

## Exodus 19-20, 24, 31-34 Podcast notes

### Exodus 19-20: The Lord Invites Israel to be a Kingdom of Priests and Covenant with Him at Sinai<sup>1</sup>

#### The commandments as an invitation for a relationship

Emily Belle Freeman stated, “We call this walking the covenant path—a path that begins with the covenant of baptism and leads to deeper covenants we make in the temple. Perhaps you hear those words and think of checkboxes. Maybe all you see is a path of requirements. A closer look reveals something more compelling. A covenant is not only about a contract, although that is important. It’s about a relationship. President Russell M. Nelson taught, “The covenant path is all about our relationship with God.”<sup>2</sup>

1. Narrative Introduction – Ex. 19.1-3.
  - a. “The third month” – Ex. 19.1.
2. Israel’s destiny defined – Ex. 19.3-6.

---

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> Emily Belle Freeman, “[Walking the Covenant Relationship with Christ](#),” October 2021 General Conference.

- a. If you obey, you will become: a peculiar treasure<sup>3</sup>, a kingdom of priests<sup>4</sup>, and a holy nation – Ex. 19.5-6.
- b. “Eagles’ wings” – Ex. 19.4.<sup>5</sup>
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,”<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup>
  - 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.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> סְגֻלָּה - *s<sup>3</sup>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.

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> Sarna, p. 105.

<sup>7</sup> 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.

<sup>8</sup> 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 Abstemtia*, 4:7.) The Levitical law took the same view (Leviticus 15:18),

- d. “Thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud” – Ex. 19.16.<sup>9</sup>
- e. “The Lord came down upon mount Sinai” – Ex. 19.20.
- f. “Let not the priests break through to come up” – Ex. 19.24.<sup>10</sup>

---

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](#).

<sup>9</sup> “I testify that the Jehovah introduced by thunders 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.

<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup>
  - 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.<sup>12</sup>
    - 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.

<sup>11</sup> 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.

<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup>
  - 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.<sup>14</sup>
  - 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”<sup>15</sup>
  - 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

---

<sup>13</sup> “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.

<sup>14</sup> 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.

<sup>15</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup>

- d. No “graven image” – Ex. 20.4.<sup>17</sup>
- e. “I am a jealous God!” – Ex. 20.5<sup>18</sup>
- f. “Visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation” – Ex. 20.5<sup>19</sup>
- g. “Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain” – Ex. 20.7.<sup>20</sup> See also: D&C 63.61-62.

<sup>16</sup> Sarna, p. 109. The text literally reads as follows: לֹא יִהְיֶה לְךָ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים עַל-פְּנֵי 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).

<sup>17</sup> 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.

<sup>18</sup> Jealous: קַנָּא *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 γάρ εἰμι κύριος ὁ θεός 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.”

<sup>19</sup> 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.

<sup>20</sup> “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.<sup>21</sup>
- i. “Honor thy father and thy mother” – Ex. 20.12.
- j. “Thou shalt not kill” – Ex. 20.13<sup>22</sup>
- k. “Thou shalt not commit adultery” – Ex. 20.14.<sup>23</sup>
- 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.

<sup>21</sup> 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.

<sup>22</sup> 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.

<sup>23</sup> 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.<sup>24</sup>
- n. "Thou shalt not covet" – Ex. 20.17.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> 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.

<sup>25</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup>
8. Do not construct steps leading to the altar! – Ex. 20.26.<sup>27</sup>

### Exodus 21.1-24.18: The Book of the Covenant - The Laws

1. Civil and criminal matters, The Covenant Code – Ex. 21.2—23.19.<sup>28</sup>

---

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.

<sup>26</sup> Rashi (1040-1105 CE), seeing that חֵרֶב *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](#).

<sup>27</sup> 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 8<sup>th</sup> 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.

<sup>28</sup> Ex. 21.1-23.19 is a law code known as **The Covenant Code** and was originally a separate, independent document, but was used by the Elohist as part of his work. See: Friedman, *Sources*, p. 154. Two codes (or possibly fragments of codes) have been identified in the Hebrew Bible: **The Covenant Code (CC)**, found in chapters 21 and 22 of Exodus and **The Deuteronomistic Code (DC)**, scattered over chapters 15–25 of Deuteronomy, with the main concentration in chapters 21 and 22. (*A History of Ancient Near Eastern Law*, edited by Raymond Westbrook, Volume One, Brill, 2003, p. 9.) Biblical scholar Albrecht Alt published an analysis of the Covenant Code in 1934 which focused on the distinction between casuistic and apodictic law. (Raymond Westbrook, “What is the Covenant Code?” in *Theory and Method in Biblical and Cuneiform Law: Revision, Interpolation and Development*, ed. B.M. Levinson (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 16.) The Covenant Code comprises mostly of [case law](#) (often in the form of an “if-then” statement, in which specific situations are addressed), as for example Exodus 21.28, “If an ox will gore a man or woman and they die, the ox shall be stoned...” [Apodictic laws](#) (characterized by absolute or general commands or prohibitions, as in the Ten Commandments) on the other hand, also appear in the Covenant Code, for example in Exodus 21.17, “Whoever curses father or mother shall be put to death.” Albrecht Alt claimed, though some scholars disagree, that the apodictic laws were a feature only found in Israelite codes (Westbrook, p. 16). Scholars do, however, agree that the contrast between the apodictic and case laws can give us clues as to how multiple sources of law were edited together into the Covenant Code, although there remain disagreements over the precise details.

Tikva Frymer-Kenski states that three distinct bodies of law codes exist in the Pentateuch: “The Pentateuch contains **three distinct legal corpora**: the **Book of the Covenant** (Exod. 20:22–23:19), the **laws of Leviticus-Numbers 11**, and the **Deuteronomistic laws** (Deut. 12–26). These collections have a long antecedent tradition in the ancient Near East, a tradition that goes back to the southern Mesopotamian law “codes” from Sumer and Babylon. Like those collections, the biblical ones are not “codes” in the sense of legislation but rather represent the jurisprudence of the day: **the best possible legal scenarios presented** as a combination of pronouncements and case law” (*A History of Ancient Near Eastern Law*, p. 976-977.)

It is important to note the likelihood that these laws in the Covenant Code had an earlier source. Without going into too much detail here, I would refer those interested parties to read David Wright’s material on the subject. He explained: “**The biblical text imitated the structure of this Akkadian text and drew upon its content to create the**

- a. Slave law – Ex. 21.2-11.<sup>29</sup>
- b. Three capital offenses – Ex. 21.12-17.
- c. Bodily injury inflicted by persons – Ex. 21.18-27.
- d. Killer beasts – Ex. 21.28-30.
- e. Damage to livestock – Ex. 21.33-36.
- f. Theft – Ex. 22.1-4.
- g. Crop damage – Ex. 22.5-6.
- h. Guardianship of another's movables or livestock – Ex. 22.6-15.
- i. The Law of seduction – Ex. 22.16-17.
- j. Prohibition of sorcery – Ex. 22.18.
- k. Prohibition of bestiality – Ex. 22.19.
- l. Prohibition of apostasy – Ex. 22.20.
- m. Concern for the poor, widows, strangers – Ex. 22.21-27.
- n. Duties to God – Ex. 22.28-31.
  - i. Ex. 22.31 says, "Neither shall ye eat any flesh that is torn of beasts in the field; ye shall cast it to the dogs."<sup>30</sup> Note that the wicked "eat the carcasses of beasts" due to their wickedness in Ether 9.34.
- o. Judicial Integrity – Ex. 23.1-3.
- p. Humane treatment of your enemy – Ex. 23.4-5.
- q. A series of other laws – Ex. 23.6-9.
- r. Agricultural law – Ex. 23.10-13.
- s. Religious calendar – Ex. 23.14-17.
- t. Do not cook a kid in its mother's milk – Ex. 23.18-20.<sup>31</sup>
- u. A renewal of the Divine Promises – Ex. 23.20-33.

---

**central casuistic laws of Exodus 21:2–22:19**, as well as the outer sections of apodictic law in Exodus 20:23–26 (along with the introduction of 21:1) and 22:20–23:19.2 **This primary use of the Laws of Hammurabi was supplemented** with the occasional use of material from other cuneiform law collections and from native Israelite-Judean sources and traditions. **The time for this textual borrowing was most likely during the Neo-Assyrian period**, specifically sometime **between 740 and 640 BCE**, when Mesopotamia exerted strong and relatively continuous political control and cultural sway over the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, and a time when the Laws of Hammurabi were actively copied in Mesopotamia as a literary-canonical text. The Covenant Code also appears to be a unified composition, given the influence of Hammurabi's laws throughout, the thematic integrity resulting from this, the unique scribal talents and interests necessary for the text's composition, and its temporal proximity to the basic laws of Deuteronomy, which depend on the Covenant Code's laws and date not much later, probably to the latter half of the seventh century. Moreover, because the Covenant Code is largely a creative rewriting of Mesopotamian sources, it is to be viewed as an academic abstraction rather than a digest of laws practiced by Israelites and Judeans over the course of centuries. Its selective character and the manner in which it reshapes the political and theological landscape of the Laws of Hammurabi, in fact, make it appear to be preeminently an ideological document, a response to Assyrian political and cultural domination." David Wright, *Inventing God's Law: How the Covenant Code of the Bible Used and Revised the Laws of Hammurabi*, Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 3-4.

<sup>29</sup> For more on the slave laws in the Hebrew Bible, their similarities and differences, see: [Slave Laws in the Old Testament](#).

<sup>30</sup> "And the flesh in the field that is torn by wild beasts (טֶרֶף) you are not to eat, to the dogs will you throw it away."

<sup>31</sup> This helps explain the prohibition of mixing all meat and milk at meals (meaning all dairy products). Sarna, p. 147.

- i. “thou shalt utterly overthrow them, and quite break down their **images**” – Ex. 23.24. Hebrew **מַצֵּבָה** *matsevah* derives from the stem נָצַב *n-ts-v*, “to stand.” It denotes a single, upright slab of stone. Believed to be the repository of a divinity or spirit, it was often used as a cultic object and was therefore considered by Israelite religion to be idolatrous.”<sup>32</sup>

### Exodus 24: The Ratification of the Covenant with God (Ex. 24.1-15a = E, 24.15b = P)

1. The People Agree to the Covenant – Ex. 24.1-11.
  - a. Moses tells the people “all the words of the Lord” and they all agree – Ex. 24.3.
  - b. Moses builds “twelve pillars” and an altar under the mountain – Ex. 24.4.<sup>33</sup>
  - c. Sacrifices are made, Moses sprinkled (יִזְרֹק) the blood upon the altar and upon the people – Ex. 24.5-8.
  - d. Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy elders of Israel see God and eat and drink with him – Ex. 24.9-11.<sup>34</sup>
    - i. “They saw the God of Israel” – Ex. 24.10. וַיִּרְאוּ אֶת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Sarna, p. 148. I find this very interesting, for the very reason that this is what the early Patriarchs in Genesis were doing. For example, in Genesis 35.14 we read that “Jacob set up a pillar (מַצֵּבָה - *matsevah*) in the place where he talked with him, even a pillar of stone: and he poured a drink offering thereon, and he poured oil thereon.” I would argue that some of the prohibitions in the Mosaic laws directly contradict the visionary men of earlier times of the Hebrew Bible, this being one important example.

<sup>33</sup> וַיִּבֶן מִזְבֵּחַ תַּחַת הַהָר וּשְׁתֵּים עָשָׂר מַצֵּבָה *matsevah* – pillars” (Ex. 24.4). Note the interesting conflict here regarding these things. I would argue that it isn’t the *matsevah* that are at issue, rather, it is how they are used and what god is being worshipped.

<sup>34</sup> This eating and drinking is the covenant meal that the Saints will one day partake of (D&C 27). This meal is also mentioned in **Revelation 19** when it says, “Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed *are* they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God” (Revelation 19.7-9).

“Μακάριοι οἱ εἰς τὸ δεῖπνον τοῦ γάμου τοῦ ἀρνίου κεκλημένοι” – “In the state of the Gods (blessed) are they that are called into the marriage **feast** of the Lamb!”

<sup>35</sup> וַיִּרְאוּ אֶת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל literally translated reads as “And they saw the God(s) of Israel.” This is a simple statement in the Hebrew, with the exception of אֱלֹהֵי, the plural added to “God,” but translators make this singular. Sarna states that “Maimonides maintains that seeing God refers not to perception by the sense but to perception by the intellect.” Sarna, p. 153.

“There are many places in the Bible where that are statements or implications that mortals cannot see God and live. The most notable statements are in Exodus 33.20, John 1.18, 1 John 4.12, and 1 Timothy 6.15–16. These passages stand in opposition to other KJV passages it is declared that Moses and seventy elders saw God (Ex. 24.9–10) or that Moses saw God ‘face to face’ (Ex. 33.11) or that God was seen by Isaiah (Isa. 6.1) or Abraham (Gen. 18.1) or Jacob (Gen. 32.30) and a host of others. The Joseph Smith Translation works to find ways to explain these paradoxes by interweaving conceptions that are missing in many of these texts.

“For example, in Exodus 33.20 the declaration is made to Moses that he cannot see the face of God, ‘for there shall no man see me, and live.’ The JST explains it more fully: ‘Thou canst not see my face at this time ... **And no sinful man hath at any time, neither shall there be any sinful man at any time**, that shall see my face and live.’ (JST Ex. 33.20.) The clarification is that it is sinful men who cannot see God, but this does not prohibit the righteous from such an encounter, if it is according to the will of God.

2. Moses receives the tables of stone – Ex. 24.12-18.
  - a. “I will give thee tables of stone!” – Ex. 24.12.
  - b. Moses “went into the mount of God” – Ex. 24.13.
  - c. “Tarry ye here for us (Moses and Joshua) until we come again” – Ex. 24.14.
  - d. Moses went up into the mount... God calls him on the seventh day... glory of God... devouring fire... Moses was in the mount forty days and nights – Ex. 24.15-18.
    - i. וַיִּשְׁכֵּן כְּבוֹד־יְהוָה עַל־הַר סִינַי - Ex. 24.16 “And the **glory** (*kavod*) of the Lord abode (*sh-k-n* “to tent”) upon Mount Sinai.”<sup>36</sup>
    - ii. “A paved work of a sapphire stone” – Ex. 24.10.<sup>37</sup>

### The Tabernacle: Exodus 25.1-31.17; 35.1-40.38. (The Tabernacle Instruction = P)

1. “In order that they would have a centerpiece for their worship and activity, the Lord instructed Moses to build a tabernacle. The tabernacle was a forerunner of the temple, made portable so they could easily carry it with them.”<sup>38</sup>

---

John 1.18 says “θεὸν οὐδεὶς **πώποτε** τεθέαται,” which translated is “No one has seen God **at any time, ever.**” The rest of the verse reads as follows, “If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.” The JST expounds upon this verse by declaring that ‘No man hath seen God at any time, **except he hath borne record of the Son; for except it is through him no man can be saved**’ (JST John 1.19). This means that whenever anyone has had contact with the Father, the Father has borne record to him of the Son. This is congruent with the events in Matthew 3.17 after the baptism of Jesus; in Matthew 17.5 on the Mount of Transfiguration; in 3 Nephi 11.7 at the appearance of the resurrected Lord to the Nephites; and in Joseph Smith’s first vision. **In each of these examples, the Father testified of the Son.**

1 John 4.12 reads, ‘No man hath seen God at any time,’ the JST adds ‘except them who believe.’ 1 Timothy 6.15–16, which states that God is ‘dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see,’ the JST explains: ‘Whom no man hath seen, nor can see, unto whom no man can approach, only he who hath the light and the hope of immortality dwelling in him.’

Robert J. Matthews explains: “In each of these scriptures there is a clarification which removes the contradiction that exists in all other Bibles. To these clarifications we can also add Moses’ explanation as to why he was able to survive the presence of God: ‘But now mine own eyes have beheld God; but not my natural, but my spiritual eyes, for my natural eyes could not have beheld; for I should have withered and died in his presence; but his glory was upon me; and I beheld his face, for I was transfigured before him.’ (Moses 1:11.) “Without these explanations and restorations to the text that are available only from the JST, biblical statements about whether or not man has ever seen God would remain hopelessly in contradiction.” Robert J. Matthews, [“Plain and Precious Things Restored,” Ensign, July 1982](#), 19–20.

<sup>36</sup> Kavod כְּבוֹד can mean “weight,” or “glory,” and well as “splendor or copiousness.” honour, splendour, glory, of external condition and circumstances: Of men, of things, of honor, dignity or position, or reputation and character, or glory. See Brown-Driver-Briggs H3519. *Shakan* שָׁכַן can mean “to settle down, abide, dwell, tabernacle or tent.”

<sup>37</sup> וַתַּחַת רַגְלָיו כְּמַעֲשֵׂה לְבִנְתֵי הַסְּפִיר “And under his feet like a work of bricks of lapis lazuli” (Ex. 24.10). In the vision of Ezekiel 1.26 and 10.1, God’s throne is made of this material. The decorative uses of lapis lazuli is mentioned in Ugaritic literature. Sarna, 153. I see this color as identifying God’s realm being “above the firmament” which hold back the cosmic waters. God is above the sea of chaos. Psalm 29 states, “The voice of the LORD is upon the waters: the God of glory thundereth: the LORD is upon many waters” (Ps. 29.3).

<sup>38</sup> Elder L. Tom Perry, [“We Believe All That God Has Revealed,” Ensign or Liahona](#), Nov. 2003, 87. We must talk with our loved ones of the temple! The following from Elder Bednar may be useful here:

2. The altar of sacrifice – Ex. 27.1-8; 30.18.
3. The Laver (water basin) – Ex. 30.17-21.
4. The Tabernacle.<sup>39</sup>
5. The Table of Shewbread – Ex. 25.23, 29-30; 26.35.
6. The Candlestick – Ex. 25.31-32, 37-40; 26.35.
7. The Altar of Incense – Ex. 30.1-8.
8. The veil<sup>40</sup> separating the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies – Ex. 26.31-35; Hebrews 10.19-22.<sup>41</sup>
9. The Holy of Holies<sup>42</sup> *qodhesh ha-qodhashim* קֹדֶשׁ הַקְּדוֹשִׁים<sup>43</sup>
10. The ark of the covenant – Ex. 25.10-22; 37.1-9.<sup>44</sup>

---

Indeed, temple preparation is most effective in our homes. But many Church members are unsure about what appropriately can and cannot be said regarding the temple experience outside of the temple. President Ezra Taft Benson described why this uncertainty exists: “The temple is a sacred place, and the ordinances in the temple are of a sacred character. Because of its sacredness we are sometimes reluctant to say anything about the temple to our children and grandchildren. As a consequence, many do not develop a real desire to go to the temple, or when they go there, they do so without much background to prepare them for the obligations and covenants they enter into. I believe a proper understanding or background will immeasurably help prepare our youth for the temple ... [and] will foster within them a desire to seek their priesthood blessings just as Abraham sought his.” Two basic guidelines can help us achieve the proper understanding emphasized by President Benson. **Guideline #1:** Because we love the Lord, we always should speak about His holy house with reverence. We should not disclose or describe the special symbols associated with the covenants we receive in sacred temple ceremonies. Neither should we discuss the holy information that we specifically promise in the temple not to reveal. **Guideline #2:** The temple is the house of the Lord. Everything in the temple points us to our Savior, Jesus Christ. We may discuss the basic purposes of and the doctrine and principles associated with temple ordinances and covenants. Elder David A. Bednar, “[Prepared to Obtain Every Needful Thing](#),” April 2019.

<sup>39</sup> The tent or tabernacle stood in a court 100 cubits by 50, surrounded by a fence ([Ex. 27.18](#)) five cubits high, composed of pillars and hangings of fine white linen. The entrance toward the east was 20 cubits wide ([Ex. 27.16](#)) and was closed by a screen of linen of four different colors on four pillars.

<sup>40</sup> A curtain separated the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place. This curtain, known as the “veil,” was made of fine linen and blue, purple and scarlet yarn. There were figures of cherubim (angels) embroidered onto it. Cherubim, servants of God, were in the divine presence and symbolized God’s power and majesty. They also guarded the throne of God, as well as the Tree of Life in the Genesis account of Adam and Eve’s fall. The Book of Hebrews states that the veil is “the flesh of Christ”: “Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he has consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh” (Hebrews 10.19-20).

<sup>41</sup> A significant event occurred in the Temple when Jesus Christ died on the cross. Mark 15.37-38 informs us that when He died, “Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed His last. And the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom” (see also Matthew 27.51). Luke says, “The veil of the temple was torn in two” (Luke 23.45). The Veil was rent, demonstrating through symbol that Jesus has now made it possible for us to come back into the presence of God, and with him, partake of eternal life and exaltation.

<sup>42</sup> The oracle (*debir*) in Solomon’s temple is described as a cube of 20/20/20 cubits. See: 1 Kings 6.20.

<sup>43</sup> See Exodus 26.33. Many scholars agree that the Holy of Holies of the Tabernacle in the wilderness was a 10/10/10 cubit cube.

<sup>44</sup> “The ark of the covenant was a chest, or box, of shittim wood overlaid with gold. It was approximately three feet nine inches long, two feet three inches wide, and two feet three inches high. Staves, or poles, on both sides allowed the priests to carry it without actually touching the ark itself. Inside, the tablets of the law given to Moses on Mount Sinai were placed (see [y. 16](#)). Hence, it was called the ark of the testimony or ark of the covenant. Later, a pot of manna and Aaron’s rod, which miraculously bloomed, were also placed inside the ark (see [Hebrews 9.4](#)).

### Exodus 32-33: The Golden Calf Episode (Ex. 32-33 = E)

1. Understanding that this story comes from the north is vital to understanding the roles Aaron and the Levites play in the narrative.<sup>45</sup>

---

The ark was placed inside the inner room of the tabernacle known as the most holy place, or Holy of Holies. The ark was viewed with the greatest reverence by the Israelites, and prayers were recited before it was moved or placed in position (see [Numbers 10:35–36](#)).

“The lid, or covering, for the ark is described in [Exodus 25.17–22](#). The King James Version translates the Hebrew word *kapporeth* (which means ‘seat of atonement’) as ‘mercy seat.’ The covering was made of solid gold and on it were formed two cherubim with wings which came up and overshadowed the lid or mercy seat.

“The word *cherubim* usually refers to guardians of sacred things. While the exact meaning of the word is not known, most scholars agree that these cherubim represented ‘redeemed and glorified manhood’ or ‘glorified saints and angels’ (Wilson, *Old Testament Word Studies*, s.v. ‘cherubim,’ p. 75). Since Latter-day Saints do not believe that angels have wings, as they are often shown in religious art, the commandment to form wings on the cherubim may raise some questions. Another revelation indicates, however, that wings symbolically represent the power to move and to act (see [D&C 77.4](#)). Between these cherubim on the mercy seat, God told Moses, He would meet with him and commune with him. Latter-day revelations state that angels stand as sentinels guarding the presence of God (see [D&C 132.19](#)).

“The blood of the lamb of Jehovah was sprinkled upon the mercy seat during the sacred day of Atonement. ... Paul and John both spoke of Jesus as being ‘the propitiation’ for our sins (see [1 John 2.2](#); [4.10](#); [Romans 3.25](#)). ...

“Clearly, then, the ark of the covenant was one of the most significant features of the tabernacle, both in its importance to ancient Israel and also in its symbolic significance” *Old Testament Student Manual: Genesis–2 Samuel*, 3rd ed. [Church Educational System manual, 2003], p. 148.

Elder McConkie wrote, “On top of the ark rested the mercy seat, a cover of pure gold, symbolizing to the mind that because of the atonement yet to be wrought, repentant souls would find mercy before the eternal throne. The mercy seat, serving as it were as the throne of God, was a symbol of his forgiveness and of his goodness and grace in providing mercy through his atonement. Once each year on the Day of Atonement, the high priest entered the Holy of Holies, thus testifying anew to all the people that mercy might be theirs through the great propitiatory sacrifice that was to be. And the two cherubim—overshadowing the mercy seat with their wings—bore record that the ark itself was the very throne of God set up among his people and that Jehovah did in fact dwell in his house and was among them.” *The Mortal Messiah: From Bethlehem to Calvary*, 4 vols. Deseret Book, 1979-1981, 1: 101.

<sup>45</sup> Richard Friedman explains this in [Who Wrote the Bible?](#) He clarifies that the person who crafted E, the northern text of the Hebrew Bible (what I propose was on the Plates of Brass) was a Levitical priest from Shiloh, and probably descended from Moses. These same northern priests were deposed by the northern kingdom when Jeroboam established cultic centers at Dan and Bethel and did not appoint these priests to positions of authority. Friedman writes, “The symbol of their exclusion in Israel was the *golden calves*. **The symbol of their exclusion in Judah was Aaron.** Someone from that family, the author of E, wrote a story that said that soon after the Israelite’s liberation from slavery, they committed heresy. What was the heresy? They worshiped a *golden calf*! Who made the golden calf! *Aaron*! The details of the story fall into place. Why does Aaron not suffer any punishment in the story? Because no matter how much antipathy the author may have felt toward Aaron’s descendants, that author could not change the entire historical recollection of his people. They had a tradition that Aaron was an ancient high priest. The high priest cannot be pictured as suffering any hurt from God because in such a case he could not have continued to serve as high priest. Any sort of blemish on the high priest would have disqualified him from service. The author could not just make up a story that the high priest had become disqualified at this early stage.” Friedman, [Who Wrote the Bible?](#) Harper One, 1987, p. 72. See also: [The Golden Calf, Moses, Aaron, and the Northern Priests of Israel](#).

2. The Construction of the Golden Calf – Ex. 32.1-6. עֲגֵל<sup>46</sup>
  - a. What could this animal symbolize?<sup>47</sup>
  - b. “These be thy gods, O Israel!” – Ex. 32.4. אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל<sup>48</sup>
3. God’s Anger and Moses’ intercession – Ex. 32.7-14.
  - a. God, “I will kill them all!” Moses, “If you do this, what will the Egyptians say about you?” – Ex. 32.10-13.
4. Moses Wrecks the Tablets and the Calf – Ex. 32.15-20.
  - a. “Moses’ anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands and brake them” – Ex. 32.19.<sup>49</sup>
5. Aaron’s Defense: “They gave me the gold, and out came this calf!” – Ex. 32.21-24.<sup>50</sup>
6. The Children of Levi rise up – Ex. 32.25-29.
  - a. “The children of Levi” killed “about three thousand men” – Ex. 32.28.<sup>51</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup> As [Rashbam](#) (Samuel ben Meir, after his death was known as “Rashbam”, a Hebrew acronym for: Rabbi Shmuel Ben Meir. 1085-1158 CE) notes, the people cannot be so foolish as to believe that the resultant image is the God who had brought them out of Egypt. **They must view either as an image that represents Him and will attract His Presence or as a pedestal on which he will stand invisibly.** *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 174.

<sup>47</sup> One of the names for the God of Israel is the אֱבִיר יַעֲקֹב *abiyr Ya-acov* “Mighty God of Jacob” (Genesis 49:24), translated the “mighty God of Jacob” in the KJV. The original meaning of the root may have been “mighty” or “powerful,” but it is also the name of an animal. The cognate in Ugaritic (a language closely related to Hebrew) is *ibr* and means “bull.” (Paul Hoskisson, [Aaron’s Golden Calf](#), *BYU Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 1, 2006, p. 379. See also: Cyrus Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook*, *Analecta Orientalia* 38, revised reprint (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1998), Glossary 2664. It should be noted that this calf or bull-calf did not represent Jehovah, but could have been a symbol for Jehovah (Hoskisson, p. 380). See: [What is going on with the Golden Calf in Exodus 32?](#) In the ANE (Ancient Near East), gods were often pictured standing on the back of a bull or animal. The bull was the throne or pedestal for the god. (R.W.L. Moberly, *At the Mountain of God: Story and Theology in Exodus 32-34*, p. 65. See also: John Walton, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*, p. 368.) I (Mike Day) propose that Aaron was doing that which he had seen others in the ANE do, he was fashioning a throne for Jehovah!

<sup>48</sup> Why do the people say “These are your gods, Israel ...” when there is only one calf? Why do they say “... that brought you up from the land of Egypt” when the calf was not made until they were out of Egypt? The answer seems to lie in the account of King Jeroboam in the book of 1 Kings. It states there that when Jeroboam made his two golden calves he declared to his people, “Here are your gods, Israel, that brought you up from the land of Egypt.” The people’s words in Exodus are identical to Jeroboam’s words in 1 Kings. It would be difficult for us to trace the textual history of these two passages now, but at minimum we can say that the writer of the golden calf account in Exodus seems to have taken the words that were traditionally ascribed to Jeroboam and placed them in the mouths of the people. This made the connection between his golden calf story and the golden calves of the kingdom of Israel crystal clear to his readers. Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* p. 73. See also: [The Golden Calf, Moses, Aaron, and the Northern Priests of Israel.](#)

<sup>49</sup> **Why did the writer picture Moses as smashing the tablets of the Ten Commandments? Possibly because this raised doubts about Judah’s central religious shrine.** The Temple in Judah housed the ark that was supposed to contain the two tablets of the Ten Commandments. According to the E story of the golden calf, Moses smashes the tablets. That means that according to the E source the ark down south in the Temple in Jerusalem either contains unauthentic tablets or no tablets at all. *Ibid*, emphasis added.

<sup>50</sup> Some see here evidence for a version of the story in which the calf was created supernaturally (which supports the view that the story was originally an approving one), like the Ugaritic myth that tells how Baal’s palace was built by simply firing silver and gold for six days. See: D. Pardee in W.W. Hallo and K.L. Younger, [The Context of Scripture, vol. 1:261.](#) *The Jewish Study Bible (Second Edition)* also cites Midrashim that describe how the Tabernacle and Solomon’s Temple “built themselves.”

<sup>51</sup> Why did the writer of E picture the Levites as acting in bloody zeal? He was a Levite. He wrote that Aaron had acted rebelliously while the other Levites alone acted loyally. Moses tells the Levites there that they have earned

7. Moses' Second Intercession – Ex. 32.30-35.
8. The Withdrawal of God's Presence – Ex. 33.1-6.
9. Moses' status – Ex. 33.7-11.
10. Moses speaks with God – Ex. 33.12-23.

### Exodus 34: A Renewal of the Covenant (Ex. 34.1b-28 = J, 34.29-35 = P)

1. Preparatory Measures – Ex. 34.1-3.
  - a. "Hew thee two new tables of stone!" – Ex. 34.1.<sup>52</sup>
2. The character of God – Ex. 34.4-9.<sup>53</sup>
3. True versus False worship – Ex. 34.10-26.<sup>54</sup>
  - a. No other god! – Ex. 34.14.
  - b. Do not go "whoring after their gods!" – Ex. 34.15-16.
  - c. "Go up to appear before the Lord thrice in the year!" – Ex. 34.24.
  - d. "Do not seethe a kid in his mother's milk" – Ex. 34.26.<sup>55</sup>
4. Epilogue: Moses' status as a prophet of God.
  - a. "He wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten commandments" – Ex. 34.28.
  - b. "The skin of his face shone" – Ex. 34.30, 35.<sup>56</sup>

---

blessing by their actions. The story thus denigrates the ancestry of the Jerusalem priests while praising the rest of the Levites. Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?*, 73.

<sup>52</sup> We connected these ideas to the things expressed in D&C 84 as we went through the podcast. We also discussed how the Book of Mormon is itself a living witness of future things to come. More will come. This is a type for Jesus: we have his words, but he will come again. We will see him. The Book of Mormon is an invitation. As we read it, we see more. We are invited to a space of holiness. As Elder Maxwell wrote: Thus the Book of Mormon...is like a vast mansion with gardens, towers, courtyards, and wings. There are rooms yet to be entered, with flaming fireplaces waiting to warm us....Yet we as Church members sometimes behave like hurried tourists, scarcely venturing beyond the entry hall." Neal A. Maxwell, *Not My Will, But Thine*, p. 33.

<sup>53</sup> In Jewish tradition these verses (6-7) are called the Thirteen Attributes of God and play a prominent role in the Jewish liturgy, where they are recited aloud in the synagogue on festivals and other holy days. Sarna, p. 216.

<sup>54</sup> Friedman asserts (*Sources*, p. 179) that Exodus 34.14-26 is the J text of the Ten Commandments. He writes, "This is absolutely explicit in verses 27-28: "Write these words for yourself, because I've made a covenant with you and with Israel based on these words'... And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments." The first two commandments and the Sabbath commandment have parallels in the other versions of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5), though the wording is different. The other seven commandments here are completely different.

<sup>55</sup> See also Exodus 23.18-20.

<sup>56</sup> עֹר פָּנָיו נִדְבָרָה אִתּוֹ "the skin of his face shone while he talked with him" – Exodus 34.29. The traditional meaning given here is favored by the context and by Habakkuk 3.4 in which *karnayim*, "rays of light," appears in parallelism with "a brilliant light." This reference relates to God, and numerous biblical passages bear witness to a widespread, poetic notion of God being enveloped in light. Moses' radiance is a reflection of the divine radiance... *keren* is the usual word for horn. It subtly emphasizes that the true mediator between God and Israel was not the fabricated, lifeless image of the horned animal, as the people thought, but the living Moses. The association of *karan* with *keren* gave rise to the mistaken notion that Moses grew horns- even though the text speaks not of his head but of "the skin of his face." The rendering of *karan* by *cornuta* in the Vulgate translation, based on the commentaries of Jerome (ca. 347-419 CE), helped foster the error, and a horned Moses later became the familiar figure in art from the eleventh century on. The most famous such portrayal is, of course, [Michelangelo's at San Pietro in Vincoli, Rome](#). Sarna, p. 221.

- c. "He put a veil on his face" – Ex. 34.33.