

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

EXODUS 18-20

Tonight I want to begin with a poem that will set the stage for Exodus 18...

Now I imagine few of us – would care to lead an Exodus
With all their problems, hopes, and fears – a-wandering for
40 years?

Moses did not want to grip – the lonely role of leadership
But God, one brilliant desert dawn – commanded him to
take it on

And feeling he could ill afford – to disobey his living Lord
He acquiesced to his request – and gave the job his very
best

No enterprise will long survive – whose leader works just 9
to 5

So Moses, being in his prime – began to work some
overtime

His office soon became the site – of meetings nearly every
night

It wasn't long before he'd scoff – at any thought of taking off
With so much work that must be done – he hadn't time for
play or fun

Nor could he laugh, relax, or frolic – Moses was a work-a-
holic

Now men with hefty power drives – are seldom heroes to
their wives

The man who leads a busy life – has little time for home or wife

Spouses do not have a yen – to join in praising famous men
They give success a cool reception – and Zipporah, she was no exception

The placid Moses whom she married – was tired, edgy, tense, and harried

And she suspected he was very – ready for a coronary

And so, she felt, 'twas time she had – a little chat with mom and dad

She journeyed where her parents dwelt – and told her folks just how she felt

'I didn't want a bed of roses – when I agreed to marry Moses

I know it takes a lot of gall – to argue with a holy call

But Moses, as you clearly see – has time for God... but not for me

I cry myself to sleep at night – tell me... do you think that's right?'

It caused those parents great distress – to see their child's unhappiness

And Jethro, dear Zipporah's dad – was more than just a trifle mad

'The time,' he thought, 'is overdue – to teach that chap a thing or two.'

Jethro's temper rankled raw – as he sought to find his son-in-law

But then he saw, to his dismay – how Moses spent the

working day

People came from far and near – in hopes of catching
Moses' ear

No problem was too small to mention – They brought them
all to his attention

The sheer amount of people who – were waiting for an
interview

Caused Jethro then to feel quite dizzy – *'My son-in-law is
much to busy!*

*I think I'll play a bit of cupid – that man's not bad, he's
simply stupid!*

And so, I'm happy to relate – Jethro told it to him straight
*'Whosoever said you were commanded – to run this country
single-handed?*

*You know you're just the protégé – of God, who rests the
seventh day*

*Why you've become (this is very odd...) – more
indispensable than God*

*This schedule you are keeping will – put you to bed in
Ulcerville*

*And that's a price we can't afford – so get some help, thus
saith the Lord!*

So under Jethro's gentle nudges – Moses chose some able
judges

And discovered to his glee – they did the job as well as he
There's ample help for any task – once we have the sense
to ask.

In chapter 18, Moses' father-in-law Jethro, gives him a lesson on priorities, and time management, and delegation, and organization... In the midst of the battle with the Amalekites, Aaron and Hur had been an invaluable help to Moses.

God was teaching Moses that he would never be able to do it all himself.

All spiritual leadership can be taxing. Pastors and church leaders have a big job to do. And to be successful they have to learn to prioritize and involve others.

Chapter 18, “And Jethro, the priest of Midian, Moses' father-in-law, heard of all that God had done for Moses and for Israel His people (Again, the news had already gotten around) - that the LORD had brought Israel out of Egypt.

Then Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took Zipporah, Moses' wife, after he had sent her back with her two sons, of whom the name of one was Gershom (for he said, "I have been a stranger in a foreign land")” *Gershom* means *stranger*. “and the name of the other was Eliezer (for he said, "The God of my father was my help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh"); *Eliezer* means *helper or comforter*.

“and Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, came with his sons and his wife to Moses in the wilderness, where he was encamped at the mountain of God.” This is the first time we learn that Zipporah was not with Moses. Apparently, he sent his family back to Midian prior to the exodus. *Why* or exactly *when* we don't know?

Verse 6, “Now he had said to Moses, "I, your father-in-law

Jethro, am coming to you with your wife and her two sons with her." So Moses went out to meet his father-in-law, bowed down, and kissed him. And they asked each other about their well-being, and they went into the tent. And Moses told his father-in-law all that the LORD had done to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake, all the hardship that had come upon them on the way, and how the LORD had delivered them.

Then Jethro rejoiced for all the good which the LORD had done for Israel, whom He had delivered out of the hand of the Egyptians."

Verse 10, "And Jethro said, "Blessed be the LORD, who has delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of Pharaoh, and who has delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians.

Now I know that the LORD is greater than all the gods; for in the very thing in which they behaved proudly, He was above them." Remember each plague God brought on Egypt was designed to show up a particular idol... The Nile was sacred so God defiled it with blood. Frogs were sacred, so God dispatched so many frogs *it made them croak*. They worshipped the sun so God orchestrated an eclipse.

"Then Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took a burnt offering and other sacrifices to offer to God. And Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law before God. And so it was, on the next day, that Moses sat to judge the people; and the people stood before Moses from morning until evening."

Moses was working far too much. He was dealing with

problems all day. His caseload was enormous. There wasn't enough of him to go around, and Jethro could see his son-in-law was headed for burnout if drastic action wasn't taken.

Perhaps Zipporah prodded her dad to call her husband on the carpet. Wives tend to see the danger signals long before their workaholic husbands.

Verse 14, "So when Moses' father-in-law saw all that he did for the people, he said, "What is this thing that you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit, and all the people stand before you from morning until evening?"

And Moses said to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me to inquire of God. When they have a difficulty, they come to me, and I judge between one and another; and I make known the statutes of God and His laws."

Moses meant well. Like any good pastor he had a *passion for God's Word* and a *compassion for God's people*. But working *longer* is not always the answer.

Guys, ministry will fill up whatever time it's allotted. Give it 50 hours and it'll fill up 50 hours - work 80 hours and you'll find 80 hours worth of things to do...

A pastor's work is never done. As long as there's one more lost person he's on call... You get to a point where the answer is not to work *longer*, but *smarter*.

Verse 17, "So Moses' father-in-law said to him, "The thing that you do is not good. Both you and these people who are with you will surely wear yourselves out. For this thing is too much for you; you are not able to perform it by yourself."

Moses represented God, but he needed to remember that he was not God.

This is what pastors have to grasp if they want to survive... Psalm 121:4 tells us God never sleeps - I hate to admit it, but pastors require 6 to 7 hours per night. God is in all places at all times - I'm limited to how fast the speed limit lets me travel... A pastor who tries to do it all himself **"will surely wear himself out"**.

Jethro continues in verse 19, **"Listen now to my voice; I will give you counsel, and God will be with you: Stand before God for the people, so that you may bring the difficulties to God. And you shall teach them the statutes and the laws, and show them the way in which they must walk and the work they must do."**

Moreover you shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them to be rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. And let them judge the people at all times." Here was Moses' choice, **"Delegation or frustration?"**

"Then it will be that every great matter they shall bring to you, but every small matter they themselves shall judge. So it will be easier for you, for they will bear the burden with you. If you do this thing, and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all this people will also go to their place in peace."

A little delegation will save Moses and bless the people.

And this is the strategy we've adopted at Calvary Chapel...

We have assistant pastors, and elders, and deacons that handle the “**small matters**” - and if they have a problem they can’t solve they bring it to me.

But rather than answer the phone and arrange chairs this allows me to focus on the three priorities Jethro gave Moses... Verse 19, *pray for the people* - Verse 20, *teach the people* – Verses 21-22, *oversee the bigger issues that arise among the people*. Moses’ job and mine is three-fold: to **plead**, to **feed**, and to **lead**.

Verse 24 tells us how Moses responded to his father-in-law’s advice, “**So Moses heeded the voice of his father-in-law and did all that he had said. And Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people: rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens.**

So they judged the people at all times; the hard cases they brought to Moses, but they judged every small case themselves.” The *deliverer* became a *delegator*.

Then Moses let his father-in-law depart, and he went his way to his own land.”

Chapter 19, “**In the third month after the children of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on the same day, they came to the Wilderness of Sinai.**

For they had departed from Rephidim, had come to the Wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness. So Israel camped there before the mountain.”

The traditional Mount Sinai, or *Jebel Musa*, is a rectangular piece of granite that soars 7,500 feet above sea level. It’s

located deep in the Sinai Peninsula.

But at least a dozen other sites have been suggested for Mount Sinai...

One of the most intriguing theory is a mountain called *Jebel al Lawz*, or “*the mountain of the law*” - located east of the Gulf of Aqaba, in Saudi Arabia. The top of *Jebel al Lawz* appears charred by fire - there’s a cave near the top that fits biblical descriptions – and there are signs of calf worship at its base.

We’re not really sure of the identity of the biblical Mount Sinai.

Verse 3, “And Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians...” And God uses some beautiful imagery to describe how He had treated the new nation, Israel...

“and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself.”

A mother eagle tosses her eaglet out of the nest, and just before it hits the ground the mother swoops down and rescues her chick. She does this over and over until the little bird learns how to flap its wings and fly. Likewise, God pushes Israel out of the nest, and into the wilderness. Now the Hebrews are forced to deal with polluted water - and no water - and hunger - and attacks from the enemy.

Each time God rescues Israel, but He wants them to flap their faith and fly.

Verse 5, “Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice

and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'

These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel."

Up until now God's blessing on Israel was based on the covenant He made with Abraham - and the *Abrahamic covenant* will still be in force. But now another covenant will also kick in. The Mosaic Covenant establishes certain laws that Israel is to obey, and God's blessing is made dependant on their obedience.

Today we refer to God's agreement with Israel as the "*Old Covenant*" – for it's been made obsolete by a Newer Covenant - paid for on the cross of Jesus. It's now faith in Jesus that keeps us in God's favor – not the laws given to Moses.

But for 1500 years the Mosaic Covenant benefited the Hebrews and created within them certain spiritual sensibilities. We can learn a lot by studying the Law.

"So Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before them all these words which the LORD commanded him. Then all the people answered together and said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do. So Moses brought back the words of the people to the LORD." They agree to live by God's laws.

Verse 9, "And the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I come to you in the thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and believe you forever."

So Moses told the words of the people to the LORD.

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them (or dedicate them) today and tomorrow, and let them wash their clothes.

And let them be ready for the third day. For on the third day the LORD will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people." The glory of the Lord will literally appear in a physical, visible form, and hover over the mountain peak.

Verse 12, "You shall set bounds for the people all around, saying, 'Take heed to yourselves that you do not go up to the mountain or touch its base.'" God tells Moses to rope off the mountain. None of the Hebrews are allowed on its slopes.

And here's why, "Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death."

God is so holy a sinful human apart from God's grace would be unable to stand in His presence and live. The only person allowed on the mountain will be Moses.

Death is the penalty for walking onto the mountain, and here's how the penalty is to be executed, verse 13, "Not a hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned or shot with an arrow; whether man or beast, he shall not live."

"When the trumpet sounds long, they shall come near the mountain."

God invited the Hebrews *near the mountain*, but they were to watch their step - they weren't allowed *on the mountain*. They were required to keep a distance.

"So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and sanctified the people, and they washed their clothes. And he

said to the people, "Be ready for the third day; do not come near your wives. Then it came to pass on the third day, in the morning, that there were thunderings and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain; and the sound of the trumpet was very loud, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled." God loved these people. He made them a grace-filled promise in verses 5-6 – they'll be His special treasure above all other people.

But notice their initial reaction to God's glory is fear – they "trembled".

Verse 17, "And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was completely in smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire. Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. And when the blast of the trumpet sounded long and became louder and louder..."

Hey, it's early in the morning - the sun is hot in the sky - God over-shadows the mountain with a thick cloud of His glory. He's sets the summit on fire. It looks like an erupting volcano. Underneath the cloud it's like a solar eclipse. This huge, chunk of granite starts to rumble and shake. A blast of a trumpet intensifies...

That's when, "Moses spoke, and God answered him by voice." Imagine, hearing the Almighty speak audibly. *How would the voice of God sound?*

On this day there's no need to quiet your spirit - or listen with the ears of your heart. There was no subtle communication at Mount Sinai. Spiritual sensitivity was not

required. God is about to sound out His law for every ear to hear.

Verse 20, “Then the LORD came down upon Mount Sinai, on the top of the mountain. And the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. And the LORD said to Moses, “Go down and warn the people, lest they break through to gaze at the LORD, and many of them perish.

Also let the priests who come near the LORD consecrate themselves, lest the LORD break out against them.” But Moses said to the LORD, “The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai; for You warned us, saying, ‘Set bounds around the mountain and consecrate it.’” Moses underestimates the people’s stupidity.

God knew someone might try to climb over the fence and break through to see God up close and personal. He tells Moses to take His warnings seriously,

“Then the LORD said to him, “Away! Get down and then come up, you and Aaron with you. But do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the LORD, lest He break out against them.” God is saying, “Don’t downplay My warning.” “So Moses went down to the people and spoke to them.”

The question arises, “*If God loved these people (and He did) why was He so concerned about them breeching His space, and approaching His holiness?*”

To understand the answer, remember the difference between *acceptance* and *love*. God’s love is unconditional. He loves you regardless of what you do. But His acceptance

is highly conditional. God has terms you must satisfy to be accepted.

The Hebrews knew God loved them, but they had not gained His acceptance. Not until their sin was atoned for could they enter and enjoy God's presence.

In Hebrews 12 the New Testament writer contrasts Israel's experience at Mount Sinai with our experience in Christ. For we too have come to a mountain. We've come to Mount Zion - to God's heavenly mountain – to His very throne.

At Sinai, Israel trembled in fear. We've receive God's comfort and grace.

At Sinai, Israel's access to God was restricted. Our access to God is unlimited.

At Sinai, they approached in fear. Today, we approach with confidence.

At Sinai, they were burdened by the guilt of their sin. We're forgiven in Christ.

At Sinai, they were under the scrutiny of the Law. We're registered in heaven.

At Sinai, their mediator was a man, Moses. Ours is the living Lord, Jesus.

Some folks believe that the key to obedience is more of Mount Sinai – more rules, more fear, and more intimidation – *more law and awe*. But that didn't work at Sinai. Israel trembled at Sinai, and just a few weeks later worshipped an idolatrous golden calf. To really change we need the grace that comes from Mount Zion.

Chapter 20, "And God spoke all these words, saying: "I am

the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.” God uses a mountain as a pulpit, and speaks audibly to His people. He lays down the Law.

And He begins with the Ten Commandments – God’s Top Ten List.

We learn later that these commandments were written by God on two stone tablets. Apparently, the first four commandments were written on one tablet – and deal with man’s relationship with God. While the second six commandments were written on another tablet – and deal with man’s relationship with his fellow man.

There are folks who believe God wrote these Ten Commandments on the heart of the first man, Adam. They constitute what we call “*conscience*”. But when Adam sinned, his conscience was wrecked. The internal standard was defaced. Thus, God came at Mount Sinai to restate His moral code – to literally, put it in stone.

Once, a little boy was asked to name the Ten Commandments. He said he could only remembered two, “Pick up your toys” and “Don’t drink and drive.”

It reminds me of the Sunday School teacher who asked her class, “Which of the Ten Commandments would you be breaking if you pulled your dog’s tail?” A little girl answered, “What God has joined together let no man put asunder.”

I hope you do a better job at remembering the Ten Commandments...

God has given His people – both then and now - ten non-

negotiables by which we should live our lives. And though we're no longer under the Law - if we ignore the wisdom in these first Ten Commandments - we'll do so at our own peril.

Recently I saw a television commercial where a boy says to his girlfriend, "I'm not impressed with you anymore. You don't have any values." The girl snaps back, "Yes I do, I bought this shirt for \$5.95." We've lost sight of what constitutes values.

Here's what concerns me about people today - *where are our convictions, our standards?* Morality is not a guessing game. Right and wrong exist. God's truth is absolute. A customized morality that serves our selfishness isn't part of His plan.

Verse 3 begins them, "You shall have no other gods before Me." In western nations today most people are too sophisticated to have golden statues on their mantles – yet that doesn't mean we're immune to idols. You can make a god out of gold – or sports, or a car. Anything that rivals our love for God is really an idol.

DL Moody once said, "You don't have to go to heathen lands today to find false gods. America is full of them. Whatever you love more than God is your idol."

"You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who

love Me and keep My commandments.”

The first commandment tells us who to worship. The second emphasizes how He wants to be worshipped. God is invisible and intangible. He is spirit. Thus we should avoid introducing any physical representations of God into our worship - icons, or trinkets, or crucifixes. Overtime the symbol overshadows the substance.

The Puritans of old - and orthodox Jews today - interpret the second command as a prohibition against art in general. All images are prohibited. If this is so, God broke His own command when He commissioned men to embroider cherubim in the curtains of the tabernacle, and place two golden cherubim on top of the Ark.

God was never against *artistry*. The second command is aimed at *idolatry*.

Verse 7, "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain." Commandment #3 instructs us not to *trivialize*, or *disgrace* the name of God. Put in the positive we need to take God seriously - always treat God and His name with reverence.

Verse 8, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that

is in them, and rested the seventh day.

Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.”

The fourth commandment instructs us to stop, relax, and learn to *rest with God*.

God knew that the rigors and demands of work would consume so much of our time - so He commanded us to set aside one day in 7 to retreat from work - spend time with Him – to pray and to play - and remind ourselves what life is all about.

God wants us in a weekly rhythm. It's a healthy rhythm that causes life to go smoother. “For six days we make a living – on the seventh we rediscover life.”

When we get to the New Testament we learn that resting one day in seven doesn't make me more right with God - but it does keep me in my right mind.

Verse 12, “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you.” Generally speaking, parents are wiser than kids. They've been around the block a time or two.

Parents know stuff kids don't. Listen to your mom and dad - and you'll minimize life's dangers – you'll maximize life's enjoyments. Why learn everything the hard way? A person will live longer and live better if you honor your parents.

The sixth commandment tells us, “You shall not murder.”

God alone gives life, so only God has the authority to end life... At times God justifies the use of the sword and war. In other places, He sanctions self-defense. And government has

the God-given responsibility to execute capital punishment...

But life is sacred. It's a gift from God. Man was made in God's likeness, so to harm an *innocent* person is to mar God's image. Jesus would say if a person gets angry and with hatred lashes out at another person – with a gun, or knife, or words, or spite – he's committed murder in his heart - he's assassinated a reputation.

The questions becomes, *"How can I adore God, and abhor the person who bears His image? How can I love Jesus if I despise the person He died to save?"*

The sixth commandment teaches us to respect human life – to be fully pro-life.

Verse 14, **"You shall not commit adultery."** Life is sacred - and the institution that propagates life is also sacred. God places a high hedge around marriage.

Sex outside marriage – whether before you're married or after you're married - is a violation of the seventh commandment. Guard your marriage at all costs.

And just as it's possible to commit murder in your heart – in the same way we can commit adultery. Jesus said in Matthew 5, **"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart."**

Obviously, the sin's *seed* is not as far-reaching or destructive as its *deed* – but in a spiritual sense it's just as loaded with evil. Always remember, **"Adultery begins in the head long before it ends in the bed."** We all should be faithful to our spouse. If you're married... to your present mate. If

you're single... to your future mate.

Verse 15, "**You shall not steal.**" To steal is to take something that belongs to another person without their permission. It includes burglary – shoplifting - employee theft - music and software piracy - deceptive advertising - not returning what you've borrowed... *and the most insidious form of theft...*

Stealing from God... which we do, when we don't give our tithe to God.

The world says, "**What's mine is mine. I'll keep it.**" The thief says, "**What's yours is mine. I'll take it.**" But the Christian says, "**What's mine is God's. I'll share it.**"

Notice the progression in the Ten Commandments... The sixth affirms the sanctity of life. The seventh upholds the sanctity of marriage - the institution that propagates life. Now the eighth protects the sanctity of private property – the stuff used to sustain life. In its rawest form, to steal another person's property is to prohibit them from meeting their needs - and kill them by a slow death.

God wants us to be givers not takers.

Verse 16, "**You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.**" The ninth command instructs us to be truth tellers – to men and women of our word.

Every society is held together by honest communication. If I can't trust what you say, then it's impossible for us to have a meaningful relationship... Business breaks down... Marriage becomes mute... The courts become dysfunctional...

Again, notice the progression... *Murder* robs us of life itself. *Adultery* destroys the institution that propagates life. *Theft*

takes away resources used to sustain life. And *slander* robs us of the reward of a great life - it destroys a good reputation.

And the tenth command, verse 17...

“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house”... even if it’s brand new, has a full basement, a three-car garage, and stainless steel appliances. **“You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife”**... even if she sunbathes in the driveway wearing a bikini.

“You shall not covet your neighbor’s male servant”... the guy your neighbor hires to spray for weeds, and mow his grass.

“You shall not covet your neighbor’s female servant”... the girl from *Maid Brigade* that cleans once a week.

“You shall not covet your neighbor’s ox”... or his new riding mower. And **“You shall not covet your neighbor’s donkey”**... even if it’s a new sport-utility donkey.

This commandment, more than any other, reveals the sinful core of every human. It’s never enough. We’re fine until the neighbor gets one, then suddenly we’ve got to have the same commodity. We can’t be one-upped... In Romans 7:7 Paul said it was this commandment that convinced him of his sinfulness.

God wants contentment – contentment with Him and with His blessings - to characterize our lives - not a constant selfishness and a craving for more.

Verse 18, **“Now all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood afar off. Then they said to Moses, “You speak with**

us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die." Israel so intimidated by God's glory, and greatness, and goodness they preferred to deal with Moses.

They were comfortable with flesh and blood, but the presence and voice of the Almighty overwhelmed them. They were wiped out by His glory and majesty.

"And Moses said to the people, "Do not fear; for God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin." So the people stood afar off, but Moses drew near the thick darkness where God was."

Verse 22, "Then the LORD said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: 'You have seen that I have talked with you from heaven. You shall not make anything to be with Me - gods of silver or gods of gold you shall not make for yourselves. An altar of earth you shall make for Me, and you shall sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen.

In every place where I record My name I will come to you, and I will bless you.

And if you make Me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stone (or craved, chiseled, finished stone – it had to be natural stone); for if you use your tool on it, you have profaned it." In other words, when you build an altar don't make it flashy – or a showcase for your talents, and skills, and craftsmanship.

This is good advice for worship leaders. Worship is not a time to show off musically. Play skillfully, but a worship leader should never try to steal the glory from the One who's being worshipped. Make sure God gets the glory, not you!

Verse 26, "Nor shall you go up by steps to My altar, that your nakedness may not be exposed on it." The priests wore flowing robes so if they walked up a flight of stairs to an elevated platform people would be able to see under their robe.

No steps - a ground level platform - would protect the priest's modesty.

But again the instructions for the altar fit God's plan for our salvation...

There are no steps to God. Jesus is our altar. He meets us where we're at.

And He didn't come plated with gold. Jesus wore no heavenly, royal robes while on earth. Jesus was an earthy altar – He was born of humble humans.

And just as Messiah was depicted in the Old Testament - Jesus was a stone. But not cut from the rock by human effort. According to Daniel "He was a stone made without hands." Nothing about our salvation had anything to do with us.

Also notice the next set of instructions after the Ten Commandments deal with the construction of an altar. It's as if God knows we'll never be able to completely keep all Ten Commandments, *especially the spirit of the command*. God knows we'll break the Law, and need a place to offer a sacrifice for forgiveness.

God didn't give us the commandments thinking they would make us good.

Just the opposite - He gave the commandments knowing they would expose our sin, and show us our need for a Savior. The Ten Commandments can only be lived by a person who's been to the altar and is walking in the power of God.

The Ten Commandments teach us how to love God and love our neighbor – but it's only after we come to Jesus that God puts that love in our hearts.