

Exodus 18-20 Show Notes

Exodus 18: Jethro's Advice for how to run the Law Courts¹

1. Jethro arrives – Ex. 18.1-12.
 - a. Jethro, a descendant of Abraham through Keturah.²
 - b. Moses' two sons are mentioned: Gershom³ and Eliezer⁴ – Ex. 18.3-4.
 - c. Jethro came with Moses' wife – Ex. 18.5.⁵

¹ As early as the second century CE, it was recognized that this chapter is not in its proper sequence, and that these things took place after the revelation at Sinai. Jethro brings burnt offerings (v. 20), so an altar at this time must exist, only it was mentioned at Rephidim, not Sinai, and was “purely commemorative,” not “functional,” therefore it is concluded that Jethro must've arrived after the theophany at Sinai. See: Nahum Sarna, [The JPS Torah Commentary: Exodus](#), The Jewish Publication Society, 1991, p. p. 97.

² The Hebrew Bible calls Jethro ‘the priest of Midian,’ but modern revelation through Joseph Smith throws important light upon the priesthood of Jethro. According to the Doctrine and Covenants, section 84, Moses received the ‘Holy Priesthood ... under the hand of his father-in-law, Jethro.’ (D&C 84:6.) It is reasonable to believe that Jethro held the office of a high priest and may have presided over a branch of the church in Midian. (See JST, Ex. 18:1.)

The Midianites were descendants of Abraham, through the children of Keturah, wife of Abraham, therefore the Midianites, who were neighbors to the Israelites in Palestine, were related to the Israelites, and were Hebrews. As descendants of Abraham, they were entitled through their faithfulness to his blessings (see Abraham 2.9-11), and in the days of Moses and preceding them, in Midian the Priesthood was found. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Church History and Modern Revelation*, 4 vols. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1946-1949, 2: 103.

³ gay-resh-ome' גַּי־רֶשֶׁת־וֹמֵ' can mean “foreigner,” or “exile.”

⁴ Eliezer אֱלִיעֶזֶר means “God is help.”

⁵ [The Jewish Women's Archive](#) has a great collection of the Jewish traditions associated with Zipporah, as well as other women in the Hebrew Bible. They offer the following:

As with other major Biblical figures, the venue of the first encounter between Moses and Zipporah, his future wife, was beside a well (Ex. 2:15–17). In the midrashic expansion, when the daughters of Jethro returned home, they told their father that a stranger had saved them from the shepherds, and he asked them: “Why did you leave the man? Ask him in to break bread” (Ex. 2:20). With the words “to break bread” (implying marriage), Jethro hinted that Moses might marry one of them. Upon hearing her father, Zipporah immediately ran after Moses like a bird (*ke-zippor*, i.e., with alacrity, or eagerness) (Ex. *Rabbah* 1:32). According to this midrash, Zipporah wanted to marry Moses, acted accordingly, and achieved her goal.

A second tradition has Jethro deciding upon Zipporah's marriage to Moses after he brought Moses into his home and came to know his qualities. Jethro was one of the magicians of Egypt, and when he saw Pharaoh's staff with its magical symbols, he desired it and took it. He planted the staff in the garden of his house, and no man could approach it. When Jethro invited Moses into his house, the latter entered the garden and saw the staff. He read the symbols on it, extended his hand, and took it. When Jethro saw what Moses had done, he exclaimed: “This one will redeem Israel from Egypt,” and therefore gave him his daughter Zipporah in marriage (*Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* [ed. Higger], chap. 39).

In a third tradition, the initiative to marry Zipporah came from Moses himself. When he was with Jethro, he saw how fine were her actions. He went to Jethro and asked: “Give me your daughter Zipporah in marriage.” Jethro replied: “Do you want to do to me what your ancestor Jacob did? When Laban gave him his daughters, Jacob deceived him and fled far away. If you are asking me to give you Zipporah, swear to me that you will not take her far away from me; I will give her to you only upon this condition.” Moses immediately swore to him, as it is said:

- d. Jethro “rejoiced for all the goodness which the Lord had done to Israel” – Ex. 18.9.⁶
 - e. “I know that the Lord is greater than all the gods!” – Ex. 18.11.⁷
 - f. Jethro, Aaron, and “all the elders of Israel” ate bread before God – Ex. 18.12.⁸
2. The organization of the Law Courts – Ex. 18.13-27.
- a. Moses “sat to judge... from morning until evening” – Ex. 18.13.
 - b. “Thou will surely wear away” – Ex. 18.18.⁹
 - c. “Thou shalt provide... of all the people able men” – Ex. 18.21.¹⁰

“Moses consented [*va-yoel*] to stay with the man” (Ex. 2:21), understanding the word “*va-yoel*” as a customary wording of a vow. Because of this pledge, Moses had to return to Midian after he had been sent to Egypt, as it is said (Ex. 4:18): “Moses went back to his father-in-law Jether [*yeter*],” from which the Rabbis learn that Moses went to Egypt, but returned to Midian to be released from (*le-hatir*) his vow (Ex. *Rabbah* 2:33; Mann, *Fragments from the Geniza*, fragment 12, p. 95). See: [Zipporah: Midrash and Aggadah, Jewish Women’s Archive](#), accessed 3.8.22.

“This is the last time Zipporah is mentioned... No one seems to take any notice of Zipporah or her sons after these three are mentioned in Ex. 18.6... Most historians have been men, so that men have come to have an exaggerated opinion of their own importance in history; and human mores in the past have been dominated by a church whose officers were wholly male and largely celibate... Nothing is known about Zipporah, but **the Talmud says with creative remembrance that Moses turned first of all to the women when he needed help in making the people obey the law**; for he said, ‘Adam would never have sinned, if God had only given Eve the directions instead of Adam,’ thus showing how much he had learned from Zipporah of the wisdom and tact of women.” *The Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. by G. A. Buttrick et al. New York, Abingdon Press, 1952, vol. 1, p. 693.

⁶ Elder Neal A. Maxwell said, “Here in mortality, we already know moments when, “because of the great goodness of God,” there is a “gushing out of many tears” (3 Ne. 4:33). Our joy is brim (see Alma 26:11). Yet this is but a foretaste of the ultimate homecoming, when our cups will not only be brim, but will run over without ceasing!” *Ensign*, May 1988, 9.

⁷ This is a classic example of monolatry: the worship of one god without the denial of the existence of other gods. See: [Monolatry in the Old Testament](#).

⁸ This ceremonial meal may have possessed a judicial function. In the ancient Near East, treaties and pacts were often ratified by the involved parties participating in a solemn meal. This is also seen in the narrative of Abimelech and Isaac, as seen in Genesis 26.30, and between Jacob and Laban in Genesis 31.54. I see this as also being connected to the meal in Exodus 24.5,11 as well as the [D&C 27](#) and [Revelation 19.6-9](#), where it discusses “The Marriage Supper of the Lamb”: Μακάριοι οἱ εἰς τὸ δεῖπνον τοῦ γάμου τοῦ ἀρνίου κεκλημένοι = “In the state of the gods/blessed are they who are called into the marriage **supper/feast of the Lamb!**”

⁹ Elder Maxwell said, “We generally see the need for Moses to apply the delegation dimension, and we note how both we and those we serve—including family—can “wear away.” Moses was hearing every case! Worse still, however, this pattern kept him from his real duties, which were to “teach them ordinances and laws, and ... shew them the way wherein they must walk, and the work that they must do” (Ex. 18:20). The original Twelve were counseled that they were not to “serve tables” (see Acts 6:1–4). **Actually, serving tables is easy. It is visible, measurable, and do-able—compared to opening up the nations of the world to missionary work or to keeping wolves out of the flock.** But if the Twelve were drawn away from their scriptural and constitutional duties, the whole Church would suffer. **Being drawn away can happen to all of us, almost without our knowing it.** Elder Neal A. Maxwell, “Wisdom and Order,” *Ensign*, June 1994, 41–42.

¹⁰ In the time of Pharaoh Haremhab (1333-1306 BCE), a decree was issued in Egypt that reformed the Egyptian judiciary. He writes that he sought out “persons of integrity, good in character,” and placed them in the towns of Egypt. He gave them the following charge: “Do not enter into close relations with other people, do not accept a gift from another.” We see a parallel to Exodus 18.21 in another account as well. In the time of King Jehoshaphat (2 Chronicles 19.5-8) in 873-849 BCE, he appointed judges. These people were “in all the fortified towns of Judah, in each and every town.” They were charged to “Consider what you are doing, for you judge not on behalf of man, but on the behalf of the Lord, and He is with you when you pass judgment... act with care, for there is no injustice or favoritism or bribe taking with the Lord our God.” See: Sarna, p. 100. Joseph Smith set up a government

- d. The Lord trained individuals in the Spirit World in “so short a time” – [D&C 138.28-29](#). The Lord works to build His kingdom in such a way as to train his leaders.¹¹

Exodus 19-20: The Lord Invites Israel to be a Kingdom of Priests and Covenant with Him at Sinai¹²

1. Narrative Introduction – Ex. 19.1-3.
 - a. “The third month” – Ex. 19.1.

whereby the same kind of things could happen. John Taylor relates, “Some years ago, in Nauvoo, a gentleman in my hearing, a member of the Legislature, asked Joseph Smith how it was that he was enabled to govern so many people, and to preserve such perfect order; remarking at the same time that it was impossible for them to do it anywhere else. Mr. Smith remarked that it was very easy to do that. “How?” responded the gentleman; “to us it is very difficult.” Joseph Smith replied, “**I teach them correct principles, and they govern themselves.**” John Taylor, “The Organization of the Church,” *Millennial Star*, Nov. 15, 1851, p. 339.

¹¹ There aren't many places in which a leader can use a person who is struggling for worthiness. Unfortunately, it seems that those few situations in which we could use them—to offer prayers, to make brief responses, to bear testimony—are almost invariably reserved for the active: for the stake presidency, for the high council, for the bishopric, for the patriarch, for the auxiliary leaders. Indeed, we sometimes go to great lengths to import speakers and participants—to the loss of our hungry ones. At a ward sacrament meeting I attended recently a sister had been invited to sing whose husband was not active in the Church. He was, however, at the meeting. The bishop wanted a very special program for this occasion. His first announcement was: “Brother X, my first counselor, will give the opening prayer.” His second counselor gave the closing prayer. How unfortunate, I thought. The three men in the bishopric struggle with such concern over the spiritually sick, then take the very medicine that would make those people well—activity, participation—and consume it themselves in front of the needy! Boyd K. Packer, *Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled*, 16. See also 3 Nephi 26.16, as Jesus allows the children to teach.

¹² John Barton analyzes the complexity of the issues surrounding Exodus 19-20, contending that these laws were probably not initiated while Israel was in the wilderness, but many years later. His argument comes from a close reading of the text. He writes:

Within the Bible, considered as Torah, there are many individual laws and collections of laws in the more everyday sense of the term: directives on what is to be done in particular circumstances that come to court for adjudication, and also a number of general commandments or prohibitions given in the name of God. A major example of the latter is the Ten Commandments, sometimes known as the Decalogue, Greek for ‘ten words’. The laws occur in the Pentateuch, which is why this is sometimes called the Torah, within the narrative framework of a revelation to Moses by God during the journey of the people of Israel towards the Promised Land...**According to Exodus 19–20 this happened at Mount Sinai, vaguely located in the southern wilderness**, where Moses passed the laws directly on to the people. **According to Deuteronomy, Moses received laws at Sinai – though the mountain is called Horeb in Deuteronomy and other D passages – but did not communicate them to the people until they were in the plains of Moab across the Jordan, about to begin their push into the Land.** In both Exodus and Deuteronomy, the Ten Commandments come first (in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5), and so the more detailed laws that follow are presented as a spelling-out of the specific implications of these more general rules. **But originally the detailed laws probably existed independently of the Ten Commandments, as codes of law in their own right.**

There are **three main collections of laws in the Hebrew Bible**. The first is often referred to as the Book of the Covenant or the **Covenant Code**, and is found in Exodus 21–23. **The general consensus is that this is the oldest of the biblical law codes.** It presupposes a settled society, but one in which there is apparently no king, and for this reason is often thought to derive from pre-monarchic times. **If the people of Israel did wander in the desert, it is not reflected here: those addressed have houses and domestic animals, and live in towns with local shrines.** The popular belief, mirroring what the Old Testament tells us, that biblical legislation goes back to Moses and the wilderness is hard to accept once the details of this law code are pondered. Note ... the **italicized references that imply a settled, agrarian mode of life, with farmers living in houses...** John Barton, *A History of the Bible*, p. 81/645 electronic version.

2. Israel's destiny defined – Ex. 19.3-6.
 - a. If you obey, you will become: a peculiar treasure¹³, a kingdom of priests¹⁴, and a holy nation – Ex. 19.5-6.
 - b. "Eagles' wings" – Ex. 19.4.¹⁵
3. Israel's response – Ex. 19.7-8.
4. Preparations – Ex. 19.9-25.
 - a. This narrative portrays Sinai as the temple: both have a "tripartite division,"¹⁶ the summit of the mountain corresponds to the Holy of Holies, the second zone, partway up the mount, is equivalent to the Holy Place, and the foot of the mount is equivalent to the outer court.¹⁷
 - b. Israel is to "wash their clothes" – Ex. 19.10. This would also include personal cleanliness.
 - c. "come not at your wives" – Ex. 19.15.¹⁸

¹³ הַגִּלְדֹּת - *s^gullâ*. This denotes a treasure, or valued property. This is a cognate of an [Akkadian word *sikiltum*](#), meaning "acquisition," "valued property" or "beloved." D&C 101.3 uses the phrase "my jewels." With this in mind, we can connect these ideas to the jewels on the breastplate of the High Priest, who represents Christ. In this way, we can see Israel as God's *segullah*, right next to his heart. Christ literally bore all of Israel upon his heart while on the cross at Calvary. See: Victor Hamilton, [Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary](#), p. 303. Joseph Smith invites us to think about what it means to be the Lord's "jewels" or "segulla." He said: "Inasmuch as God hath said that He would have a tried people, that He would purge them as gold, now we think that this time He has chosen His own crucible, wherein we have been tried; and we think if we get through with any degree of safety, and shall have kept the faith, that it will be a sign to this generation, altogether sufficient to leave them without excuse; and we think also, it will be a trial of our faith equal to that of Abraham, and that the ancients will not have whereof to boast over us in the day of judgment, as being called to pass through heavier afflictions; that we may hold an even weight in the balance with them; but now, after having suffered so great sacrifice and having passed through so great a season of sorrow, we trust that a ram may be caught in the thicket speedily, to relieve the sons and daughters of Abraham from their great anxiety, and to light up the lamp of salvation upon their countenances, that they may hold on now, after having gone so far unto everlasting life." See: Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1938), 135–36. See also: Larry E. Dahl, ["The Abrahamic Test," in Sperry Symposium Classics: The Old Testament](#), edited by Paul Y. Hoskisson, Deseret Book, 2005.

¹⁴ The connection between this idea and the LDS temple are bountiful. In the temple, the Lord invites all into his power, his priesthood. Indeed, the sacrament of marriage is called "the order of the priesthood," something all Latter-day Saints would be wise to ponder and consider.

¹⁵ The king of birds, the eagle, impressed the writers of the Bible for their expansive wing span, ability to carry their young on their backs, and to soar to great heights at considerable speed, flying over great distances. Sarna, p. 103. When young eaglets first attempt to fly, the parents hover anxiously near. Should the young bird begin to falter from exhaustion, the parent bird is said to support the fledgling on its expanded, more powerful wings. Hoyt W. Brewster, [Doctrines and Covenants Encyclopedia](#), Bookcraft, 1988, p. 38. Jay and Donald Parry offer the following: "The eagle's wings symbolize deliverance from on high, which deliverance comes with swiftness and power. The Church after the days of Christ will be delivered by the same divine power that delivered the children of Israel from Egypt; as we read in Exodus, "Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself" (Ex. 19:4; see also Deut. 32:11-12; Isa. 40:31)." See: Parry, [Understanding the Book of Revelation](#), Revelation 12, Deseret Book, 2007.

¹⁶ Sarna, p. 105.

¹⁷ I would add this not only is this an allegory or type for the temple, it is our journey back to God. This is the "ascent" or the hero's journey.

¹⁸ Compare to 1 Samuel 21.4-5; 1Corinthians 7.5. **It was the general sentiment of antiquity that a ceremonial uncleanness attached even to the chastest sexual connection.** (Herod. i. 189, ii. 64; Hesiod. *Op. et D.*, 11. 733-4; Tibull, *Carni.* ii. 1, 11. 11, 12; Porphy., *De Abstinencia*, 4:7.) The Levitical law took the same view (Leviticus 15:18),

- d. “Thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud” – Ex. 19.16.¹⁹
- e. “The Lord came down upon mount Sinai” – Ex. 19.20.
- f. “Let not the priests break through to come up” – Ex. 19.24.²⁰

as did the Indian law (*Menu*, v. 63), the Persian (*Zendavesta*, quoted by Bähr, *Symbolik*, vol. ii., p. 466), and the Mahometan (*Koran*, iv. 5). [Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers](#).

¹⁹ “I testify that the Jehovah introduced by thunderings and lightnings to a gathered Israel at Sinai (see Ex. 19:16–18) **is the same Jesus** who later lamented, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem ... how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings.” (Matt. 23:37.) **I thank him for such repeated reachings out to mankind, whether in phenomenal power or in quiet conversation at a wellside.**” Elder Neal A. Maxwell, *Ensign*, May 1976, 27.

²⁰ According to Exodus 28-29, the priesthood was not established in Israel until after the revelation at Sinai. This would make this verse anachronistic. Many scholars see this verse as reflecting a different strand of tradition about the origins of the institution of priesthood. Sarna, p. 107. Friedman places this verse, as well as much of Exodus 19, as J. Friedman also acknowledges the complexity of the issue, as J does not present Aaron as participating with Moses in any of these events, in fact, Aaron is not even mentioned in J up to the text of Exodus 19. He posits that a later redactor had to have inserted Aaron into this part of the story to deal with the fact that Moses' ascent in E along with Aaron and other persons is now inserted before the J account of an ascent that Moses makes alone in Exodus 34. See: Friedman, [The Bible with Sources Revealed](#), p. 152-153. As a Latter-day Saint reader, this would not present the same problems, as our theology allows for a priesthood to predate the things discussed in Exodus 28-29, as Adam would be considered the first priest.

Barton offers an argument that these commandments do not reflect a nomadic lifestyle:

Surely these are the bedrock of Israel's laws, and they, at least, go back to Moses? Again we have to ask what situation the Commandments presuppose. The two listings, in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, differ little in content. They include moral principles common to almost every human society (prohibitions of theft, adultery and murder), which could come from any period in the history of Israel. But they also contain legislation implying, again, a settled agrarian community. **The person who is addressed by the Sabbath law has slaves and domesticated animals to help him with his farm; his neighbour has a house that someone could covet. He is clearly not nomadic in lifestyle, nor does he live in the desert, but in a fertile land.** The only theory that will preserve a Mosaic origin for such laws is the Bible's implication that Moses gave these laws as a matter of prophetic foresight: he knew that, once the tribes got into the Land, they would need them. But on any normal evaluation of the origins of legislation like this, we would judge that it came from a settled culture, the culture that prevailed in the days of the Hebrew kings, or just before it, as described in the book of Judges.

By the end of the nineteenth century it was usual for Old Testament scholars to think of the Ten Commandments as a distillation of the ethical teaching of the great prophets such as Amos, Hosea and Isaiah. In the twentieth century there was a conservative backlash against so late a dating, allied with the general sense that biblical archaeology had undermined scholarly scepticism about early Israel...This optimism about reconstructing early Israel proved short-lived, and the majority view would now be that we know little if anything about Moses as a historical figure, any more than we know about Abraham and his descendants. And with this goes a willingness again to contemplate the possibility that the Decalogue is a comparatively late arrival, probably later than the individual laws in the Covenant and Deuteronomic Codes that were arranged to look as though they are a detailed spelling-out of its implications. The Ten Commandments now appear in both contexts as a prologue to the detailed laws, but (like the Foreword to many books, usually written last) **they were probably compiled later than those laws.**

Even so, **the Commandments may have passed through a series of stages in their composition.** Some have tried to reconstruct an original core of just ten pithy rules, but this has led to no agreement, and has been largely abandoned in favour of seeing the texts as an amalgam of elements of differing date. The murder-adultery-theft section reflects a number of old texts such as Hosea 4:2 ('Swearing, lying, and murder, and stealing and adultery

- g. [D&C 84.17-27](#) give Latter-day Saints added context to the ideas expressed in these chapters of Exodus.
5. The Ten Commandments – Ex. 20.1-17.²¹
- a. **A Modern Day Ten Commandments:** D&C 42 and 59. Understanding the revelations and commandments of our day is as important for us as the Ten Commandments were for ancient Israel.²²
 - i. Do not kill – D&C 42.18.
 - ii. Do not steal – D&C 42.20.
 - iii. Do not lie – D&C 42.21.

break out’) and Jeremiah 7:9 (‘Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal . . . ?’). The opening section, describing Yahweh as the God who brought Israel out of Egypt, looks more like a reflection on the stories in the Pentateuch after they had crystallized into their present form. The law about coveting seems an oddity, in that it prohibits a sin of thought rather than, like the others, a sin of action. The communities that revere the Commandments cannot even agree on how they are to be divided into ten discrete rules: Jews and many Protestants distinguish the precept to have no other gods before Yahweh as the First Commandment and the prohibition of images as the Second, whereas Catholics and Lutherans run these together as two aspects of the same sin, and then divide the Tenth Commandment into (a) coveting your neighbour’s house and (b) coveting anything else that is your neighbour’s, so as to make up the requisite tally of ten. (The Jewish division seems more logical, since worshipping only one God and not using images are two separate issues, while there is no particular reason to introduce a division into the law against coveting.) This in itself shows that the text is not totally coherent as a list of exactly ten items, and must have some kind of history of growth, even if we cannot reconstruct it. **It is also obvious that some of the Commandments have lengthy explanations and motivations, whereas others are short and crisp, and to any biblical specialist this immediately suggests a long period of transmission in which the text has been embroidered.** Barton, *A History*, 84/645 electronic version.

²¹ In rabbinic legend, the ten commandments were offered by God to all the world. That these pronouncement were made in the wilderness, and not within any national boundary, highlights the universal nature of these laws. It was also said to have been translated into all the languages of mankind. See: Sarna, p. 108. Founding Father John Adams wrote, “The Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount contain my religion” - John Adams, Nov. 4, 1816, letter to Thomas Jefferson.

President Benson stated, “I would urge you to heed strictly the commandments of God, particularly the Ten Commandments. As long as we regard God as our Sovereign and uphold His laws, we shall be free from bondage and be protected from external danger. **God has not left us alone to flounder over right and wrong in the area of personal ethics and morality. His laws are circumscribed in the Decalogue—the Ten Commandments.** These laws embody our relationships with God, family, and fellowmen. Yes, the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount are the foundation principles upon “which our personal happiness is predicated. To disregard them will lead to inevitable personal character loss and ruin.” *The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988], 353.

²² The Prophet Joseph Smith put it this way: “To every church in past ages which the Lord recognized to be His, He gave revelations, wisely calculated to govern them in the peculiar situation and circumstances under which they were placed, and to enable them by authority to do the peculiar work which they were to perform. **The Bible contains revelations given at different times to different people, under different circumstances...**The old world was destroyed for rejecting the revelations of God given to them through Noah. The Israelites were destroyed in the wilderness for despising the revelations given to them through Moses; and **Christ said that the world, in the days of the Apostles, would be condemned for not receiving the word of God through them: Thus we see that the judgments of God in the past ages have come upon the people not so much for neglecting the revelations given to their forefathers, as for rejecting those given immediately to themselves.**” Joseph Smith, *HC* 1:277-278.

- iv. Love your wife – D&C 42.22-26.²³
 - v. Do not speak evil of your neighbor, nor do him harm – D&C 42.27.
 - vi. Remember the poor, and consecrate your property for their support – D&C 42.30.
 - vii. Be not proud – D&C 42.40.
 - viii. Do not be idle – D&C 42.42.²⁴
 - ix. Live the truth in love – D&C 42.45.
 - x. Thank the Lord in all things – D&C 59.5-6.
- b. Tablets of stone – Ex. 34.1 “Hew two tables of stone like unto the first”²⁵
 - c. “Ye shall have no other gods before me!” – Ex. 20.3. Hebrew does not have a verb “to have,” but expresses possession by *h-y-h le-*, literally “to be to.” Since the idea of

²³ “When the Lord says all thy heart, it allows for no sharing nor dividing nor depriving. And, to the woman it is paraphrased: “Thou shalt love thy husband with all thy heart and shalt cleave unto him and none else.” The words none else eliminate everyone and everything. The spouse then becomes preeminent in the life of the husband or wife, and neither social life nor occupational life nor political life nor any other interest nor person nor thing shall ever take precedence over the companion spouse. The Lord says: “Thou shalt cleave unto him and none else.” Marriage presupposes total allegiance and total fidelity. Each spouse takes the partner with the understanding that he or she gives totally to the spouse all the heart, strength, loyalty, honor, and affection, with all dignity. Any divergence is sin; any sharing of the heart is transgression” Spencer W. Kimball, *Faith Precedes the Miracle*, 142-143.

²⁴ Do not shift the burden of your maintenance onto someone else. President Kimball taught: “The responsibility for each person's social, emotional, spiritual, physical, or economic well-being rests first upon himself, second upon his family, and third upon the Church if he is a faithful member thereof. No true Latter-day Saint, while physically or emotionally able, will voluntarily shift the burden of his own or his family's well-being to someone else. So long as he can, under the inspiration of the Lord and with his own labors, he will supply himself and his family with the spiritual and temporal necessities of life.” Spencer W. Kimball, *Teaching of Spencer W. Kimball*, 366.

Marion G. Romney ([The Celestial Nature of Self-Reliance](#)) shared this story relating to the importance of self-reliance: “I clipped the following article from the *Reader's Digest* some time ago and have told it before, but it bears repeating. It reads:

“In our friendly neighbor city of St. Augustine great flocks of sea gulls are starving amid plenty. Fishing is still good, but the gulls don't know how to fish. For generations they have depended on the shrimp fleet to toss them scraps from the nets. Now the fleet has moved. ...“The shrimpers had created a Welfare State for the ... sea gulls. The big birds never bothered to learn how to fish for themselves and they never taught their children to fish. Instead they led their little ones to the shrimp nets. “Now the sea gulls, the fine free birds that almost symbolize liberty itself, are starving to death because they gave in to the ‘something for nothing’ lure! They sacrificed their independence for a handout. “A lot of people are like that, too. They see nothing wrong in picking delectable scraps from the tax nets of the U.S. Government's ‘shrimp fleet.’ But what will happen when the Government runs out of goods? What about our children of generations to come? **“Let's not be gullible gulls. We ... must preserve our talents of self-sufficiency, our genius for creating things for ourselves, our sense of thrift and our true love of independence.”** “Fable of the Gullible Gull,” *Reader's Digest*, Oct. 1950, p. 32. See: Marion G. Romney, [The Celestial Nature of Self-Reliance](#), October 1982 Conference.

²⁵ The practice of recording covenants on tablets was well rooted in the biblical world, as was also the custom, mentioned in Ex. 25.16, of depositing the document in the sanctuary. There was Jewish tradition that the two tablets have each contained the five declarations, but this would have resulted in a substantial imbalance, as one tablet would have had 146 Hebrew words and the other only 26. The Palestinian Talmud had the tradition preserved that the two tablets both had the entire decalogue contained on them, thus preserving a copy of the first set. See: Sarna, p. 108.

possession necessarily involves relationship, the same term is used for entering into a marriage bond and for establishing the covenant between God and Israel.²⁶

- d. No “graven image” – Ex. 20.4.²⁷
- e. “I am a jealous God!” – Ex. 20.5²⁸
- f. “Visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation” – Ex. 20.5²⁹
- g. “Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain” – Ex. 20.7.³⁰ See also: D&C 63.61-62.

²⁶ Sarna, p. 109. The text literally reads as follows: לֹא יִהְיֶה-לְךָ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים עַל-פְּנֶיךָ! My literal translation: “To you will be no **elohim** (gods/divine beings), no **other** above/to/upon my face.” The preposition ‘*al*’ has some flexibility here. Other translations: “You shall have no other gods beside me” (Robert Alter & N. Sarna). “Thou shalt have no Elohim acherim in My presence” (Orthodox Jewish Bible). “You may worship no other god than me” (Living Bible). “You shall not have other gods instead of me” (New Catholic Bible).

²⁷ Modern Judaism conceives of God as something that cannot be depicted. They take literal the words in Deuteronomy 4.12, 15-19 where it is said that the people heard the “sound of the words” at Sinai but “perceived no shape,” as to them, God has no shape or form. Sarna, p. 110.

²⁸ Jealous: קָנָא *qannā*; “jealous,” this word is used only of God. See: *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, Hendrickson, 2020, p. 888. N. Sarna relates, “The Hebrew stem *k-n*’, in its primitive meaning, seems to have denoted “to become intensely red.” Because extreme and intense emotions affect facial coloration, the term came, by extension, to express ardor, zeal, rage, and jealousy. It is used in a variety of contexts, even with God as the referent.” Sarna seems okay with using the idea “an impassioned God,” and relates this to the idea that through the covenant Israel is in a “marriage bond” state with God. Sarna, p. 110.

The meaning of *jealous* is revealing. Its Hebrew origin means “possessing sensitive and deep feelings” (Exodus 20:5, footnote b). Thus we offend God when we “serve” other gods—when we have other first priorities. Elder Neal A. Maxwell, *Conference Report*, Oct. 2013, 72.

The second part of the verse in Greek reads as follows:

ἐγὼ γὰρ εἶμι κύριος ὁ θεὸς σου θεὸς ζηλωτῆς ἀποδιδοῦς ἀμαρτίας πατέρων ἐπὶ τέκνα ἕως τρίτης καὶ τετάρτης γενεᾶς τοῖς μισοῦσίν με

My translation: “For I am the LORD thy God, a Jealous *one*, delivering over the sins of the fathers upon the children until the third and fourth generation of them hating me.”

²⁹ Infidels will say to you: “How unjust, how unmerciful, how un-Godlike it is to visit the iniquities of the parents upon the children to the third and fourth generations of them that hate God.” How do you see it? This way; and it is strictly in accordance with God's law. **The infidel will impart infidelity to his children if he can. The whoremonger will not raise a pure, righteous posterity.** He will impart seeds of disease and misery, if not of death and destruction, upon his offspring, which will continue upon his children and descend to his children's children to the third and fourth generation. It is perfectly natural that the children should inherit from their fathers, and if they sow the seeds of corruption, crime and loathsome disease, their children will reap the fruits thereof. Not in accordance with God's wishes for His wish is that men will not sin and therefore will not transmit the consequences of their sin to their children, but that they will keep His commandments, and be free from sin and from entailing the effects of sin upon their offspring; **but inasmuch as men will not hearken unto the Lord, but will become a law unto themselves, and will commit sin they will justly reap the consequences of their own iniquity, and will naturally impart its fruits to their children to the third and fourth generation.** The laws of nature are the laws of God, who is just; it is not God that inflicts these penalties, they are the effects of disobedience to His law. The results of men's own acts follow them. Joseph F. Smith, *Conference Report*, October 1912, 9.

³⁰ “Violating the third commandment has as much to do with the way we live and the way we are as it does with the way we speak. It is tied to our eternal perspective—the way we think and act upon sacred things. We cannot

- h. “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy” – Ex. 20.8.³¹
- i. “Honor thy father and thy mother” – Ex. 20.12.
- j. “Thou shalt not kill” – Ex. 20.13³²
- k. “Thou shalt not commit adultery” – Ex. 20.14.³³
- l. “Thou shalt not steal” – Ex. 20.15.

fully appreciate the seriousness of violating this commandment without understanding what it means for people to take the name of God upon themselves, and then for them to speak and act and pray in the name of the Lord.” Robert L. Millet, “Honoring His Holy Name,” *Ensign*, Mar. 1994, 7.

President Hinckley taught the importance of the words we use when he taught the following:

“When I was a small boy in the first grade, I experienced what I thought was a rather tough day at school. I came home, walked in the house, threw my book on the kitchen table, and **let forth an expletive** that included the name of the Lord. **My mother was shocked.** She told me quietly, but firmly, how wrong I was. She told me that I could not have words of that kind coming out of my mouth. She led me by the hand into the bathroom, where she took from the shelf a clean washcloth, put it under the faucet, and then generously coated it with soap. She said, **“We’ll have to wash out your mouth.”** She told me to open it, and I did so reluctantly. Then she rubbed the soapy washcloth around my tongue and teeth. I sputtered and fumed and felt like swearing again, but I didn’t. I rinsed and rinsed my mouth, but it was a long while before the soapy taste was gone. In fact, whenever I think of that experience, I can still taste the soap. The lesson was worthwhile. I think I can say that I have tried to avoid using the name of the Lord in vain since that day. I am grateful for that lesson. President Hinckley, *Ensign*, Nov. 1987, 46.

³¹ Wilford Woodruff taught: “I was brought up under the blue laws of Connecticut, when Presbyterianism ruled throughout the state as the religion of that state; and I dared no more go out to play on a Sunday than I dared put my hand in the fire. It would have been considered an unpardonable sin. We could not attend a ball and dance; we did not dare attend a theatre, and from Saturday night, at sundown, to Monday morning, we must not laugh or smile, but we must study our catechism. This we had to do whether we were members of the Church or not. My father was not a member of any church. This early teaching had its effect upon me.” *Journal of Discourses*, 11:61.

³² Elder M. Russell Ballard taught: “I feel that judgment for sin is not always as cut-and-dried as some of us seem to think. The Lord said, “Thou shalt not kill.” **Does that mean that every person who kills will be condemned, no matter the circumstances? Civil law recognizes that there are gradations in this matter**—from accidental manslaughter to self-defense to first-degree murder. I feel that the Lord also recognizes differences in intent and circumstances: **Was the person who took his life mentally ill?** Was he or she so deeply depressed as to be unbalanced or otherwise emotionally disturbed? Was the suicide a tragic, pitiful call for help that went unheeded too long or progressed faster than the victim intended? Did he or she somehow not understand the seriousness of the act? Was he or she suffering from a chemical imbalance that led to despair and a loss of self-control? Obviously, **we do not know the full circumstances surrounding every suicide. Only the Lord knows all the details, and he it is who will judge our actions here on earth.** When he does judge us, I feel he will take all things into consideration: our genetic and chemical makeup, our mental state, our intellectual capacity, the teachings we have received, the traditions of our fathers, our health, and so forth. *Ensign*, Oct. 1987, 7-8.

³³ Elder Dallin H. Oaks taught: **“Outside the bonds of marriage, all uses of the procreative power are to one degree or another a sinful degrading and perversion of the most divine attribute of men and women.** The Book of Mormon teaches that unchastity is “most abominable above all sins save it be the shedding of innocent blood or denying the Holy Ghost” (Alma 39:5). In our own day, the First Presidency of the Church has declared the doctrine of this Church “that sexual sin—the illicit sexual relations of men and women—stands, in its enormity, next to murder” (“Message of the First Presidency,” 6:176). Some who do not know the plan of salvation behave like promiscuous animals, but Latter-day Saints—especially those who are under sacred covenants—have no such latitude. We are solemnly responsible to God for the destruction or misuse of the creative powers he has placed within us. *Ensign*, Nov. 1993, 74.

- m. "Thou shalt not bear false witness" – Ex. 20.16.³⁴
- n. "Thou shalt not covet" – Ex. 20.17.³⁵

³⁴ President Hinckley taught: "I believe that honesty is still the best policy. What a destructive thing is a little dishonesty. It has become a cankering disease in our society. Every insurance adjustor can tell you of the soaring costs of dishonest claims. Cheating in the payment of taxes robs the treasury of millions and places undue burdens on those who pay. Employee theft, padded expense accounts, and similar things bring tremendous losses to business institutions. The institution may be able to stand the loss of money, but the individual cannot afford the loss of self-respect." Gordon B. Hinckley, "This I Believe," *BYU 1991-92 Devotional and Fireside Speeches*, March 1, 1992, p. 79.

He also shared this story:

A letter and an old ash tray came to the office of the Presiding Bishop the other day. The letter reads: "Dear Sir, I stole the enclosed ash tray from your hotel in 1965. After these many years, I want to apologize to you and ask for your forgiveness for my wrong doing. I have enclosed a check that attempts to reimburse you for the ash tray."

The check was in the amount of \$26.00, one dollar for each year he had kept the ash tray. I can imagine that during those twenty-six years, each time he tapped his cigarette on the rim of that tray he suffered a twinge of conscience. I do not know that the hotel ever missed the ash tray, but the man who took it missed his peace of mind for more than a quarter of a century and finally ended up paying far more for it than it was worth. Yes, my brethren and sisters, honesty is the best policy. *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley*, Deseret Book, 1997, p. 268-269.

He who permits himself to tell a lie once, finds it much easier to do it a second and third time, till at length it becomes habitual; he tells lies without attending to it, and truths without the world's believing him. This falsehood of the tongue leads to that of the heart, and in time depraves all its good dispositions. Thomas Jefferson, letter to Peter Carr, Aug. 19, 1785.

³⁵ President Hinckley taught:

I wish to discuss a trap that can destroy any of us in our search for joy and happiness. It is that devious, sinister, evil influence that says, "What I have is not enough. I must have more."

When the finger of the Lord wrote the Ten Commandments on the tablets of stone, He gave as the tenth and final commandment: "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife..." (Ex. 20:17.)

There have been many changes in this world since that time, but human nature has not changed. I have observed that there are many in our present generation who with careful design set out on a course to get rich while still young, to drive fancy automobiles, to wear the best of clothing, to have an apartment in the city and a house in the country—all of these, and more. This is the total end for which they live, and for some the means by which they get there is unimportant in terms of ethics and morality. They covet that which others have, and selfishness and even greed are all a part of their process of acquisitiveness.

Now, I know that everyone wants to succeed, and I wish that everyone might succeed. But we must be careful of how we measure success. One need only read the daily newspapers to know of case after case of those whose driving, **selfish impulses have led to trouble and serious, abysmal failure. Some of those who once drove about in the fanciest of cars and owned the fanciest of homes are now languishing in prison.** They are, without question, persons of tremendous capacity and ability. They have good minds, but their cleverness led to their downfall.

6. I have talked with you from heaven! – Ex. 20.22.
7. Make altars, but not with tools! – Ex. 20.24-25.³⁶
8. Do not construct steps leading to the altar! – Ex. 20.26.³⁷

I think if the Lord were speaking today and giving us the last of the Ten Commandments, He might say, “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s wife, nor his position in society, nor his car, nor his boat, nor anything that is thy neighbor’s.” Gordon B. Hinckley, “Thou Shalt Not Covet,” *Ensign*, Mar. 1990, 2.

³⁶ Rashi (1040-1105 CE), seeing that *הָרֵב* *hereb* “tool” can be also read as “sword,” and since a sword shortens life, and these altars are all about extending life, thus increasing atonement, therefore the sword, or tool, should not be used. See Rashi’s commentary on this verse [here](#).

³⁷ This had to do with the modesty required of the layman, not the priests, as priests clothing included “linen breeches to cover their nakedness” (Ex. 28.42). Sarna relates that the altar had to be designed so as to not reveal the nakedness of these individuals. He thus concludes that the “official altar” was approached by steps. This contrasts with the many scenes in ancient Near Eastern art that feature priests officiating in the nude. Ritual nudity is a phenomenon known to many religions. It is symbolically associated with both death and rebirth. He also relates that the dress of the ordinary person included a shirtlike garb, but not breeches. He adds that the Israelite altar excavated at Tel Dan, dating from the first half of the 8th century BCE, has “a wide, monumental stairway built against the southern face of the platform on which it stands. In the Second Temple, however, the altar was approached by a ramp.” Sarna, p. 117.