just means there is a hierarchy of importance, and that greater importance is only seen if the first thing has importance to begin with. (*"Worth more than whole burnt offerings"* Mk. 12)

The only way the author of Hebrews ties the knot on his argument is **if the animal sacrifices actually accomplished something**. If the animal sacrifices did that, how much more does the blood of Messiah do this? Do you see that? Hebrews 9:13 says that the blood of goats and bulls and the sprinkling ashes of the heifer (that comes from Numbers 19) actually purify the flesh. That's what Yahweh ordained and set up for ritual purification from sin and an allowance into the

earthly tabernacle. Well... the Messiah is a man not an animal, and not just any man, but a perfect man; he's the second man Adam, the new creation, the sinless Son of Yahweh, so **how much more** will his blood purify, not the flesh, but the conscience. Not the external but the internal.

Our sin problem goes much deeper than our flesh. We sin because we have an internal problem and struggle, and the blood of goats and bulls was not designed by Yahweh to help that problem. It never was, even back in Exodus and Leviticus. But Hebrews isn't denying the validity of animal sacrifices. They do something, even the guilt and sin offerings. They just aren't sufficient to forgive our sins on the eternal scale.

### **No Competition**

Why is this important to realize? Well, when we grasp this we realize that when we slaughter a lamb for Passover, or offer up a burnt offering for thanksgiving, or a peace offering for fellowship between believers and the Most High, we aren't trying to compete with what Yeshua did. What Yeshua did for us is greater than what any burnt offering could do. Hebrews 9:23-24 says:

Therefore it was necessary for the copies of the things in the heavens to be purified with these sacrifices (the animals), but the heavenly things themselves to be purified with better sacrifices than these. (24) For the Messiah did not enter a sanctuary made with hands (only a model of the true one) but into heaven itself, that He might now appear in the presence of God for us.

The Messiah ascended into heaven, he entered the heavenly tabernacle, he presented himself to Yahweh, and Yahweh was pleased with his heroic act of bravery and sacrifice, for willingly laying down his life for us. So it's not first about what we do for Yeshua as his disciples, it's first about what Yeshua did for us as the Savior Yahweh sent who fulfilled everything laid out for him to do.

He sacrificed his life so that we could have life, and while we experience that forgiveness now, what he did for will be most realized in the age to come. We are all still going to die in this life, but we have the promise of resurrection, ultimate forgiveness, and perfection (no more sinning), based upon the perfect life, death, and resurrection of Yeshua.

### **Closing**

Does that help? I sure hope it does, and you can spend more time reading, studying, and meditating on all this. I didn't get all this in one night, it took years of studying and meditation. Yahweh was patient with me in bringing me to a better understanding, and He will be just as patient with you.

I realize I haven't talked anymore about Exodus 20:24, but I will next time I teach. I just thought this sermon was needed to make sure people realize that I am in no way trying to add to what

Yeshua did. That's not even possible actually. Yeshua gave his life as a ransom for many, and we could not have been ransomed any other way.

### ***“The Genesis Offerings”***

**Read Exodus 20:22-24** :: Today I'd like to develop a fuller understanding of verse 24 by beginning to look at texts in Scripture that speak of the building of altars and the offering of animal sacrifices upon those altars. We are going to look at approved examples of this, apart from there being a tabernacle/temple at the location, and also apart from their being a Levite priest involved.

When you come into the understanding that Yahweh's law has not been abolished, and that Yeshua really meant what he said in Matthew 5:17-19, you will at one time or another encounter someone who will ask you, “Well, what about the sacrifices? Are you going to offer up animals since you don't believe the law was done away with?”

It's become the pattern in the Torah Community to answer with something like this, “Well, if you *actually knew the Torah*, you would know that I *can't* offer up animal sacrifices without a temple and Levite priesthood.” I've heard this spoken in some form or another by many people in our movement for the last 25 years. It's been repeated so much that we have taken for granted that it's true. It gets us off the hook quick, and those giving this objection usually just accept it and move on to the next objection.

I want to suggest to you today that this answer is at best a partial-truth, as well as an oversimplification of the topic. This answer does not take into account everything the Bible teaches us on the subject. When we only use parts of the Bible to establish and build our beliefs we come away with *some* truth, but that means we also come away with some falsehood.

### **The Examples in Genesis**

Whenever I hear discussions on this topic, all of the approved examples of altars and sacrifices in the book of Genesis usually get swept under a rug and forgotten. With one big swoop it's said that, “Well, that was before the temple was built and priesthood was active, so it's not relevant. Ever since the temple and priesthood were established, we need them both to properly offer sacrifices.”

What's interesting is that in our community, when it comes to a host of other laws, we are always pointing people BACK TO GENESIS to show them the validity of Torah and its establishment prior to Moshe and Mount Sinai. We take people to Genesis 2 to show them the Sabbath. We go to Genesis 7 to show the clean and unclean designations. Genesis 9 gives us the death penalty for murder, and how we are to abstain from eating/drinking the blood of an animal. We go to Genesis 17 to show circumcision or Genesis 31 to show ritual impurity laws. I could give more examples, but this is sufficient to show that when we want to really prove our point about the law being the way of life for the people of Yahweh, we don't *dismiss* Genesis, we **USE** Genesis.

That is - UNLESS - we are talking about animal sacrifices. Then, we come up with an excuse for why this Genesis practice is not relevant to us today, and personally... I think it's because we don't *really* want to be obedient here, due to the fact that we are already ostracized enough by traditional Christianity for our beliefs and practices, and the slaughtering of animals on an altar will only add to our being made fun of, or being called some crazy-fringe group that believes ridiculous things. Yet, a simple-honest reading of Genesis shows that men of Yahweh built altars and offered up sacrifices on those altars, apart from either a temple or Levite priesthood, and Yahweh was pleased with such sacrifices.

## The Altar

In Genesis alone there are about 13 uses of the word altar. Our English word altar stems from the Latin language, from the words *altare*, meaning "something high or a mound," and there's probably also a link to the Latin word *adolare*, having to do with "burning and honor." The Hebrew word for altar is *mizbeach* (miz-bay-ach), meaning a raised mound, and it's related to the Hebrew word *zebach*, having to do with the slaughter of a clean, domestic animal for sacrifice. So what we have with the word altar is an elevated place (Ex. 20:24 says it can be made of earth/dirt) on which appropriate animals are offered in sacrifice to Yahweh.

We haven't gotten to Exodus 20:25-26 yet, but I'd like to read it here to just give a little more context. Verse 25: "If you make a stone altar for Me, you must not build it out of cut stones. If you use your chisel on it, you will defile it." So an altar could be made out of uncut stones (just natural stones stacked), and then verse 26: "You must not go up to My altar on steps, so that your nakedness is not exposed on it." So although altars were elevated places, they weren't extremely high. Yahweh didn't want them so high that you had to walk up steps to get to the top, and that had to do with keeping one's nakedness covered (modesty). So an elevated altar would be up off the ground, but not too high to reach with you standing beside it.

## First Mentions

The first mention of an **altar** in Genesis is twice in Genesis 8:20 where right after Noah and his family exited the ark, he built an altar to Yahweh and offered clean animals in the form of burnt offerings. It says there that Yahweh smelled the pleasing aroma and made a promise not to ever destroy the whole earth by flood again.

But... that's not the first mention of someone offering an animal sacrifice. The first explicit mention of animal sacrifice goes back to Genesis 4:4 where it's said that Abel offered also the firstling of his flock with the fat portions thereof, and Yahweh had regard for Abel and his offering. Theories have been presented as to why Cain's offering was rejected. One old theory says that Cain brought deficient produce rather than the first-fruit and best. The Septuagint has Yahweh telling Cain in Genesis 4:7, "If you offer correctly but do not divide correctly, have you not sinned?" That does sound like Cain made the offering, but didn't rightly divide his first and best from the rest of his produce.

The main point here is that animal sacrifice goes back *at least* to the time just after the exit from the Garden of Eden. Abel somehow knew to offer not only the firstling of his flock but also the fat portions thereof. This would be the fat around that inner organs (as well as the fatty tail, liver, and kidneys) that we are commanded not to eat (recorded later in Leviticus 3:9-11), but the firstling offering itself is an edible sacrifice. That detail is recorded later in Deuteronomy 15:19-20; the firstling offering is a peace offering or fellowship sacrifice.

How did Abel know? It had to have been taught to him, either directly by Yahweh or by his father Adam, who would have been taught by Yahweh and then handed it down to Abel. We know it was approved, because Yahweh had regard for Abel's offering, which means he turned to it (*sha'ah*) or gazed upon it in delight. So here in Genesis 4, as well as with Noah in Genesis 9, we see men offering sacrifice. We might say that the land they had dedicated to the service of Yahweh was their temple, but there was no actual tabernacle or temple there at either sacrifice. There were also no Levites there, because Levi (the son of Jacob) hadn't even been born.

### **Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob**

If we move from there to Genesis 12 we have Abram building two altars in different locations, and calling upon Yahweh's name, then in Genesis 13:18 he builds another altar. Then, in Genesis 22, Abraham (his name is changed by now) builds an altar upon Mount Moriah on which to sacrifice his son Isaac. I'm not going to get into the subject of Yahweh asking Abraham to sacrifice his son (that's for a whole other teaching), but suffice it to say that Yahweh stops Abraham from sacrificing Isaac, and then provides a ram for Abraham to offer as a burnt offering. This is Genesis 22:13-14. Abraham named that place Yahweh Yireh meaning Yahweh Will See (to it) or Provide. Still no temple or Levites.

In Genesis 26:25, Isaac builds an altar in Beersheba, calling upon Yahweh's name, and in Genesis 33:20 Jacob builds an altar in the Canaanite city of Shechem, naming the place El-Elohe-Yisrael. Then in Genesis 35, Jacob builds another altar in Bethel.

This is a brief overview of altars and offerings in the book of Genesis. There is no temple, and there is no Levite Priesthood. The man Melchizedek as a Priest of the Most High is mentioned in Genesis 14, but interestingly enough there is no altar or sacrifice mentioned there, only that Abram paid Melchizedek a tithe from the spoils of war he had taken when he rescued his nephew, the kidnapped Lot. There is bread and wine mentioned in conjunction with Melchizedek, so that could be a reference to a grain offering, as well as a drink offering. But no animal or altar is mentioned.

I do want to add here that there is a mention of a drink offering in Genesis 35:14 after Yahweh appears to Jacob and changes his name to Israel, giving him a promise. Jacob-Israel sets up this stone marker and he pours a drink offering on it, as well as anoints the stone with oil. Drink offerings in Scripture were given of wine, poured out as an expensive gift to the Creator, much like the firstling best of the flock or herd.

So why don't we lean on Genesis when it comes to altars and sacrifices? Why do we dismiss what is taught in this book of beginnings? It appears that the Patriarchs understood what Exodus 20:24 teaches - an altar of earth on which burnt offerings and peace offerings are offered - at the places (plural) Yahweh causes his name to be pronounced or memorialized, where he comes and blesses one of His followers.

### **Our Current Circumstance**

It seems to me that the state in which we find our selves now is more akin to Genesis than to Leviticus, Numbers, or a theocracy. During the wilderness wanderings the Israelite community had a movable tabernacle and a Levite or Aaronic priesthood. After settling in the land they had something more stationary, and although there were problems and sins among the tribes, they did establish a theocracy and active Priesthood.

We don't find ourselves in that state today. We have our small congregations scattered across the earth, but we are more similar to families of worshipers, like Noah's family or Abraham's family. Why then would it be wrong to worship Yahweh the way Noah or Abraham did? Was it once pleasing, something Yahweh turned His face towards in approval, but now it's a reproach? Did Yahweh completely change His mind? Does He now disdain something that He once called a sweet-smelling savor?

See, what we run into here is: if we do not accept and practice what Genesis teaches us in the area of altars and sacrifices, then we really don't have any business trying to show traditional Christians the Sabbath, tithes, clean and unclean animals, and no eating of blood from the book of Genesis.

### **Tithes Too**

Let me harp on the tithes for a second here too. According to various texts in Deuteronomy, the tithes and monetary offerings were also to be brought to the place where Yahweh chooses to place His name. That's in Deuteronomy 12 and 14. So what is said about the animal sacrifices is also said about the tithes. Does that stop people from tithing or giving an offering, or do people understand that in the current circumstance in which we live we give tithes or offerings in the most appropriate way possible? In other words, we do the best we can or have the ability to do.

Preachers won't balk at the tithes and offerings, but boy will they balk at the altars and animal sacrifices. I've heard so many people bring up Genesis 14, where Abram paid a tithe to Melchizedek, after they were told that tithes were under the law. They say, "Wait a second, tithes are in Genesis before the law." Well... what about animal sacrifices?

A lack of consistency is the sign of a failed argument. You can't say that it's okay to give a tithe or make a monetary contribution today, to an elder or to a congregation, and then turn around and say it's not okay to build an altar and offer a burnt offering or peace offering upon it. You've got to either accept both or reject both. Really, the only option is to accept both, because if you reject both you end up rejecting Holy Scripture and that brings on even bigger problems.

**Ancient/Old Paths (Jeremiah 6:16)**

We've got to get back to worshiping Yahweh in the way He desires to be worshiped. A big part of that is realizing that livestock and produce are real wealth, and to give of the best of those things over to Yahweh is showing Yahweh that we genuinely appreciate His blessings and activity in our lives.

I'll talk more about this in a soon-future lesson, but clean, domestic animals were created to be received as food with thanksgiving by them who believe and know the truth. These animals are sanctified by the word of Elohim and prayer. That doesn't mean we treat these animals cruelly. Some of them may never be slaughtered for meat or for sacrifice.

I have chickens out in my back yard for the purpose of eggs. I didn't buy them to slaughter. It would be okay if I bought them for that purpose, but while they're not being used for meat I take care of them. I let them free graze, and I feed them black-oil sunflower seeds (which they love). Same with any goats or sheep or cows one may have. We take care of these domestic animals while they are with us. Even a cow that is raised for slaughter shouldn't be abused prior to slaughter. But when slaughter day comes, we must realize that Yahweh created that cow to be used for meat. It's okay. And if we offer a firstling bullock for a peace offering, or a male goat for a burnt offering, Yahweh is pleased with that gift we are bringing him.

I've had people bring me a gift of appreciation before. Some people have brought me a bottle of wine, and I've even had some people bring me beef sausage as a gift. When we bring that food gift to each other, it's a sign of appreciation and friendship, and it's no different when we bring Yahweh the same. It's a sign of thanksgiving. It's something of worth to us and we are giving it up for Yahweh, just to show Him that we are thankful for His provisions.

It's not always easy. When my blueberry bushes outside start making around May to June, and them big, plump blueberries form... I sometimes wonder: if I pick all the first and best ones off the bushes to give away to an elder or share at a feast... will I have any left for myself? But guess what? Yahweh always provides. When we give away what He tells us to, He always blesses us with plenty. Proverbs 3:9-10 says, "Honor Yahweh with your possessions, and with the first produce of your entire harvest; then your barns will be completely filled, and your vats will overflow with new wine."

Now... in the next lesson we will progress in our study to looking at approved examples of altars and animal sacrifices after the establishment of Israel in the promised land as well as the continued Levite priesthood. There are examples of righteous men building altars in local areas (apart from the temple) and making offerings without the aid of a priest. I think Genesis is sufficient to show this, but I don't want to leave any stone unturned. I look forward to continuing this study journey with you.

### ***“Manoah, David, and Naaman”***

**Read Exodus 20:22-24** :: Last week we spent time going through the approved examples of altars and animal sacrifices in Genesis. This week I’m going to move into approved examples *after* Israel settled in the promised land and had an established place of worship (in a specific city, with the tabernacle) as well as an established priesthood (Levite).

This is significant, because the objection generally given is that Genesis allows it because it was prior to the establishment of a temple or priesthood. After the temple and priesthood are established (they say), there is a command to no longer offer sacrifices on an altar outside of the one place Yahweh designates, and apart from an official Levite priest.

I think that even if the argument carries some weight, we still currently find ourselves in more of a Genesis circumstance rather than an established theocracy; so I think the approved examples in Genesis are sufficient. But today’s lesson will move on to show the approval of this same practice in the time period of Judges, 2 Samuel, and 2 Kings. The approved examples we will look at are: Manoah, David, and Naaman.

#### **Manoah**

We’ll begin with Manoah. Who is Manoah? Do you mean Noah brother Matthew? Lol... no, I’m speaking of the man in Judges 13 who lived in a town named Zorah (about 8 miles west of Jerusalem; Easton’s Bible Dictionary), from the family or tribe of Dan. He’s not talked about much, but what will help everyone is to speak here the name of Samson - everybody knows Samson (the strong guy). Manoah was the father of Samson.

#### **Back-Story**

Judges 2 teaches us that as long as Joshua was alive the Israelites as a whole served Yahweh. Even after his death, as long as the elders who had personally known Joshua were alive, service to Yahweh as a whole continued. After that generation died out, the next generation forgot Yahweh. Forgot doesn’t mean they had no idea who Yahweh was, but rather that the fear of Him and love for Him dwindled away due to the people’s desire to live like the pagans around them.

The pattern in Judges is: the children of Israel would fall away into false worship, Yahweh would raise up a leader to save them from their sins, the people would change, but once the leader died the people would relapse. This shows us how important it is to have a righteous leader or leaders in a community. Righteous leaders set an example for a community and keep wickedness at bay.

Judges 13 (*Manoah*) begins at a time period of transgression for the nation as a whole, but always remember, that doesn’t mean there weren’t individual righteous people still inside the nation. It’s the same when the nation is righteous as a whole, there are still wicked people even if a minority in those good times.



## Manoah's Offering

During one of these bad times Manoah's wife was barren, but an angel of Yahweh appeared to her and told her she would have a son, and he'd be a Nazarite from his birth. That's the child we know as Samson. The angel told her that their child would begin to save the Israelites from the hand of the Philistines. She went and told Manoah about her encounter, and in Judges 13:8-10 we read this:

Manoah prayed to Yahweh and said, "Please Adonai, let the man of Elohim you sent come again to us and teach us what we should do for the boy who will be born." Elohim listened to Manoah, and the Angel of Yahweh came again to the woman. She was sitting in the field, and her husband Manoah was not with her. The woman ran quickly to her husband and told him, "The man who came to me today has just come back."

Manoah follows his wife back to this "man of Elohim," and asks about what had been told to his wife. After this "man of Elohim" (the Angel sent by Yahweh) tells Manoah basically the same thing he'd already told Manoah's wife, Manoah says:

(Vs. 15) "Please stay here... and we will prepare a young goat for You." (Then in vs. 16) the Angel says to him, "If I stay I won't eat your food. But if you want to prepare a burnt offering, offer it to Yahweh." For Manoah did not know he was the Angel of Yahweh."

(*Not getting into who is the Angel.*)

So verses 19-23 reads: Manoah took a young goat and a grain offering and offered them on a rock (Ex. 20:25; unhewn stone) to Yahweh, and He did a wonderful thing while Manoah and his wife were watching. (20) When the flame went up from the altar to the sky, the Angel of Yahweh went up in its flame. when Manoah and his wife saw this, they fell facedown on the ground. (21) The Angel of Yahweh did not appear again to Manoah and his wife. Then Manoah realized that it was the Angel of Yahweh. (22) "We're going to die," he said to his wife, "because we have seen elohim!" (23) But his wife said to him, "If Yahweh had intended to kill us, He wouldn't have accepted the burnt offering and the grain offering from us, and He would not have show us all these things or spoken to us now like this."

The main point here is we have a *Danite* offering up a burnt offering and grain offering on a rock, in the town of Zorah. There is no temple there. There is no Levite priest there. There is only a husband and wife, and an Angel. One may say, "Well the angel told him to do it," but the narrative doesn't read as though the offering would have been something out of the ordinary. The Angel just tells him, "If you want to offer an offering, go ahead and offer it to Yahweh." Manoah doesn't balk. There's no indication in the text that this was otherwise forbidden, and Yahweh accepts the offering.

Granted, this was during a time when Israel was handed over to the Philistines, and maybe thus didn't have a central location of worship or even a completely active Levite priesthood. But...

isn't that a point? Aren't we in a similar circumstance today? If Manoah could do this during a time period of semi-captivity, why couldn't I?

### **David's Offering**

My next case-example is from 2 Samuel 24 (parallel in 1 Chronicles 21) with King David. Some may think, "*Well... King David could offer sacrifice away from the central worship location and without a Levite... because he was the king.*" But, David being a king wouldn't allow him to just casually do something that was forbidden. According to Deuteronomy 17, a king was required to hand-write out a copy of the Torah, and read in it everyday. He was to set an example of law-keeping for the kingdom.

### **Census Back-Drop**

The back-drop here is David's sin in numbering the warriors in Israel. Some have wondered why David's census is condemned. It has to do with David's distrust in the power of Yahweh and David's reliance on the arm of flesh. David was taking pride in the vast number of his army, and finding comfort in his military strength rather than trusting that the battle is Yahweh's (2 Chr. 20:15), and Yahweh can save by many or by few (1 Sam. 14:6). So at the beginning of the chapter we find that Yahweh's anger burned against Israel (due to David's distrust in Yahweh and trust in man), and that anger stirred up David to number the troops.

*SIDE-NOTE:* Many have been puzzled by the 2 Samuel 24:1 and 1 Chronicles 21:1 parallel texts where we are told that (1) Yahweh stirred up David to number Israel, and (2) Satan stood up against Israel and incited David to number the troops. I saw a video the other day where one guy said that this "contradiction" caused him to lose faith in the Bible and in the Almighty.

There are a few good harmonies here; one popular one is that Yahweh is the primary and Satan is the secondary; Yahweh used or allowed Satan to do the incitement (think of the story of Job). A better harmony (I think) is that the Hebrew word "saw-tawn" can refer to human adversaries or even opposition or wrath. The very Angel of Yahweh is called a satan in Numbers 22:22, 32, and in 1 and 2 Samuel, the Philistines refer to David as a satan (1 Sam. 29:1-4), and David calls the sons of Zeruiah satans/adversaries (2 Sam. 19:22). The NET bible says in a footnote on 2 Samuel 24:1 "The adversary in 1 Chr 21:1 is likely a human enemy, probably a nearby nation whose hostility against Israel pressured David into numbering the people so he could assess his military strength."

I personally think a good harmony is that the wrath of Yahweh is referred to as an adversary (satan) against David here (Ellicott's commentary takes this view; "It thus appears that the adversary of our text, the influence hostile to Israel, was the wrath of God."); Yahweh released his hand of mercy from David, and that was Yahweh's wrath inciting David to do what his flesh wanted to do. David wasn't trusting the power of Yahweh, but instead looking to the arm of flesh for military strength.

### **David Repents**

Afterwards David realizes what he's done and says "I've sinned greatly," but Yahweh punishes by sending a plague upon Israel and 70,000 military men died. That's a big plague, and Yahweh

accomplished this through his Angel. The Angel of Yahweh was about to destroy the city of Jerusalem too, but Yahweh had mercy and told the Angel, “Enough, withdraw your hand now!”

When the Angel stopped, he was standing at the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. David sees the Angel standing there, and pleads for the people. Let’s read here in 2 Samuel 24:18-25

Gad came to David that day and said to him, “Go up and set up an altar to Yahweh on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.” *(Note: Araunah the Jebusite’s threshing floor wasn’t where the Tabernacle or Priesthood was located and active right?)* (19) David went up in obedience to Gad’s command, just as Yahweh had commanded. (20) Araunah looked down and saw the king and his servants coming toward him, so he went out and bowed to the king with his face to the ground. (21) Araunah said, “Why has my lord the king come to his servant?” David replied, “To buy the threshing floor from you in order to build and altar to Yahweh, so the plague on the people may be halted.” (22) Araunah said to David, “My lord the king may take whatever he wants and offer it. Here are the oxen for a burnt offering and the threshing sledges and ox yokes for wood. (23) My king, Araunah gives everything here to the king.” Then he said to the king, “May Yahweh your Elohim accept you.” (24) The king answered Araunah, “No, I insist on buying it from you for a price, for I will not offer to Yahweh my Elohim burnt offerings that cost me nothing.” David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for 50 ounces of silver. (25) He built an altar to Yahweh there and offered burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. Then Yahweh answered prayer on behalf of the land, and the plague on Israel ended.

So we see that King David, a Judahite, offered acceptable sacrifices to Yahweh apart from the tabernacle and Levite priesthood, at the threshing floor of a Jebusite. It was accepted by Yahweh as a prayer of repentance. *(Some say he was commanded; commanded against Torah?)*

What’s interesting is the the parallel account of this in 1 Chronicles 21 reads: (29) At that time the tabernacle of Yahweh, which Moshe made in the desert, and the altar of burnt offering were at the high place in Gideon, (30) but David could not go before it to inquire of Elohim, because he was terrified of the sword of the Lord’s angel. (22:1) Then David said, “This is the house of Yahweh Elohim, and this is the altar of burnt offering for Israel.”

David was invoking Exodus 20:24. Yahweh was causing His name to be remembered on the threshing floor of this Jebusite; It was turned from an ordinary place to a holy place.

### **Naaman’s Dirt**

The last example today is found in 2 Kings 5. In this chapter there is a commander in the Aramean army named Naaman (he’s a non-Israelite). Yeshua even mentions Naaman, calling him “the Syrian” in Luke 4:27. Naaman was a brave warrior, but he had this incurable skin disease (KJV “he was a leper”).

There was a young Israelite captive, a girl who lived with Naaman and his wife, and served the wife in the home, and she had been telling Naaman to go to the prophet of Yahweh in Samaria, because Naaman was seeking a cure for his skin disease. Naaman goes, and takes 750 pounds of silver, 150 pounds of gold, and 10 changes of clothes with him, but Naaman first goes to the king of Israel, and the king tears his clothes and thinks Naaman is crazy.

Well, there's this prophet named Elisha who hears about the encounter and sends a message to the king, telling him to have Naaman come and see him. Remember, kings are powerful (and can be spiritual men), but the closest person to Yahweh in the nation is always the ordained prophet or prophetess. So Naaman goes, and stands outside the door of Elisha's house, but Elisha doesn't come out - he sends a messenger to answer, and the messenger tells Naaman, "Go wash 7 times in the Jordan river, and you'll be healed." Huh?

Naaman gets upset because he wants the prophet to come outside, call on the Sacred Name, wave his hand over the leprosy, and receive his spotlight miracle. So Naaman starts to leave in a huff, but his servants stop him and say, "Master, if the prophet told you to do a great thing wouldn't you have done it? He's told you to do something easy... why not do it?" Naaman walks down to the Jordan, dips himself 7 times, and BAM, he's healed.

So Naaman goes back to Elisha's house, and knocks on the door (*I bet that was some knock!*). He says this (2 Kings 5:15): "I know there is no Mighty One in the whole world except in Israel. Therefore please accept a gift from your servant." But... Elisha refuses the money even after Naaman urges him to take it.

Now... what comes next is peculiar if we don't know the Scriptures that have come before 2 Kings. I don't think it will be too strange to all of you, because we've been learning about the altar of earth and the sacrifices offered on it from Exodus 20:24.

After Elisha refuses to take the money from Naaman, Naaman says (2 Kings 5:17), "If [you won't take the gift], please let two mule-loads of dirt be given to your servant, for your servant will no longer offer a burnt offering or a sacrifice to any other mighty one but Yahweh."

The text is explicit in telling us that Naaman wanted to offer a burnt offering (animal sacrifice) to Yahweh, but why does he want the dirt? Some commentators try too hard here and miss the obvious; he asks for a pile of dirt, enough of it that it has to be pulled by two mules, because he wants to build an altar of earth. He sees the land on which he is standing as sacred, due to the prophet and due to his healing, and he wants to take some of that land back with him to his home town and dedicate a place in Aram to worship Yahweh.

E.W. Bullinger commentary here says: "Earth = soil. Naaman may have heard of Exodus 20:24."

Jamieson-Faucett-Brown commentary says in part: "Two mules' burden of earth - with which to make an altar (Ex. 20:24) to the God of Israel." (*Ellicott and Benson get this right as well*)

The JPS Torah Commentary on Exodus 20:24, page 116 (in part) says: "Altar of Earth, One made by heaping up a mound of earth in an open field. It was just such an altar that the Syrian commander probably had in mind, as told in 2 Kings 5:17, when he requested two mule loads of the earth of the land of Israel to take back home with him. there, in Damascus, he could offer sacrifices on the earthen altar."

Elisha grants Naaman's request in verse 19 by saying "Go in peace." That's a phrase used in the OT to say, "Yes you may." (Ex. 4:18; Jug. 18:6; 1 Sam. 20:42) So Elisha respected Naaman's desire to build an altar and sacrifice to Yahweh, and to do so in a foreign land, without the tabernacle or Levite priesthood. The prophet must have understood Exodus 20:24 in the manner I've been presenting in these lessons.

As a side note, in verse 18 Naaman asks for an exemption. When he goes back to Aram, he knows he is the king's right hand man. So when Naaman goes into the temple of Rimmon (a Syrian deity of wind, rain, and storm; BDB Lexicon) he knows he will have to bow. He seeks to be pardoned in his bowing, suggesting that it is an outward gesture only, and not from the heart. Elisha's "Go in peace" from vs. 19 covers this request too, so the prophet recognizes the heart or spirit over the letter, something Yeshua later comments on (Mt. 5; 23), and that people think only came into view in the NT.

## Closing

Building an altar shouldn't be done haphazardly, and offering an animal shouldn't be done casually. There should be thought and prayer put into each, and the performance of each should be done in a reverent manner; it's holy space and time when doing so. But that doesn't mean it shouldn't be done, or that it's unlawful to do so because we are in Georgia, USA. Now, I don't have any dirt from Elisha's property laying around, but I have consecrated this property to the service of Yahweh. We've also consecrated the land where our assembly sits to the service of Yahweh. I realize literally obeying Exodus 20:24 sounds strange to modern people, but since when does anything we do for Yahweh not sound strange to someone? May Yahweh help us be obedient to all of His word.

## ***"Leviticus 17 and Goat-Demons"***

**Read Exodus 20:22-25; Leviticus 17:1-9 ::** No matter what position you take on any given subject in Scripture, you will find verses (if you're honest) that do not fit as well as into your belief system as you would like them to. Different people study the Bible and come to different conclusions, oftentimes because different verses stick out to them as being most important.

It all goes back to hermeneutics. That's a big word isn't it. Hermeneutics. *It sounds like someone named Herman got tics on him or something.* This word refers to the laws or rules of interpretation. How we go about interpreting and understanding Scripture, what methods we use, how we arrive at what a text not just says, but means.

We do this by asking questions (who wrote this, who was it written to, when was it written), and keying in on words, phrases, and context (both surrounding text and culture). Other good rules are to interpret the unclear in light of the clear, and the few in light of the many. So if you have 10 texts teaching one thing clearly, you don't overturn those texts with 1 verse that seems to teach something else but isn't as clear.

Also, in Bible study, you are to take direct commands over examples. Examples of people (Hebrews) doing things can be approved or disapproved; approved examples (where Yahweh gives His approval of something a Hebrew does) are strong, but direct commands from Yahweh are always paramount. There's other things to consider, but these are some of the big ones.

The two texts I began with are both direct commands. The Exodus text is Yahweh speaking at Mount Sinai just after the giving of the Ten Commandments. I don't think it's a difficult text. Make an altar of earth, sacrifice burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, and He'll come to you and bless you in all the places He causes His name to be proclaimed. When we look through Scripture both before and after this, we find approved examples of men doing this and being blessed (just like He said).

### **The Apparent Contradiction**

The Leviticus text we read seems to go contrary to this on its first reading, but it's also a direct command spoken by Yahweh. Is Leviticus 17 prohibiting sacrifices apart from the Tabernacle/Temple and Levite priest? It's a sobering text, because it includes the clause, "that person must be cut off from his people" when going against what is commanded. How do we understand this in light of what we've learned from Genesis, Exodus, and the approved examples we looked at last week with Manoah, David, and Naaman, where they received direct commands from Yahweh through an angel or prophet about making a private altar and sacrifice?

Well, I think what we've went over so far is many and clear, so I decided to slow down and go back over Leviticus 17, and study it in more depth. We don't have to throw our hands up, or pit one text against another. We've went over the others in detail, so let's take some time to go over this text in detail.

### **Exegesis of Lev. 17**

Lev. 17:1-4 "(1) Yahweh spoke to Moshe: (2) Speak to Aaron, his sons, and all the Israelites and tell them: This is what Yahweh has commanded." (3) Anyone from the house of Israel who slaughters an ox, sheep, or goat in the camp, or slaughters it outside the camp, (4) instead of bringing it to the entrance to the tent of meeting to

present it as an offering to Yahweh before His tabernacle - that person will be charged with murder. He has shed blood and must be cut off from his people.”

It's very serious here with the murder charge. I've actually had someone send me this text a few years' back when they found out I slaughtered a lamb for Passover. So... they must have viewed my actions as a violation of this command.

Now, let's remember the context here. This was first spoken to Israelites in the wilderness. They were, at this point, camped at Mount Sinai, still early on, in the second year of their wilderness wanderings. You can see this by reading the last chapter in Exodus and the first chapter in Leviticus; one moves right into the other.

They are commanded here, in the wilderness, DO NOT slaughter an ox, sheep, or goat without first bringing it to the entrance of the Tabernacle - why? - (vs. 4 tells us) in order to present it as an offering to Yahweh. The key is to make certain the animals are being brought to Yahweh.

### **Slaughter vs. Sacrifice**

Now... what many people miss here is the word slaughter. The Hebrew word here is *shachat*. This word is not limited to a religious, ceremonial sacrifice which carries regulations for not only the killing, but: who can eat it, how long it can be eaten of, what particularly is to be done to the animal while slaughtering or afterwards, etc.

Think here of the Passover lamb (you have to be clean to slaughter it, no bone may be broken, cook it whole, only eaten one night - in one house, burn remains in the morning, etc.) vs. slaughtering a cow let's say to store meat in a freezer. Both are clean animals, and both are slaughters, but only the Passover is technically a ceremonial sacrifice or we might say, a “special slaughter.”

A few examples of the word *shachat*: Genesis 37:31 where Joseph's brothers killed a kid of the goats so they could dip Joseph's coat in it and act like he'd been killed by a wild animal. Numbers 11:22 the word is used of killing flocks and herds to daily feed the people of Israel. 1 Kings 18:40 when Elijah slew the prophets of Ba'al, and in Jeremiah 9:8 it's used metaphorically as a tongue which speaks deceit being like an arrow which is *shot out* (the shot arrow pierces to kill).

This word can refer to a religious, ceremonial sacrifice, but that's not what the word means in itself. The word means to kill or slaughter, and since a ceremonial sacrifice has to be slaughtered, those sacrifices fall under the category of *shachat*, but *shachat* covers more than just these ceremonial sacrifices.

In Jewish history, there were two Rabbis who took opposing views on this (early second century A.D.). Rabbi Akiva held that the Leviticus 17 law was only regulating technical sacrifices and not all slaughters. Rabbi Yishmael held that Leviticus 17 prohibited all sacrifices including

common slaughters. Akiva believed a later text in Deuteronomy 12 showed that general slaughterings were always permissible locally. Yishmael believed that Deuteronomy 12 rescinded a temporary restriction - while in the wilderness bring all slaughters to the tabernacle; when entering the land you can now slaughter and eat within your gates.

It should be noted as well here that in one sense, all slaughtered animals are sacrifices, in that the animal has to lose its life - even in a general slaughter - for the provision of food for a person or persons, and even with general slaughters, the blood and fat is still not to be eaten (ref. Leviticus 17:10-14 and Leviticus 7:22-27).

### **Why Shachat is Important**

Leviticus 17:3 uses the word *shachat* when speaking of what was to be brought to the entrance of the tent of meeting. According to the overall meaning of this word, it wasn't just ceremonial sacrifices that had to be brought to the tent of meeting in the wilderness, it was all domestic animals that would be slaughtered in the wilderness. I think Rabbi Yishmael was right.

Here's the point... if you're going to use this text to teach against, let's say, slaughtering a lamb for Passover, then you have to equally use this text against slaughtering a cow on your property or a local farmer's property for the purpose of putting the meat in your freezer to last you and your family for a while. See the point? (*But there's more. What's the reason for this command?*)

### **The Primary Reason**

Lev. 17:5 "This is so the Israelites will bring to Yahweh the sacrifices they have been offering in the open country. They are to bring them to the priest at the entrance to the tent of meeting and offer them as fellowship sacrifices to Yahweh."

Now the word *zebach* is used, which is a stronger word for ceremonial sacrifice. The point of the command to bring all oxen, sheep, and goats to the tabernacle in the wilderness is so that no matter what domestic animal is slaughtered, it will be brought to Yahweh (whether a technical ceremonial sacrifice or a general slaughtering sacrifice). No slaughtering will be left out or questioned if they are all brought to the entrance of the tent of meeting. Any slaughter that is done for religious, ceremonial sacrifice is covered.

Lev. 17:6-7 "(6) The priest will then sprinkle the blood on Yahweh's altar at the entrance to the tent of meeting and burn the fat as a pleasing aroma to Yahweh. (IMPORTANT) "(7) They must no longer offer their sacrifices to the goat demons that they have prostituted themselves with. This will be a permanent statute for them throughout their generations."

Now... why in the world are goat-demons all of sudden mentioned? Lol - First, it's important here to notice the continued reason for the command. Remember, verse 5 says the command was so the sacrifices that the Israelites had been offering *in the open country* would be brought to



Yahweh, verse 7 gives us more clarification of verse 5 by saying that the command is put into play to prohibit the Israelites from continuing to offer sacrifices to *the goat-demons*.

### Goat-Demons

The goat-demons (devils, in the KJV) is the Hebrew word *saw-er* (*seireem*, plural) and has to do with a shaggy or hairy he-goat, oftentimes in Torah just used for a goat. For example, one chapter earlier, in Leviticus 16:27, it speaks of the “goat for the sin offering.” That’s *saw-er*. So why is it translated as devils or goat demons here in Leviticus 17:7?

The Bible Background Commentary (by John Walton, also Matthews and Chavalas) says here, “The term most likely refers to satyrlike demons who were believed to haunt the open fields and uninhabitable places.”

This is tied into what many scholars believe Leviticus 16:8 refers to (on the Day of Atonement). For instance, in the CEV this reads: “where I will show you which goat will be sacrificed to me and which one will be sent into the desert to the demon Azazel.” The JPS Torah Commentary on Leviticus suggest there is a thematic relationship of Azazel to the goat demon of Leviticus 17:7.

Among Israel, this is a carry-over from the worship in Egypt. Think here to the episode of the golden calf in Exodus 32. The Israelites were trying to worship Elohim through the image of a calf. Well, the same was done in Egypt through the image of a goat. The male shaggy goat was seen as a representation of a demon deity, and thus the Egyptians would erect statues of goats across their nation. This is actually where the popular image of the devil (with horns, tail, a goat-tee, and cloven feet) comes from. Some cultures called the goat-demon Pan. Our English word panic comes from the Greek word *panikon* (lit. “pertaining to Pan”) and actually goes back to the fear struck in one’s heart upon the appearance of the goat-deity Pan.

This false worship had become engrained among the Israelites due to there long stay in Egypt (*you can take the Israelite out of Egypt, but you can’t always take Egypt out of the Israelite*), so they’d often perform syncretism in their slaughterings, blending the worship of Yahweh with the worship of some form of an deity-image from Egypt. Thus the golden calf in Exodus 32, and the goat-demons here in Leviticus 17. In Joshua 24:14, after Moshe was passed, Joshua still urges the Israelites to: “Get rid of the elohim your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates and in Egypt, and worship Yahweh.” Later in 2 Chronicles 11:15 we find that Jereboam not only erected golden calves (from the original writing in 1 Kings 12), but also goat-demons which were worshiped at the high places.

### Temporary Restriction

Now Leviticus 17:7 says the Israelites “must no longer offer their sacrifices to the goat-demons,” showing that this was still going on to some degree in the wilderness. The command here in verses 1-9 to bring all slaughterings to the entrance of the tent of meeting, would stop (or at least slow down) the false worship inherited from Egypt.

I'd like to suggest today that this was a temporary restriction, put in place in the wilderness, in order to teach the Israelites, and get them in the habit of slaughtering or sacrificing to Yahweh apart from any image depicting him.

### **Tee-Ball Illustration**

I used to help TJ coach in a kids' softball league, and I remember one time we coached the young kids, like ages 5-7 I think. I remember one little girl in the outfield picking wild-flowers during the game, and a ball hitting her right in the head. Bless her heart... and the parents often thought their kid was the star player.

One thing we were allowed to implement was a tee, where you put a tee on home plate and set the softball on it stationary where the little kids can learn coordination and hit the ball. The tee is there to teach them, but it doesn't stay in the next level up, because you graduate to being able to hit a moving ball.

### **What is Permanent?**

I think that's what is going on here in the wilderness; a temporary legislature whereby Israel - as little children who have just exited pagan Egypt - are learning how to slaughter properly. In the future they would graduate, and be able to do the same slaughtering (loyal to Yahweh) privately at times, due to a long journey, or persecution, dispersion, or distance away from the central worship location.

Some object to this view on the basis of Leviticus 17:7b where we read "This will be a permanent statute for them throughout their generations." What this objection fails to recognize is what exactly the permanent statute is. What is permanent is NOT bringing all slaughters to the entrance of the tent of meeting, but THAT Israel not offer their sacrifices to the goat-demons they have prostituted themselves with. That's the connection from 7a to 7b.

According to Deuteronomy 12:15-25, after entrance into the land there would exist the situation where a person was far away from the central location of worship, and they were allowed to slaughter and eat meat within their gates, but make sure not to eat the blood (or the special fat portions). Granted, that chapter does say to bring all the burnt offerings, sacrifices, *tithes*, and personal contributions to the one, central place of worship, but again - that is specifically when all the tribes are at rest in the land and a theocracy is in order. *(But let me make a quick point on Deuteronomy 12:21 - and I'll continue to study this further - the phrase "IF you are too far from the central worship location, THEN you can slaughter of your herd and flock" sounds like permission is given in one situation that would normally be carried out another way if one was in close proximity to THE PLACE. If you could always do this, the If/Then clause doesn't make sense.)*

## The Best Harmony

The best harmony I can see at this time is that in cases when we are not at rest in the land under a theocracy, and are either in a Genesis like environment (too far, far away), or a semi-captivity, private sacrifices can be made.

## Temporary: Exodus or Leviticus?

I think this makes sense of the altar of earth (Exodus 20:22-25) built in the places (plural) that Yahweh puts his name. Some may think I'm stretching Leviticus 17 to say it's temporary, but let me remind you that this is what other people do with Exodus 20:24 - they say it was temporary. Same with the sacrifices in Genesis - they say they were temporary until the tabernacle/temple and Levite Priesthood. So I guess you will have to decide which argument holds more weight. *To view Genesis and Exodus 20 as temporary or Leviticus 17 as temporary.* I've given you my reasons in these lessons for viewing Leviticus 17 as temporary, and a big reason is that this view allows for the approved examples of private sacrifices to Yahweh, commanded by angels and prophets (in various locations) to breathe freely.

Yahweh's acceptance of Manoah's offering in Zorah, David's offering on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite, and Naaman's offering in Damascus (along with others like Gideon, Saul, Samuel, and a group of Israelites in Mizpah). All these can be understood best by letting Genesis and Exodus 20:24 control the general rule of law, and Leviticus 17 be a restriction in the wilderness for teaching purposes.

## ***"Answer Questions and Meat-Eating"***

**Read Exodus 20:22-25** :: This will be my last lesson on these verses. There is more material to cover in Scripture on this, but for now I think I've exhausted the knowledge Yahweh has given *me* at this present time. I'm sure I'll be adding to this study as I grow in age and wisdom, but after today I feel like it's time to move on to the next verse in our Torah study.

## The General Questions

Today we'll begin with some questions I've gotten. First one: "Brother Matthew, are you saying we should still be offering animal sacrifices today, on our personal properties?"

Yes, that's exactly what I'm saying, so long as your property is dedicated to the service of Yahweh. I believe it is permissible to offer sacrifices as individual believers, as expressions of thanksgiving, appreciation, and fellowship. I'm seeing this as an action of worship, something along the lines of prayer and fasting.

"What kinds of private sacrifices are permissible?"

The command in Exodus 20:24 specifies the burnt offering and peace offering. The burnt offering (*ola*) is entirely consumed on the altar, and the worshiper has nothing to partake from it. It's a total gift to the Almighty, telling him you are thankful for what he has done (and was

sometimes used for seeking Yah's favor and averting judgment). This is what Noah offered after he got off the ark. It appears to me though that the blood was still drained from the animal, and then covered over with dirt (Lev. 17:13; Deut. 12:16, 24). It's possible that in some cases the blood is placed on the altar and burned, but of this I'm not yet sure.

The peace or fellowship offering (*shelamim*) was an edible offering. The blood is still not partaken of, and the fat portions are burned on the altar. The rest of the animal is eaten by people in covenant with the Creator, as a sign of fellowship with him and each other. According to Leviticus 19:5-8, most peace offerings were only to be eaten for two days, and the remainder burned on the third day. With the Passover (which is a peace offering) it is to only be eaten on one night and the remainder burned early the next morning.

Although grain offerings aren't specified in Exodus 20:24, Judges 13 does show that Manoah privately offered a grain offering along with his burnt offering, with Yahweh's approval. These were also edible offerings, but I haven't studied in depth enough to know exactly how these are to be done. You can read about the grain offerings in Leviticus 2 (with the Levite Priest involved), but they were also done apart from a priest in Genesis 4 with Cain. I realize Cain's offering was rejected, but it's only because he didn't divide correctly or offered inferior product. Even though his offering wasn't sufficient, Yahweh did tell him - "If you do well, won't you be accepted?" - which showed that he could bring an appropriate grain offering, just as Abel brought an appropriate peace offering.

"What about sacrifices for sin?"

I haven't seen any approved examples of private sin (*chata't*) offerings or guilt (*asham*) offerings. These are the two remaining classes of offerings mentioned in Leviticus, and the only categories that deal with guilt and sin in Torah. (*It's a mistake to assume all animal sacrifices were for sin.*) For now, I won't be making any of these, but I want to make two things clear: (1) I don't believe sin sacrifices are a bad thing (Yahweh implemented them, so they are good), and (2) I don't believe the animal sacrifices for sin **ever** took care of sin on the eternal redemptive scale. Only the blood of the Messiah does that, according to Isaiah 52-53, the book of Hebrews (among other Scriptures).

If the Temple still stood, and the Levite priesthood was active, I would personally have no problem offering a sin sacrifice. Mary brought one (with Joseph), when she went to the Temple in Luke 2, and she had recently birthed Yahweh's Messiah (knowing who he was, Luke 1). Paul participated in the sacrifices for four men concluding a Nazir vow in Acts 21, and those sacrifices (according to Numbers 6) included an unblemished year-old female lamb for a sin offering. The sin offerings purified the flesh not the conscience, pertaining to the earthly not the heavenly.

"But are you **encouraging** people to start doing these burnt, peace, and grain offerings?"

Yes, but with care and caution. I'm encouraging these personal, private sacrifices, because I think Exodus 20:24 commands them, and I see approved examples in Genesis, and in Judges through 2 Kings, but I'm encouraging that they be done properly. Don't just go out and try to do something before studying. Study the Scriptures, look at the approved examples, go back over the teachings I've done, and if you decide to do a burnt or peace offering, do the very best you can. I'm not saying you'll get it all right the first time. I've learned better and more appropriately over the years how to keep the Passover. Just do your best and always remain open to correction from the Scriptures, and from other well-studied believers.

I want to make the point here that I've not found any examples of women in Israel offering up these sacrifices by themselves. All the approved examples I've found have been men doing so, and mostly the heads of the households. I'm not saying women can't be present, I just don't see any Scriptural precedent for a woman offering a sacrifice by herself. I would encourage the sisters who want to participate in this to wait until you are around a righteous male servant of Yahweh who is offering sacrifice, and then seek to help in whatever way you can.

"What about making the altar? How should I do this?"

It's clear to me that altars in the Bible were built for the purpose of offering sacrifice on. I'm not sure the animal was placed on the altar and slaughtered. It may have been slaughtered, blood drained out (see 1 Samuel 14:31-35), animal died, and then either the whole animal (burnt offering) placed on the altar to be consumed by fire, or in the case of a peace offering, the fat portions that belonged to Yahweh were burned on the altar. Again, as we continue to study, we will learn and grow, but we must begin somewhere.

I've been asked about how to exactly make an altar. I don't think it's complicated. I think one of the main points in Exodus 20:24-25 (about the altar of earth or stone) is that it's building is simple and primitive. It's either a mound of dirt or mound of uncut rocks. It's up off the ground, but not too high to be able to reach it while standing.

### **Did Yahweh Not Command Sacrifice?**

Let's move now to Jeremiah 7:22-23 which I've written on at length, but will hit the highlights here. Yahweh speaking, "For when I brought your ancestors out of the land of Egypt, I did not speak with them or command them concerning burnt offering and sacrifice. (23) However, I did give them this command: Obey Me, and then I will be your Mighty One, and you will be My people. You must walk in every way I command you so that it may go well with you."

I've had a few people ask me specifically about this text since I've been teaching these lessons. Some people try to use this verse to teach that all the passages in the Bible that speak about animal sacrifice and eating meat are later interpolations added by the lying pen of the scribes. It's strange how they just accept Jeremiah 7 as authentic, but any passage that doesn't go along with

what they believe they claim, “lying pen of the scribes,” which actually is also a horrible reading of Jeremiah 8:8. (I can send you my written exegesis on Jeremiah 8:8 if you’re interested.)

Did Yahweh command about animal sacrifices when He brought the Israelites out of Egypt? Well I’d say He did! The whole exodus was based upon the sacrifice and blood of the Passover lamb (Ex. 12), and that has to do with the initial deliverance from Egypt. Then we have Exodus 20:24 where He commands it again at Mount Sinai immediately after the giving of the commandments. So what in the world is going on in Jeremiah 7?

If you go back and read all of Jeremiah 7, you’ll see that YHWH is reprimanding the Israelites for their overall disobedience. He’s calling them to amend their ways, not trust in the Temple for their salvation, stop oppressing their widows and orphans, and get rid of syncretism in their worship. Oftentimes the people of Israel used tangible items as somewhat of a good luck object. Here they figured if they had the Temple, and could come and offer sacrifice, they would be alright.

I’m reminded of how some people view the sinner’s prayer and baptism. In their mind, they think that saying a prayer and being baptized makes everything else they do okay. A person could pretty much do whatever they wanted to do and just trust in their prayer/baptism. Prayers of repentance and baptism are beautiful things according to many Scriptures, but to use them as a replacement for a life of holiness is filthy.

In His anger Yahweh is telling the Israelites to keep their animal sacrifices they are giving to Him for themselves. He goes so far to say that He did not command them about burnt offerings and sacrifices when he delivered them from Egypt. What Yahweh is doing is speaking *comparatively* here (this over that; main thing vs. minor thing). The meaning is that His overall commandment is obedience. He doesn’t want disobedience coupled with bringing a sacrifice to the Temple.

Comparative speaking can be found in other texts of Scripture. Think about Genesis 45:8 where Joseph told his brothers, “It was not you who sent me here, but the Almighty.” Yet Joseph’s brothers were the ones who threw him into a pit and sold him to some traders which eventually led to his time in Egypt. Joseph’s point though is comparative; although his brothers did all this to him, ultimately it was Yahweh who had it planned out for a greater purpose. There are many examples of comparative speech in Scripture.

Sacrifices mean nothing if they aren’t brought from a pure heart. What Yahweh ultimately desires is obedience. When we serve Him, and then bring a sacrifice, it is acceptable. Just like with our repentance and baptism. None of us live perfectly without sin, but when our lifestyle is one of overall obedience and dedication, we can indeed look back and trust our repentance and baptism.

People who attempt to use Jeremiah 7 to speak totally against animal sacrifices haven’t read Jeremiah closely, and they have thrown out the commands given by Yahweh in Exodus 12 and

20. It can be a fearful thing, because some are leading people astray from the inspired Scriptures and direct commands of Yahweh.

### **When Did Meat-Eating Begin?**

I'd like to now address the issue of meat-eating vs. vegetarianism. I feel led to address this, because the more I study about animal sacrifices: all the commands, approved examples, and the phrase "a sweet smelling savor to Yahweh," I believe we've inherited some false beliefs about vegetarianism being preferred in the beginning over meat-eating.

I don't believe a follower of Yahweh has to be a vegetarian (as some try to push either gently or forcefully), because in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 Yahweh says in his commands, "of these (clean animals) you may eat." So this at least shows meat eating is a righteous option.

But, I also think it's a sin for a believer to be a complete vegetarian, because the Passover lamb is commanded to be eaten each year, and if a believer with animals was doing the appropriate offerings, their firstborn from the flock would also have to be eaten by them (Deut. 15:19-23) as a fellowship offering. So those are areas where the eating of meat is commanded.

So why do some Bible believers push being vegan or at least say it is preferred and the original way? They claim the original diet in the garden of Eden was vegan. They base this on Genesis 1:29-30 where Elohim says (in part), "I've given you every seed-bearing plant, and every tree whose fruit contains seed. This will be food for you and the animals. I've given you every green plant for food."

### **SDA Man at Church**

One man came to our assembly years ago and sat in the back, he approached me afterwards and told me about his Seventh Day Adventist background, and then told me he wanted to discuss some things with me the next time he came, so I invited him to come early the next week and we'd talk. That next week he came back and I found out he wanted to talk about being vegan, from Genesis 1:29-30.

One thing he stressed from this text was that before the fall (of Adam and Eve) mankind only ate fruits and vegetables, and that this must mean it's best and preferred if we abstain from meat and eat only fruits and vegetables. So I asked him to turn over to Genesis 2:25 and we read where (also) before sin man and woman walked around naked and unashamed. I told him, "If we are going to say we must be vegan because of Genesis before the fall, then we would have to say we also must go around naked because of Genesis before the fall." He look at me for a few seconds and said, "I don't think we're ready for that teaching brother Matthew." Lol

### **Genesis 9**

In my younger years of Bible study I had this idea that meat-eating didn't begin until Genesis 9, after the flood, where Yahweh told Noah that fear and terror for you will be in the animals, and every living creature will be food for you. I've taught on this text in light of the dietary law

before, so I won't do that here, but you can listen to that other teaching online where I show that Genesis 9 isn't saying Noah was allowed to eat pig, or camel, or wolf. (*I know that sounds funny, but the conclusion some make has to allow for you to eat the family dog.*)

I later came to the conclusion that Genesis 9 wasn't the first time animals were eaten, based primarily on two earlier texts in Genesis, Genesis 4 (Abel) and Genesis 7 (Noah). Genesis 4 shows Abel making an offering of the firstling of his flock with the fat portions. Knowing the whole Torah, I knew that firstling offerings were edible offerings. Abel tended his flock and made appropriate sacrifices, even separating the fat portions. I don't believe all this was done only to throw away the meat.

And with Noah, Elohim told him how many clean and unclean animals were to be taken on the ark, which was **before** the flood. The clean and unclean designations are seen in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 to specifically be about what may and may not be eaten by a follower of Yahweh. I believe it was the same for Noah. One may try to argue that it was just for sacrificial purposes before the flood, but that dismisses the understanding that one of the main purposes of the sacrifices was to eat the meat. All animal sacrifices, minus the burnt offering, were eaten by someone.

So I came to see the Genesis 9 text as contrasting the eating of meat with the prohibition of eating the blood of an animal. Such contrasts are throughout the Torah, where Yahweh says, "You may do this, except for this." He's not introducing law, he's emphasizing something of importance. He also tells Noah in Genesis 9 to, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth." That doesn't mean that command didn't exist previously, it did, back in Genesis 1:28. He's reiterating for emphasis.

### **Genesis 1 and Eating Meat**

So what about Genesis 1:29-30? Was the original diet, before the fall, vegan? Well, I used to think so. Even though I back-tracked my view on eating meat to Genesis 4, I still thought that meat-eating was introduced after the fall into sin. I no longer believe that, due to the command in Genesis 1:26-28 given to mankind to rule over and subdue the fish of the sea, birds of the sky, animals on the earth, and crawling things. The words rule and subdue are harsher terms in Hebrew than we get in English, and carry the idea that animal death existed before the fall. I do not believe animals were created immortal. I believe they died natural deaths and part of ruling and subduing included sacrificing an animal and using it for meat.

The purpose of this sermon is not to go into this in detail, but you can read a PhD dissertation paper online by Joshua John Van Ee titled, "Death in the Garden: An Examination of Original Immortality, Vegetarianism, and Animal Peace in the Hebrew Bible and Mesopotamia" from 2013. He details the Hebrew words for rule/dominion (*radah*) and subdue (*kabash*) to be military conquest or ruling over servants terms; not words that speak of caring or tending something, but warfare or killing. If you want a condensed version Ben Stanhope has a chapter on it in his book titled



“Misinterpreting Genesis” (chapter 11). He also did an 18 minute video teaching you can find on YouTube, and I can send to anyone who’d like to watch.

I now see Genesis 1:29-30 as giving additional information on what could be eaten. In other words, Genesis 1:26-28 says to rule and subdue the fish, birds, animals of the earth, and crawling things. This would be done by killing some for protection, using some for clothing (think Genesis 3:21 and the coats of skin/leather), and others for eating. In Genesis 1:29 Elohim additionally says he’s given the plants and fruits for food.

### **The Genesis 3 Curses**

Note here that in Genesis 3 when the curses are spelled out after the fall, there’s no indication that animal death comes into being. Human death (from dust you are and to dust you will return), the ground being cursed, pain in child-bearing, and the serpent (Satan) are all mentioned and cursed, but there’s nothing about “now the animals will start dying.”

### **Paul to Timothy**

This also makes sense when comparing what Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 4 where he was warning Timothy about doctrines of demons. One was forbidding people to marry (probably a command of celibacy), and the other was commanding to abstain from meats that Yahweh created to be received. We know the meats that we may receive as food from Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. They’re sanctified by the Word and prayer. But when were they created? In Leviticus 11? No, back in Genesis 1-2. Paul says they were **created** to be received as food, but I used to tell people they weren’t created to be received, only fruits and vegetables were. I believe I was wrong.

### **Adam Wasn’t Biologically Immortal**

As a brief side note, I do not believe there was human death before the fall, I think that’s the point of Genesis 3 and Romans 5, but I don’t believe mankind was created immortal. I believe their lack of death was made possible by the tree of life in the Garden. This is why Genesis 3:22-24 reads: “Yahweh Elohim said, ‘Since man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil, he must not reach out, and also take from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever. (23) So Yahweh Elohim sent him away from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. (24) He drove man out, and east of the Garden of Eden He stationed a cherubim with a flaming, whirling sword to guard the way to the tree of life.’” So the way man would be sustained to live forever is not from his biological properties, but because he was close to and could partake of the tree of life in the Garden.

So... I believe animal sacrifice is the ancient form of worship in Scripture, and the eating of meat is a blessing in Scripture, and this has all existed since the very beginning of mankind. I don’t believe it was something introduced after the fall of man into sin, or after the flood, and I actually believe it’s healthier for us humans to have a well-rounded diet consisting of meats, fruits, nuts, and vegetables.

## ***“Modesty: for Men and Women”***

**Read Exodus 20:25-26** :: Today we move into the next verse in our study through the Torah, specifically here in the book of Exodus, but we’ll continue to branch out into every book of the Law, as well as the Prophets when looking at these commandments.

Exodus 20:26 is what we’ll begin looking at today, and it’s not a complicated verse, but there is a wealth of knowledge we can pull from it. When an Israelite built an altar on which to offer animal, grain, and drink offerings, he was not to build the altar at such a high elevation that steps were needed to reach the top. The altar was up off the ground, but the top was able to be reached by simply standing up beside it.

The reason steps were prohibited had to do with making sure a man’s nakedness was not exposed. Remember, this law pertaining to altars and offerings is not a law given only to the Levite priesthood. This was a law for all the men of Israel. I haven’t seen anywhere in Scripture where the women of Israel built altars and offered sacrifices by themselves, so I think the command here in Exodus 20:26 against exposing nakedness is primarily to the men, although in stands in principle to both male and female.

During the time this command was given, the Hebrew men wore robes or tunics, oftentimes without pants or breeches as undergarments. If a man had to climb up high steps to offer sacrifice, the community or family participating in the offering might see the man’s nakedness, turning a holy act into a lewd act.

### **Outward Modesty**

Modesty - in outward appearance - is the command here. Modesty is more than just the way we dress, but it is not less than the way we dress. In general modesty has to do with being humble, kind, quiet, and simple. But modesty also extends to dressing in a way that doesn’t expose one’s nakedness. According to this text, the men of Yahweh are to dress in such a way that their nakedness is not seen by others.

### **Warped Teaching**

Modesty in dress isn’t taught much anymore, especially to men. In some of the more fundamental churches they do harp on the women, but mostly in the wrong way. I’ve seen some churches demand that the women’s sleeves reach to the the wrist, and the skirt or dress reach the ankles. Most of time these churches place unscriptural restraints on women, and make them feel like sex objects instead of people who portray the image of the Almighty.

These same churches often have men who dress in tight pants or shirts (which is a double standard)... and it’s framed from the pulpit that it’s always a woman’s fault if a man is lusting after her. They constantly tell the women to stay covered so the men don’t lust, instead of placing the blame on the person doing the lusting. It is true that a woman can purposefully dress in such

a way that they want an outside man to lust after them, but it's also true that a woman can be dressed beautifully while modest and decent, and a lustful man will still gawk at her.

## **Sound Teaching**

I want to get away from all of this modern, Christian fundamental ideology. I'm not here to harp on the women and leave the men out. I'm not here to preach church standards to you either. I think some preachers get their kicks by making up rules and telling other people what to do. I'm not interested in any of that. What I want to do is teach you from the Bible that as men and women of Yahweh we are called to be set-apart, and that includes in how we look on the outside.

Outward modesty is about honor, dignity, and privacy. Parts of our body are not meant for everyone to see. Outward modesty doesn't always mean there has been a change of heart, but wherever there has been a change of heart, outward modesty will be found. The reason is because when Yahweh changes a person's heart, He begins to write His law upon it (your inner-person). This means your desires change, and they change toward wanting to be obedient to the law of Yahweh. This includes a desire to be obedient to the laws that deal with outward appearance, which sometimes means our dress - face, hair, and apparel - change. We don't desire to fit in with the world. We only desire to please our Creator.

What this Divine work produces is a person who thinks, acts, and looks different from the world - not because they looked at the world and did everything opposite, but because they began looking at Scripture and making the effort to be obedient.

## **Stop Watching the World**

You are the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matthew 5:13-16). You don't have to watch the world for anything brothers and sisters; not to tell you what *to* do or what *not* to do. Yahweh's law is all you need. Sometimes people ask me about this current event, or that world situation, or this "famous" person... and I'm usually clueless because I don't spend my time dwelling on what is going on in the world.

Some people rebuke me for that, and they try to use the verse that says "watch and pray" that nothing comes on you unawares to teach that we've gotta' know what's going on in the world. Watch and pray doesn't mean watch the world and pray, it means keep guard over Yahweh's law for your life and pray. So... I don't have to watch the Grammys... or the Government... to stay informed. This book keeps me informed.

I just keep reading and studying Yahweh's law, working on myself, and being a good influence to my inner circle, and to anyone I may meet along the way. Remember that you have the power to control yourself. You can't control John Doe out in California. You can only control you. When you make changes in your personal life, and work daily on yourself, it's then that you will be a light that shines in the path of those around you, and you'll have some good influence in the world.

## Forcing Doesn't Work

1 Peter 5:2-4 says this to the elders (from the ERV). "(2) Take care of the group of people you are responsible for. They are God's flock. Watch over that flock because you want to, not because you are forced to do it. That is how God wants it. Do it because you are happy to serve, not because you want money. (3) Don't be like a ruler over those you are responsible for. But be good examples to them. Then when Christ the Ruling Shepherd comes, you will get a crown - one that will be glorious and never lose its beauty."

So I don't believe in forcing (or trying to force) people to do anything. A man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still. If a person does something by coercion, they aren't really doing it, because *really* doing something means it comes from the heart. So I'm not going to stand up here and bark at you, because I don't want anyone to do anything in a robotic way. Yahweh wants service and worship that stems from an inward desire to please Him.

I think the best way to encourage modesty is to remind people of this: You belong to Yahweh. Yahweh loves you, and wants what is best for you. Belonging to Yahweh means that He gives commands to you for your good, to bless you. Yeshua, Yahweh's Son, died for you - he gave up his life so that you could be forgiven of your sin and have eternal life. Knowing and believing these things causes our heart and soul to swell up with appreciation, and that in turn makes you want to do what is right, even when it comes to how we present ourselves on the outside.

## Genesis Foundation

This is an introductory sermon, but let's go now to the Word for some foundation. We are pulling from Exodus 20:26, but I want to go back even further and show you something from the book of Genesis. We learn so much from the book of beginnings, but we miss a lot of it because we drive-through instead of camp-out. The first few chapters of Genesis probably get read more than most else in the Bible, because of people starting Bible reading plans and then stopping after a few days. I question how much is retained or understood. You can read something just to be reading it, or you can read something because you want to understand and apply what you learn.

Towards the end of Genesis 2 (vs. 21-24, ERV) we have the first recorded marriage in Scripture. Yahweh formed woman out of man and then brought the woman to the man. This is actually the origin of where we get the practice of the father giving away his daughter. It's not an act of belittlement, as though the daughter has no say in who she marries... it's an act of recognizing that a female is precious. The father is concerned about who she marries because he doesn't want her mistreated or belittled in her adult life.

Yahweh is the father of Eve in Genesis 2. Remember, Adam and Eve are unique in that they had no earthly parents, so Yahweh (in Genesis 2:22) made woman from out of the side of man, and then brought her to the man. Adam proclaimed, "Finally! One like me, with bones from my bones and a body from my body." Adam recognized that he was going to be attached to Eve.

Then he prophetically says (in vs. 24), “This is why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife. In this way two people become one.”

Notice the proper family unit is mentioned here twice. Father and mother are mentioned, and then the man who leaves father and mother bonds with his wife. So a family unit is male and female, who join together to make more males who eventually join with females, or more females who eventually join with males. The closeness of a marriage is seen here by the male and female becoming one. One here is used in the sense of unity; one in purpose, thought, and goal.

### **Naked and Unashamed**

Then Genesis 2:25 says, “Both the man and his wife were naked, yet felt no shame.”

This is *before sin* enters the picture in Genesis 3. There was something about the time period “before sin” that allowed people to walk around naked and there be no shame in it or nothing wrong with it. We cannot apply that to the time period in which we live, because we are now “after sin,” and “in sin” not “before sin.”

In Genesis 3 sin enters. I’m not going to do a whole verse-by-verse exegesis here (that’s not the main point of this sermon), but I am going to remind you of the big picture. Yahweh gave a command, and Adam and Eve violated the command. Adam was held responsible as the head of that marriage and creation, and that brought ruin upon mankind and upon the land. Sin has consequences. We cannot disobey Yahweh and think everything will just run smoothly after.

### **Naked and Ashamed**

One of the things that happened after man and woman sinned was a realization of the shame nakedness. Genesis 3:7 says, “Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings.”

The act of sin and realization of disobedience brought upon the necessity of nakedness needing to be covered. So they make loincloths out of some fig leaves. A loincloth has to do with what we would think of a type of underwear. Some translations say “aprons,” but that’s not an apron like you’d wear in the kitchen cooking, but more like what we call a nail-apron for a carpenter. The word is *chagor* in Hebrew, and literally refers to the waist where the belt is worn.

I always think here of little Mowgli on the old Jungle Book cartoon. So this has to do with covering up the midsection of male and female... but this covering was insufficient. It was the human attempt at covering nakedness, but not the Yah-ordained way to completely or sufficiently cover nakedness.

This may have been an honest attempt to do the right thing, but it was still insufficient. It would be like your boss giving you a task and you do your best, but you for whatever reason didn’t

have the right tools or the “know-how.” The boss comes along later and doesn’t scold you for trying, but corrects your wrong and shows you the proper way.

This is what we see Yahweh do later in this chapter, in Genesis 3:21, where we read, “Yahweh (the) Mighty One made clothing out of skins for Adam and his wife, and He clothed them.” This is the foundation text for modesty, but we don’t always see it due to the translation.

The old KJV I grew up with says “coats of skin” here. In our modern vernacular we might think that means bottoms aren’t necessary, lol. Other translations say clothing or garments, but a couple of them say “tunics of skin.” I think that’s currently the best way to bring over the Hebrew into English. Both the Amplified Bible and NKJV say tunics. The NETS (LXX) gets this right as well by saying, “And the Lord God made leather tunics for Adam and for his wife and clothed them,” (also LES = “tunics of skin”). An animal (or animals) were slaughtered, and the skin (the hide, possibly the hair) was used to make tunics for the man and woman in order to cover their nakedness.

You see that word “made” there in Genesis 3:21? Did Yahweh himself actually make the tunics for Adam and Eve? Maybe... The Hebrew word there is *asah*, and it can be used in a wide variety of ways, one of which is to *appoint* or *institute* something. I personally think that’s the meaning here, but it could just as easily mean Yahweh actually made them himself. Either way, the implication is that this is the clothing Yahweh wanted Adam and Eve to properly cover themselves with.

You can consult just about any Bible dictionary or encyclopedia, and it will tell you this was the basic garment for both sexes. A shirt-like garment that hung from the shoulders to the knees or ankles. I’ll cite one reference work here, The IVP Bible Background Commentary, page 33: “The long, outer tunic is still the basic garment for many people in the Middle East. This replaces the inadequate fig-leaf covering made by Adam and Eve. God provides them with these garments as the type of gift given by a patron to a client. Gifts of clothing are among the most common presents mentioned in the Bible (see Joseph in Gen. 41:42) and other ancient texts. It also prepares them for the rigors of weather and work which await them.”

It was basically a long, loose shirt-like garment, covering the upper body and the mid section of a person modestly. Pants hug and outline a person’s midsection, whereas a tunic drapes over it.

I’ll go into more detail on this next week, but I’ll close today with this thought. Modesty has been defined as “behavior, manner, or appearance intended to avoid impropriety or indecency.” People should be able to look at us and know something is different, in a good way. We should stand out in a crowd, not from a sense of arrogance or better-than-thou-ness, but from a sense of letting our light shine to bring glory to our Heavenly Father. It might be said that when someone looks at us they think, “They must be a religious person.” I realize religion can be messed up sometimes, but that’s how outsiders say it. Our appearance should signal that we serve the Creator.

## ***“Pants, Skirts, and Dresses”***

**Read Exodus 20:26 (HCSB) and Genesis 3:21 (NKJV) ::** Last week our study through Exodus brought us to a law where the men of Israel were to take precaution to cover their nakedness in public. I talked about modesty in outward appearance and laid some groundwork. Modesty is about honor, dignity, and privacy.

I then took us back through Genesis 2 and 3 and the foundation for modesty. Before sin entered, the man and his wife were naked and unashamed in a holy way. They were in paradise. After they disobeyed Yahweh’s command, the realization of their nakedness came upon them, and they made loincloths out of fig leaves to cover their mid-section. That was man’s attempt at covering nakedness, but it was not sufficient. We read in Genesis 3:21 that Yahweh made (or appointed, or instituted) tunics to appropriately cover the nakedness of man and woman.

The Holman Bible Dictionary says this under the heading *Clothing Styles*: “The Bible gives only general descriptions of the types of garments worn in biblical times. Egyptian, Assyrian, Roman, and Hittite monuments provide extensive pictorial evidence of dress in the ancient world. The need for clothing derives its origin from the shame of nakedness experienced by Adam and Eve in the garden (Gen. 3:7-8). God’s provision for His people is reflected in the animal skin garments given in response to human need. Men and women wore tunics made of linen or wool hanging from the neck to the knees or ankles. The Beni Hasan Tableau from the tomb of Khnum-hotep in Egypt depicts tunics worn by Semitic peoples as having diverse patterns and colors.”

As you read throughout Scripture, the tunic wasn’t the *only* garment worn by men and women. We read about outer coats, breeches, head coverings, belts, sashes, etc. A variety of clothing is acceptable and fine, the main issue here is that the tunic is not removed, because it is the piece of clothing Yahweh gave to man and woman to sufficiently cover their nakedness. So long as the tunic is on, other clothing may be worn underneath or overtop for practical reasons or even stylistic desires.

### **Everyone Knows the Tunic**

I believe everyone knows that the tunic was the basic, everyday garment of both Hebrew men and women, it’s just that most have not stopped long enough to think about the implications. If you’ve ever been to a play depicting a scene in the Bible (at a church or drama theatre), you see how the men and women are dressed. You can tell them apart, but their garments are basically the same (tunics, robes).

I’ve recently enjoyed watching a new TV series called *The Chosen*, depicting the adult life and times of the Messiah. There’s been a lot said about it, both pro and con, among Christians and Messianic people. I don’t agree with every single liberty they’ve taken to recount Bible history, but for the most part I believe they are doing their best to make it feel as authentic as possible. One of the ways they do this is through dress, and the Messiah and all of his disciples are dressed in: tunics. The man who plays Yeshua wears this basic, tan tunic, with tassels at the four corners.

It has longer sleeves and reaches to the knees, with no pants underneath. And that's probably what our Messiah walked around in on a day-to-day basis. No one has a problem with this... until someone like me suggests, "Hey, why aren't we still wearing tunics for modesty?" Then all the objections start coming out.

### **Only Animal Skin**

One I heard years ago (when I first began this study back in 2004) was that if we use Genesis 3:21 as the foundation text for modesty, then we'll have to say that not only is a tunic required, but a leather tunic is required, because the first ones there were made of animal skin.

The problem with this argument is that it doesn't take into account ALL of Scripture. Genesis is the foundation, yes, but we keep building on it through Scripture from there. As we continue to read (all the way to the end in Revelation) we see other pieces or items of clothing to be acceptable (over or under the tunic), and we also see that Hebrew men and women wore tunics made of different material like linen, cotton, wool, or even silk. The key is that the basic garment didn't change. A tunic is still a tunic whether it's made from animal skin, sheep wool, or spun and sewed from cotton. All one has to do is type in "linen" or "wool" in the search engine on their Bible app or computer program and look at all the examples.

### **Primitive Times**

Another argument I heard to try to weasel out of wearing the tunic was, "Matthew, do you expect everyone to go back to primitive times and only wear sandals, or only ride camels, or draw water manually from a well?" This argument is fallacious because it thinks I'm presenting a "back to ancient culture" teaching, which I'm not.

The argument from Genesis 3:21 isn't based on thinking we've can't advance in technology and practice, like the Amish or Mennonite mindset. Style changes are perfectly fine. I consider myself pretty stylish in some of my tunics (although some people may disagree, lol). Genesis 3:21 is a modesty or type argument. It's not an argument saying we have to dress like ancient Hebrews due to an attempt to get away from modern things, it's an argument saying we need to dress like this because it was Yahweh's appointed modest garment.

### **Even Protestant Reformers**

When we get from Genesis to Revelation, thousands of years later, we still see tunics and robes being worn by both men and women. As a matter of fact, if we even fast forward from there to the Protestant Reformation with men like John Wycliffe or John Calvin... they all still wore tunics or robes in the 15 to 1600's A.D. They may have worn breeches or pants underneath, or a coat overtop, or a belt around their waist, but they still donned the tunic.

### **Western Culture and Skirts for Men**

When you first start meditating on all of this it sounds a bit strange, because in our western culture mindset, during the 20th century, we see pants as defining a man and a dress (which is more closely in style to a tunic or robe) as defining a woman. We hear a word like "skirt" mentioned in the context of clothing, and we automatically think "woman's apparel."



But, for example, the word skirt is used 12x in the KJV (OT), and every single time it's talking about the skirt of a man. One example is where Ruth was quietly and secretly laying at the feet of Boaz during the night (in Ruth chapter 3), and when he realizes it she says to him, "I *am* Ruth thine handmaid: spread therefore **thy** skirt over thine handmaid; for thou *art* a near kinsman." Boaz had a skirt.

Another is in Zechariah 8:23: "Thus saith [Yahweh] of hosts; In those days *it shall come to pass*, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of **him** that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard *that* Elohim *is* with you." Some Bibles say "robe" or "hem" there, and there are cases where the skirt does refer to the hem or border of one's tunic or robe, but the point here is that we generally associate the word skirt with a female. The King James Version associates the word skirt with a male.

Why then do we think skirts are for women and pants are for men? Why do the signs on the bathroom doors have one stick figure in what looks like a dress, and the other one... well it looks like it's wearing nothing, but I guess it could be considered pants. You know why? Modern, Western culture from the 17 to 1900's. If the Messiah or one of his disciples walked up to these two bathroom doors wearing his tunic, he would think the one depicting a person with clothes (in the skirt) was probably the one he was supposed to go into.

### **Pants and Deuteronomy 22:5**

We assign pants to men and skirts to women because of modern, Western culture not Hebrew culture, and some of us who grew up in Pentecostal or fundamental Baptist type churches heard Deuteronomy 22:5 pounded, mainly in an attempt to keep the women from wearing pants. (I don't understand why we were taught the law was done away with, but yet still heard the Deuteronomy 22:5 law preached. It's kind of like the tithing law; they can't let it go.)

It says there (KJV), "The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so *are* abomination unto the LORD thy God." So "there it is" they'd say, "don't wear pants women," but that verse doesn't say anything about pants, and here is an excellent example of learning how NOT to read the Bible. When we try to take our modern day mindset and transfer it back to the Bible (ancient Hebrew culture + Hebrew language) we will often get ourselves into interpretive trouble.

When Deuteronomy 22:5 was first given, it was given to Hebrew men and women, and the men and women both wore the same basic garment based on Genesis 3:21, the tunic or robe. So Moshe and his wife Zipporah are standing there wearing tunics. Maybe Moshe's had stripes and Zipporah's had flowers; I don't know, we aren't told. The point is that whatever colors, patterns, or style, they had on the same basic garment.

Could they have been wearing something like pants underneath their tunics? Yes, they could have. We aren't specifically told in many of the texts, but I'm sure other items of clothing were worn for protective and practical reasons.

For example, we aren't told anything about sandals in Genesis 3:21, but as we continue to read we know Moshe had on sandals because he was told to take them off in Exodus 3 when he encountered the burning bush. Sandals would have been practical to protect the feet while walking and working. Pants would have been practical to protect the legs while working, and for more warmth in cold weather (and that's fine), but we are never, ever told in Scripture that pants are a man's garment and shouldn't be worn by women.

### **The Truth about Deuteronomy 22:5**

All some churches use is Deuteronomy 22:5, and that just doesn't work when we read it in light of the Hebrew culture and practice of that time. So what is it talking about?

One thing we should notice carefully here is the Hebrew word for man in the verse. We won't get this from the English, because we just read "man" twice here, but behind the one English word man can stand a few different Hebrew words, and they are different for a reason.

The English word man is used 81x in the book of Deuteronomy, but there are only 2x in Deuteronomy where the word man is based on the Hebrew word *geber*. Guess where those 2x are? Deuteronomy 22:5. All the other 79x use the words *iysh*, *adam*, *ebyon*, *ibriy*, *asher*, *chalal*, *naphal*, *ayin*, *bachur*, and *seybah*. I sounded like I just talked in tongues didn't I? I guess I did, the Hebrew tongue.

Granted, some of these words describe actions associated with a man. For instance, the Hebrew word *naphal* means to fall down, so the translator will write "If a man falls" and *naphal* describes the man who falls. The point still stands though that in all of these cases, only 2x is the word *geber* used for a man, and both are in Deuteronomy 22:5. You think that's significant?

As a matter of fact, in this very chapter the word man is used just a few verses later in Deuteronomy 22:13 where a man takes a wife, and there the word *iysh* is used, the same word used back in Genesis for Adam. But *iysh* isn't used a few verses earlier in verse 5. Why?

The Hebrew word *geber* is defined by Strong's (H1397) as "Properly a valiant man or warrior; generally a person simply." Brown, Drivers, Briggs Hebrew lexicon defines it as "A man, strong man, warrior, emphasizing strength or ability to fight." Both lexicons track it back to H1395, *gabar*, meaning "to be strong, prevail, act insolently."

Because of this, the old, Methodist commentator Adam Clarke concludes that this law is about a woman dressing as a soldier or warrior. He says in part: "It is very probable that armor is here intended; especially as we know that in the worship of Venus, to which that of Astarte or Ashtaroth among the Canaanites bore a striking resemblance, the women were accustomed to appear in armor before her. It

certainly cannot mean a simple change in dress, whereby the men might pass for women, and vice versa. This would have been impossible in those countries where the dress of the sexes had but little to distinguish it, and where every man wore a long beard.” So that’s one possibility, but it doesn’t really deal with the part in the verse where the man is told not to wear the woman’s garment.

The Jewish historian Josephus does comment on this verse in his Antiquities 4.8.43 where he says, “Take care, especially in your battles, that no woman use the habit of a man, nor man the garment of a woman.” So it could be understood that for a man to wear the woman’s garment mean he swapped places with her; he stayed home from a battle or stopped doing the providing for the family, but notice carefully that Josephus doesn’t limit this to war or battle; he says “especially in your battles” showing that he viewed this as a general law to be kept always, but especially at war time.

### **Role and Sex Changes**

My view on Deuteronomy 22:5 is that it’s about role changes and a purposeful attempt at switching one’s look to be like the opposite sex. The CEV, though not a literal-wooden translation, captures the meaning by saying, “Women must not pretend to be men, and men must not pretend to be women, Yahweh your Elohim is disgusted with people who do that.”

For a man to try to look like and act like a female is an abomination. For a woman to try to look like and act like a male is an abomination. This doesn’t mean a man can’t wash dishes and a woman can’t drive a tractor. I’m not saying that. I’m talking about a specific desire to take away what Yahweh has given you as male or female and try to be the opposite. Anytime a man tries to look feminine or a woman tries to look masculine it looks awkward. You know why? Because it is not natural.

So the command is a general one forbidding transvestites and transgenderism. Some of this may not have been a “thing” back then in Hebrew culture, but then again maybe it all was? There’s nothing new under the sun right? Regardless, the principle holds true, very similar to how a high deck needs a railing around it in the same way that an ancient Hebrew roof needed one (Deuteronomy 22:8). So we learn in Deuteronomy 22:5 that men are not to try to be women and women are not to try to be men. Yahweh made us male and female in the beginning, and that is the way it should stay. All of this modern talk of blurring the sexes and gender fluidity is an abomination in the sight of Yahweh.

What we do not learn in Deuteronomy 22:5 is that pants are for men and not for women. Pants are actually NOT an appropriate, outer garment for either sex. Pants are a practical garment for warmth and protection, or even style, but not for modesty. The tunic is what is given by Yahweh for modesty in Genesis 3:21. Pants may be worn by either man or woman, under the tunic, and you can still differentiate who is man and who is woman by their manner of conduct and the way they present themselves. Tisha and I have walked into Home Depot many times, both in tunics with pants underneath, and no one has trouble telling which one of us is male and which one is

female. *That may have something to do with my beard...* but this isn't a beard message. Regardless, Tisha isn't trying to be a man by wearing pants, and I'm not trying to be a woman by wearing a tunic. We are both trying to be obedient to what Yahweh instituted in Genesis 3:21.

## Closing

A wise, Hebrew sage once encouraged the study of Torah by saying, "Turn it over, and turn it over again, because everything is in it. Look into it, grow gray haired and old in it, and do not depart from it, for you have no better standard of conduct than it." So there's more to be said on this topic, and I'll save that for next week when I wrap this up.

## ***"Nakedness and Practical Modesty"***

**Read Exodus 20:26 and Genesis 3:21** :: In my first sermon on modesty I laid some ground work from both of these texts, and then last week we covered some more about the tunic and looked at Deuteronomy 22:5 in its cultural context. Today I want to deal with a few more points from Scripture, and then give you some practical advice and encouragement on modesty in dress.

I ended last week with the point that there is nowhere in Scripture that defines pants as being a man's garment. After my lesson, Brother Arnold approached me and asked, "What did you say someone told you about your tunic to make fun of you?" I told him I've had men ask me where I got my dress at. *He said to tell them, "Men are supposed to get dressed and pantsd."* Lol

What Hebrew men wore was more similar to what we would call a dress or skirt today. I mentioned that the 12x the word skirt is used in the Older Testament it's talking about a man's skirt, and of course we have one word - *ketoneth* - describing the garment for both Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:21.

Here is a great quote and point from an article I read many years ago titled, "The Truth About Deuteronomy 22:5" by Mr. Jason Young

"A thorough study into the clothing norms of the Bible reveals that there was no distinction between men's and women's clothing in the Bible beyond stylistic differences such as trim, color and size. In fact God Himself made clothing for Adam and Eve that was so similar that one word (*ketoneth*) could describe the specific garment he made for each of them. This same word describes the clothing worn by Godly men and women throughout the Bible from the Old Testament to the New Testament. Yet today, many Christians demand much more than even the Bible did by requiring not only a difference in style but a difference in function and form as well. If God makes no such clothing demands on His people, then who are we to make them? Do we know better than God?"

## Breeches, Trousers

One objection or point I've had some people bring me over the years are the five mentions of the word breeches in the KJV. Here's one, in Exodus 28:42-43, "And thou shalt make them linen breeches to cover their nakedness; from the loins even unto the thighs they shall reach: (43) and they shall be upon Aaron, and upon his sons, when they come in unto the

tabernacle of the congregation, or when they come near unto the altar to minister in the holy place; that they bear not iniquity, and die: it shall be a statute forever unto him and his seed after him.”

All five of the occurrences of breeches are in the same context, the Aaronic priests. Never are the breeches commanded to be worn by common Hebrew men, or Hebrew women for that matter.

Notice that the breeches are not pants in the sense as we wear pants today, they are basically... underwear. The HCSB uses the word “undergarments” in each place where the KJV uses “breeches.” They reach from the waist to the thigh, and in the context of the priesthood, they are never worn by themselves. The priests didn’t put on these breeches and walk around in front of people with nothing else on, and they didn’t put on these breeches and a t-shirt and walk around in front of people. They wore these breeches *under* their robe. Back in verse 4 of Exodus 28 we read, “And these *are* the garments which they shall make; a breastplate, and an ephod, and a robe, and a brodered coat, a mitre, and a girdle: and they shall make holy garments for Aaron thy brother, and his sons, that he may minister unto me in the priest's office.”

So the robe, coat, girdle, ephod, and breastplate were all worn over top of the breeches; another person would never even see the breeches, just like when you and I go out in public, no one ever sees our underwear.

Other Bible translations do not call them breeches. The ESV says “linen undergarments.” Brentons Septuagint says, “linen drawers.” In Leviticus 16:4 where they are mentioned again as a holy, priestly garment, the NET says “linen leggings.” *Us men might say, “I ain’t wearin’ no linen leggings.” If you want to be a priest you will. Lol.* The point is we are dealing with a type of shorts that are used as underwear, not a pair of Levi jeans like men wear today.

### **What Nakedness?**

A long time ago when I first studied this subject, I thought the high priest and the priests under him would wear these breeches when they ministered so that if anyone in the community was around watching their ministry, no one would see up under their tunic or robe. I thought that Exodus 28:42 was covering their nakedness in general. Later in my studies, I realized that didn’t make sense because the commandment in Exodus 20:26 specifically implies that the altars built in Israel weren’t high up so that you’d have to use steps to reach it. So a man would be standing on the ground when he worked the altar. No one was going up steps or a ladder to where someone else might see up their robe.

I think a better understanding here is that the breeches were on the priests to cover their nakedness securely in the presence of Yahweh. Notice here in the picture of the high priest... no one is seeing the breeches. Listen carefully to the context of Exodus 28:42: “(The linen breeches) shall be upon Aaron, and upon his sons, when they come in unto the tabernacle of the congregation, or when they come near unto the altar to minister in the holy place.” The

covering of nakedness here is not covering one's nakedness among society in public, but covering one's nakedness in Yahweh's special presence.

Genesis 3:21 teaches us how men and women are supposed to cover their nakedness in general. Exodus 28:42 teaches us how a priest was to cover his nakedness while he ministered before Yahweh. A priest could be all by himself ministering, and he'd still have to wear the linen breeches under his robe.

### **Breeches: Just for Men?**

Now the argument goes that priests were men so the breeches are here worn by men. My rebuttal is that (1) there's nothing here about men in general, (2) the breeches were worn underneath the tunic or robe so no one would ever see them anyhow, and (3) just because something is said to be worn by a priest doesn't mean a similar shaped garment wasn't ever worn by a common man or woman.

Exodus 28:4 says that one of the priestly garments was the brodered coat. The word coat there is *ketoneth* in Hebrew, the same word in Genesis 3:21 for the clothes of Adam and Eve. So if you say that the breeches are only for men because they're mentioned for the priests, then what about the *ketoneth*? Should a woman not wear that because it's mentioned here for the priests?

Or what about the belt or girdle? It's mentioned in this chapter for the priests too. Can a woman not wear a belt or girdle then? See it's not a good argument. The texts that mention breeches don't teach us anything about pants being only for men. This is a grasping for a straw argument that some Christians use who just don't want to give up their man-made doctrine of pants are for men and dresses are for women.

### **The Ketoneth and King Jehu**

Here's a quote from a book I have titled *Manners and Customs in the Bible*, by Victor Matthews, and this is on pages 117-119 where clothing styles are covered.

The basic dress for both men and women was the ketoneth, a shirtlike garment which is depicted in ancient art in a variety of styles. Usually made of wool, it could reach as far as the ankles or just to the knees; it might have either long or short sleeves. This garment is mentioned in the "Black Obelisk" inscription of the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III (842 B.C.). In a series of sculpted, captioned registers, Jehu, king of Israel, is depicted bowing down before the king; his servants are shown carrying gifts as tribute payments. Jehu is wearing a fringed ketoneth tied with a girdle which also has tassels hanging from it. His head is covered by a pointed cap, and his beard like those of the Israelite porters carved on this monument, is trimmed to a point.

In a picture of the stone inscription mentioned in this book (it's housed at the British Museum in London), you can see the ancient cuneiform writing up at the top describing what's going on in each block or panel on the stone.

On panel two is a chiseling of King Jehu bowing down, and wearing a ketoneth with tassels. It's also interesting to point out that it appears that Jehu is donning the side-locks from the temples of his head. One brother up in Michigan pointed this out to me years ago when I was studying Leviticus 19:27. This stone lends credence to the view taken still by the Hasidic Jewish community that the command about cutting of the sides of your head means to let the hair on one's temples grow out. I take a slightly different view of this; one day I'll review my notes and teach on it.

The main point here that is seen in this ancient stone inscription - mentioned by this Bible dictionary, and mentioned in every single Bible dictionary I have (and I have quite a few) - is that the basic, everyday dress of Hebrew men (and women) was the ketoneth or tunic. It was not pants for men and dresses for women. It's really an undisputed point in scholarship, it's just that not many people want to push it to its logical conclusion.

### **Modestly Clothed**

Genesis 3:21 doesn't just teach that male and female must be clothed, it teaches that male and female must be clothed modestly. It's a verse that Christians have just skimmed over without digging into it and taking it seriously. Swimming trunks and a bikini doesn't work here. I might add briefly that according to Genesis 3:21, it's just as wrong for a man to go topless in public as it is a woman. The only reason people today don't view it this way is due to modern culture. What's good for the goose is good for the gander.

A follower of Yahweh is not authorized to wear anything he or she wants and claim they are covered. If you do that you are doing what Adam and Eve did in Genesis 3:7 when they made those loincloths out of fig leaves. Yahweh doesn't recognize that as modest apparel. He appointed a specific garment for male and female that covers nakedness modestly, and devout Hebrew men and women wore it from Genesis to Revelation. It never changes in all the Bible.

### **Q&A and Practical Application**

So now we come to the close of this series, and I'm going to answer some questions, give some advice, and hopefully encourage you some in this. This is the first time in over 10 years that I've taught on this subject from the pulpit. It might be another 10 years before I teach on it again, I don't know. I'm not gonna' harp on this or try to force this, but I do want to encourage you to let go of your modern thinking... and maybe let go of some pride - and take an honest look at what I've taught from the Bible for these past three sermons.

### **Dresses and Skirts**

Some sisters have asked me about dresses and skirts, are they similar to the tunic? Yes, some dresses are basically tunics, and some skirts cover the body in the same way a tunic does, draping loosely over the mid-section. That's really the goal here, to not reveal the shape of our body. Our clothes should compliment our body or beauty, not reveal everything to the outside

world. Nakedness is something private to you, or private between you and your spouse if you're married. It's not for the whole world to see.

### **Loose Pants?**

Others have asked me about loose pants. Yes, some pants are more modest than others. I have some linen pants that don't hug my mid-section like a tight pair of blue jeans would... *or a pair of those priestly linen leggings*. Now I don't wear these linen pants without a tunic, but if I did they would be more modest than a pair of blue jeans or regular dress pants. But... I'm not really interested in more modest, I'm interested in what Yahweh appointed in Genesis 3:21.

### **Men... I Know it's Different**

For the men... I know this is a hard teaching. When I first started wearing the tunic (2004) I got stared at by so many people. I remember walking through Kohls with Tisha back then and this was all new to me, and I saw all kinds of people do a double-take and point. It was hard back then; I had to get rid of a lot of this flesh.

Not too long ago I was standing in line at Chick-fil-a and I saw a couple of girls point at me, whisper, and laugh. It didn't bother me at all. *I looked straight at them, waved and smiled, and they got red in the face and went back to working real quick-like*. It's become a way of life to me, kind of like the lunar reckoning of the months and weeks. Things from the Bible that seem difficult or strange are only that way because we are unfamiliar with them. When you change to Yahweh's instructions, the longer you walk in them the less you want out. You become in tune with the old, Hebrew ways and the modern ways start becoming strange.

Men, you can begin this with baby steps if it's too much to take in all at once. When you buy your shirts there are some shirts that have long tails in the front and back, and there are other shirts with an extra T on the tag standing for "tall" that hang down 2 to 4 inches longer than most shirts. Look for those kind, and I would definitely encourage you to at least wear your shirts untucked men, and then work your way up to a tunic eventually. They used to teach little boys to tuck in their shirt to be presentable, but that's a violation of Scripture. *Wear that shirt untucked men*. If you don't start somewhere you'll gradually forget about this teaching.

### **To the Women**

The same goes for the sisters here. It's kind-of become a little bit stylish now for the short tunics. I see them on the clothes rack some times in stores, and I think some of them are too short - like a mini-tunic - but at least it's a start. The women can look for these type shirts if they are wearing pants, shirts that at least start to cover or drape over the mid-section. I think many dresses and skirts are fine as well.



## **Tops and Shirts**

Let me add here about the tops we wear too. I understand that clothes will at times show some of our form, that's unavoidable, but we shouldn't be wearing tops that are too tight or that reveal too much of our chest area. *I've seen some fellas who I guess strike their-self as a ladies man and unbutton a few of those buttons down their chest to let some of that hair show.* That's not appropriate, and neither is it appropriate for a female to show off her chest area. According to Genesis 3:21 covering nakedness in general is from the shoulders to at least below the thigh. I don't really like shorts, but I don't think the bottom of the leg is nakedness in Scripture. I think a tunic above the knee or with shorts is sufficient.

## **The Tunic is Modest**

If you put this into practice and start becoming conscious about what you wear, you will start to notice how much more modest a tunic is than regular clothes. I'm a people-watcher and I'm sure some of you are even though you might not want to admit it. You will see people at the grocery store in pants, and then you might see a woman dressed in a long coat in the winter time. You will immediately notice how much more modest the long-coat is because it hangs over the mid-section.

## **Thanks for Listening**

Do you know how hard it is to teach a sermon like this? *Let's all take a deep breath, lol.* I really appreciate everyone's attentiveness to this series. I've seen you really trying to listen and learn. Y'all are such good students of the Bible. I'm just up here trying to be a good shepherd. I'm not interested in policing anyone, but I am interested in encouraging everyone in holiness.

Like I said before, I won't be talking about this much anymore. This past week I went through my booklet on modesty and revised and updated it; it needed it, the last time I did an update was 2011 (where did all that time go?). This morning I posted it on the book section of the website for the whole world to read. It does go into more detail on some things I've mentioned in these sermons, and there are more reference works as well. I hope you'll take the time to read and study it.

## **Closing**

So... I love everyone, and I love everyone right where they are at. I have to, because Yahweh loves me right where I'm at, and I know that I'm not yet at the level I ought to be. When we share this message with others, let's do so in kindness and not in a judgmental way. That song we sing - don't let me judge but love - it's about not being judgmental. We all have to make judgments everyday, but we don't have to walk around with a stuck-up judgmental attitude, looking down our nose at everyone. Yahweh's people should be the kindest people on this earth. So let's not pounce on anyone with this modesty message. Let's mainly share it by example, and when someone asks, be as gentle and patient with them as Yahweh has been with you.