

BS-7

(Year 334 of This Confinement!)

(Surely by now, you've found something BETTER to read!)

We finally get an idea of MOSHE'S "day job" he's the JUDGE of all the Israelites. 600,000+ people. Think about that. Here comes, the Judge, here comes the judge, the courts in session now, here comes the judge!) Yep, that's how old I am.

Jethro (Not Gibbs!) knows this is a TOUGH business. He tells him, "This IS NUTS. You'll tucker yourself completely out doing all this. Why don't you appoint some "minions," some underlings, some henchman, some flunkey's, lackey, hireling, stooge (just don't get the THREE STOOGES! or what about a gofer who will apply G*D'S laws? Just take the BIG CASES for YOURSELF." Make it easy on yourself!

MOSHE agrees that this is a WAY BETTER IDEA than what he's been doing.

Having been the perfect plot-mover, Jethro (Not Ames) goes back home to Midian, yep he's a Midianite alright!

Three months after leaving Egypt, the Israelites ARRIVE at MOUNT SINAI (No, not the hospital!)

G*D tells MOSHE to assemble everyone for a BIG Israelite SCHOOL ASSEMBLY. But one thing: they can't come up ONTO the MOUNTAIN (where MOSHE chats with G*D) or they'll DIE.

NOTED! Keep off the mountain!

Everyone washes up to look nice and spiffy for the party.

G*D descends upon the mountain in fire, smoke, and eerily loud trumpet blasts. How awesome and scary is that!

G*D tells MOSHE, "Do not let either the PRIESTS or the PEOPLE break through to come up to the Lord; otherwise his wrath will break out against them."

Notice here that access to G*D is RESTRICTED to the few. For a guy who WANTS to adopt these people as his own, G*D doesn't seem to want to get TOO CLOSE to them.

Big chapter, people. HEADS UP. NOW! Get ready for NO,NO,NO! (Or in Hebrew, "SHALT NOT!" ah, maybe that's King James...I dun no!)

The Decalogue (literally, "10 words") are some of "the most influential WORDS" in the entire Bible, and they've influenced "THOUSANDS OF YEARS of WESTERN thinking." Even in our day-to-day lives, the Ten Commandments RESONATE with how people think about "RIGHT AND WRONG." As WE go through them, think about how they relate to YOUR LIFE. I dare you.

G*D gives the people the Ten Commandments ORALLY. Let's tackle them, TOGETHER SHALL WE.

WE ARE EXCLUSIVE, right?

"You shall have NO OTHER gods before me."

"BEFORE" has also been translated as "BESIDES."

Naturally, this has provoked a lot of debate! "BEFORE ME" seems to imply that the worshipper can toy with other gods as long as G*D is number one, but

"besides me" implies an EXCLUSIVE RELATIONSHIP. See how this can get TRICKY?

If this sounds like TWO LOVERS talking about their rather COMPLICATED relationship, then you're on the right path here. G*D often acts like a SPURNED LOVER, and there are a lot of "complicated issues in this or any other MARRIAGE."

Bottom line: G*D is getting MAJORLY promoted.

No Idols. EVER!

Back in the ancient world, idol worship of statues and other objects was VERY COMMON. It's pretty natural to attach yourself to AN OBJECT, if you think about it!

The MAIN IDEA here is that these IDOLS (not American Idols) were contrary to the religious ideas of "the writers." THEY believed that their G*D held something more INTANGIBLE, more POWERFUL than could be produced in a crude simplistic CLAY STATUE.

Oaths, Swear-words, and Blasphemy-watch your mouth! You know you should! No F-bombs allowed!

"You shall not make wrongful use of the NAME of the Lord your G*D, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name."

Knock off all the God – Dammits and the Jesus Christs! They are offensive. And today people are offended by so many things! But not this?

This one is all about RESPECT for G*D. For the ancients, it wasn't a ban on naughty words, but an attempt to ELEVATE G*D's name and give it some cultural currency and some street creds. In other words, the writers wanted to make sure that G*D's name had some panache BEHIND IT.

Blasphemy isn't just a BAN on swearwords, but a ban on using G*D's name flippantly.

Chillaxin' on the Weekend! Chill out, y'all! RELAX. TAKE FIVE! Another big NO-NO!

"Remember the SABBATH DAY and keep IT holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a SABBATH to the Lord your G*D; you shall NOT DO any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but RESTED the seventh day; therefore, the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it."

When you think about it, this is a pretty good idea FOR SOCIETY. Why shouldn't everyone just work all the time? We'd get WAY MORE done. Especially for the ancients, who had crops to worry about, this was a big deal.

Taking aside ONE DAY for higher concerns (like G*D) is a major breakthrough because it moves the ancient world from “pure SURVIVAL MODE” to a more “cosmopolitan way of life.” If you're thinking about the next place to find FOOD all day, you definitely aren't thinking about “man's condition in the COSMOS.” NO, not the drink!

"Honor your father AND YOUR MOTHER, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your G*D is giving you." Love, honor, respect, obey...you gotta problem with this one?

This one isn't just an attempt by parents to BE OVER-BEARING to their children. It's about setting up a society “that works” and “works WELL.”

Here's the thing.

You probably can't have a functional society that standardizes parental disrespect (unless you're George Orwell and this is 1984).

Killing...or Murder? NRSV: "You shall not murder."

KJV: "Thou shalt not kill." Ah, translations...you gotta love ‘em! (Be careful which one you choose!)

"MURDER" implies that you took another life for your own advantage. "KILLING" might imply that there was a better reason—after all, Moses himself killed a man.

This is some nasty moral territory, folks. Think, abortion, euthanasia, suicide, capital punishment, war, hunting, vegetarianism even! Just mentioning these together in the same sentence is going to raise someone's dander!

Given that G*D himself authorized Israelites to KILL Amalekites, it's reasonable to assume that this rule only applies to YOUR COMMUNITY. War seems like an exemption, and G*D himself takes life. It's messy, but the writers probably left it that way INTENTIONALLY.

No ADULTERY, none, zip it up! Keep it in your loin cloth!

Remember, in ancient times, one man could have multiple wives, NO PROBLEM! This isn't a romantic endorsement of marriage or anything. The writers are just trying to make sure that their society has RULES.

What this passage is REALLY SAYING is that "a married woman" cannot have SEXXX with a man who is NOT her husband.

No STEALING, either...cuz (Rippin' off Ain't right!)

Seems pretty straightforward, RIGHT? But what about the Israelites "plundering" the Egyptians back in Chapter 3? Wouldn't you say that counts as a kind of

stealing? Or, were they just BORROWING everything they knowingly took that didn't belong to them?

Also, what about taking the land in Canaan that G*D himself said BELONGED to other people? G*D has made it clear from the beginning that he's giving the land of others to the Israelites. Is that STEALING, or just "Ancient Oriental Regional Politics?" Or, AORP, for short!

Yeah, it's COMPLICATED. Legislation and legalization usually are! But we tread on...

Testifying and Witnessing...I NEED a WITNESS!

Basically, you could take these two ways. You could interpret in "Law & Order style" and say that this commandment only PROHIBITS lying on the stand in a trial. So, if you see something happen, you can't lie about it when asked by "THE MAN." Makes good social sense, right?

You could also take it as a complete BAN on all lying. On a smaller scale, isn't lying bearing false witness? If you're not being truthful, then aren't you technically just a bad witness to life?

In both cases, here's another attempt to regulate society and create a functional system of laws. That's not to say that there were NO laws before the Commandments, but this represents an attempt to get everything written down on paper, I mean papyrus, I

mean embedded in stone, well, you know what I mean!.

Now, think about things like: Jealousy, Envy, **DESIRE**, wanting, **SPITE**, covetousness, **BITTERNESS**, discontent...entitlement...

"You shall not covet your neighbor's **HOUSE**; you shall not covet your neighbor's **WIFE**, or male or female slave, or ox, or **ASS**, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

On one level, this seems like a good idea. Envy and jealousy produce crime, so why not just **BAN** it?

"A few historical goodies" on this commandment. First, doesn't this seem like a way for people to deal with "social inequalities?" If everyone had an identical **ASS**, why would you need to be envious of someone else's? I won't continue, promise!

Second, check out how "**WIFE**" gets dumped and lumped in with all kinds of **PROPERTY**. That's just the way it was! **SLAVERY** is also taken for granted; it was a **GIVEN**. No surprise there, since it's all over the Bible.

FINALLY, did you notice that the images on this list are very **PASTORAL**?

It's basically farm equipment and animals. Remember back in the day, when **EVERYONE** was farming on **FACEBOOK**?

MOSHE'S is a very farming-oriented society.

**What would you put on today's list? iPads?
Computers? 401 K's? Houses? Money? My RIDE!
Stock portfolios? The CABIN up north! My ROLEX!**

NO, NO, NO, I tell you, you can't do this, you cant do that...what in the heck can you do? But we are just getting started here... (But don't forget there are still 613 more to go!)

But we're not done. Duh.

Think about these commandments in this way: If you're a city planner, would you put up a "No Smoking" sign in a place where people don't smoke? Of course not.

I'm not saying that the ancient world was ANARCHY before these commandments, but you wouldn't make rules unless you had good reason.

Whoever wrote this stuff (G*D, MOSHE, the Biblical writers, or your grandmother and her sassy sister, Lori) had a very certain idea in mind about how they wanted society TO LOOK.

When we think of this chapter in a literary framework, even more question pops up:

How would these RULES look if MOSHE had SAID them? How would they look if G*D wasn't cloaked in fire and smoke and all those TRUMPET BLASTS?

The point is that CONTEXT MATTERS.

If Dumbledore or Gandalf says something, we SHUT UP AND LISTEN.

There's some speculation that the writers of the Exodus story inserted these rules to make them seem like G*D said them—if that's the case, it's kind of a brilliant strategy. IF GOD DID ACTUALLY COMMAND THEM, then WHY don't we listen and follow them?

If you want to dig into the “archaeological, legal, and historical meat” of these commandments, you'll find ENDLESS WORKS on the subject.

MOST SCHOLARS agree that WHOEVER wrote these commandments was heavily influenced by the world around them.

Basically, the list boils down to Hittite influences on the NORTH, Egyptian influences from the SOUTH, and Mesopotamian influences from the WEST.

Hammurabi's Code looks an awful lot like the Ten Commandments, and Hittite TREATIES may have also been at work.

A quick dip back into the story: After G*D gives out the Commandments, the people freak out and tell MOSHE that he should be the one talking to G*D. They're too scared.

We probably would have been as well! And, I am done! Once again.