

SUMMER 4 - Way Out!

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Preacher: Paul Barker

[0 : 00] Almighty God, we come trembling at the threshold of hearing your word, and we pray that in your mercy you will speak to us clearly, as you have spoken of old and through the ages to your people.

Not only that we may hear, but also heed, that we may do your word, for Jesus' sake. Amen. A seven-hour bus ride these days from Cairo through pretty desolate country.

It's the bus I caught a bit over a year ago. It'll have an Arabic version of the film Jerry Maguire, but at least you can listen to the English language being spoken through all the smoke in the bus.

It's desolate country, Mount Sinai, very dry and very arid. Mount Sinai itself traditionally is Jebel Musa, the mountain of Moses. It's about 2,200 metres high, which is a little bit higher than the highest mountain in Victoria, Mount Bogong, but I think a little bit less than Kosciuszko.

It's about a, well, I should say an hour and a half's walk. It's a two-hour walk for me, from the bottom, from the monastery to the top. That's the context of these words, and indeed all the rest of the words of Exodus, Leviticus, and into Numbers chapter 10.

[1 : 27] Here for several months, a bit under a year, Israel is encamped at the foot of Mount Sinai. The context is that God has saved his people from Egypt, as we've seen the last three Wednesday nights.

That's very important to get right, because so often people have a caricature of the Old Testament that it's a book of law, of God telling us what not to do, basically, summarised by often, stop having fun.

But it's very important that we understand the law aright, and the first words of this chapter help to set us into the right context. On the third new moon, after the Israelites had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that very day, they came into the wilderness of Sinai, they journeyed from Rephidim, entered the wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness.

And Israel camped there in front of the mountain. So they've come from Egypt, saved and rescued by the mighty acts of God. But there's something else as well.

Can you remember back to the first week, those of you who are here, when Moses was rather hesitant at the burning bush before God, and God promised him a sign that he would do what he was saying he would do.

[2 : 44] And the sign was, when you come out of Egypt, you and the people will worship me here at this mountain. And now this is where they are. Remember the strangeness of the sign, because it was a sign after the event.

So it's calling Moses to trust God's word, and here is in a sense now a fulfilment, acknowledging the fact that Moses and the people have in some sense trusted God's word.

Moses went up to God, up the mountain, presumably, and the Lord still called to him from the mountain, so even though Moses has gone up the mountain at least to some extent, God is still calling out to him.

And even though throughout the rest of Exodus and into the next couple of books, Moses comes very close to God, there still remains a sense of distance between them. And God, or the Lord, Yahweh that is, calls out saying, thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, that is Jacob's descendants, and tell the Israelites, same people, but saying the same thing twice, for emphasis, you have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagle's wings, and brought you to myself.

A couple of things worth noting there, they've not seen God, but they've seen what God has done. He's rescued them. But what God has done for them is not just bring them out of Egypt, and in a sense, set them free in the wilderness, and say, well there you go, head off.

[4 : 10] But he's actually brought them to himself. That is, when God has saved his people, it's not just that he saved them from slavery, from the Egyptians, but he saved them to himself, to be his people.

That is, there's a positive goal in mind. There's something better that replaces slavery to Egypt. God's brought them to himself. And it says on eagle's wings, which is clearly metaphorical, it's not that Israel was lifted up on the wings of an eagle, literally, and taken to Mount Sinai, but one of the very famous verses in the Bible that refers to eagle's wings, it's one that's often quoted to give people comfort, about, from Isaiah chapter 40, about being lifted up on the wings of an eagle, and those who are weary, and so on.

It's alluding back to this. Isaiah is preaching there, in effect, to people in exile, in Babylon, and he's promising them that what God had done for Egypt, he will do for the exiles in Babylon.

And so here it says, God has brought them, metaphorically, on eagle's wings out of Egypt, to be to himself, and so in Isaiah 40, is the same promise that God will bring his people out of exile, to himself, to the promised land again.

Then comes a few very important verses, really, to understand all the context of the Ten Commandments in the next chapter, and the laws that follow that.

[5 : 34] Now, therefore, in the light of what I have done, in the light of the salvation, and liberation, and freedom that I have brought you, freely and graciously, as we've seen, because I've made covenant promises back to Abraham, if you remember, back to the first week, now, therefore, if you obey my voice, and keep my covenant, you shall be, and then come a few descriptions of Israel, what it will be.

A covenant is an agreement, but it's more than that. Probably the closest we have today is like a marriage certificate, in a way, a marriage agreement.

That is, it's not just two people making an agreement with each other, but something that's rather solemn, in front of witnesses, in a sense, signed, taken very seriously.

There are some covenants, or promises that are made between two equal people, in effect. But also, in the ancient world, there are many ancient documents that have been found, that are covenants between a king, and a conquered, or subservient group of people, often called suzerainty treaties, or sovereign vassal treaties.

And the format of what God does with Israel, in this book, and in the books that follow, and especially in Deuteronomy, is the same thing, the same sort of pattern, though some differences, from ancient treaties.

[7 : 00] God the king is binding himself in a relationship with this vassal people, if you like, a subservient people, who themselves have some obligations to keep the covenant agreement with him.

But notice too, before we get into these statements about Israel, verse 5 says, if you obey my voice, that is, if you hear my voice. One of the things that's so important to get right about God, is that we don't see God primarily, but we do hear his voice.

And of all the senses that we have, it's our hearing that is most important. Moses is saying to people, you've seen what God has done, now hear his voice.

Now that becomes so important throughout the Bible, because never, really in the end, does anybody see God. Isaiah has a vision in the temple in Isaiah chapter 6, the angels there cover their eyes because they don't want to see God.

And in the description of Isaiah's vision, we don't actually see what God looks like, but we hear his voice. Ezekiel in chapter 1 of Ezekiel also has a vision of God.

[8 : 15] But can you describe what God is like from his vision? No, because the closer you get to a description of God, the vaguer it becomes. Because God, in a sense, is beyond seeing and beyond description.

And the same thing happens in the book of Revelation. There we get a description of the elders and the beasts and the lake and all the jewels and the sea and so on and the throne at the centre of it all in heaven but we never get a description of who's sitting on the throne.

We know it's God and the Lamb but we don't get a description because physical appearances of God don't matter. That becomes important a bit later on as we'll see but it's important at this point because what we are to do is hear God and sometimes, I guess, in our world which is becoming more and more visual is that we like to sort of see pictures and things but God has fundamentally revealed himself by his word which we are to hear not by a picture which we could see.

Now what does God promise to Israel here? He promises in verse 5 you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples, indeed the whole earth's mine but you Israel shall be the things that follow.

So Israel is being set apart from other nations here they alone have these privileges and God calls them my treasured possession. Now this is a fairly intimate sort of term.

[9 : 42] I think I'm right in saying that the Queen of England lives in Buckingham Palace as we all know but Buckingham Palace is owned by the state. It's not actually her house. It's a bit like me living in the vicarage here.

I don't own it but I live there. But if I was like some wealthy clergy I might have a holiday house somewhere which I own and I could go to and in a sense that's my personal possession.

The distinction is here God is saying to Israel you are my personal possession. That is he's not in a relationship with them just because he's the king but there's a personal commitment of God to the people of Israel and it's a very prized word.

It is the thing above all else that he treasures in effect. it's his prized possession. To use a slightly different analogy if you imagine your house is about to burn down what's the one thing you'd go to first?

I'm not sure what it is for me because I couldn't handle all my books in one go. But your prized possession something that's in a sense irreplaceable. That's the sort of intensity of emotion behind this word.

[10 : 51] So you just see the significance of what God is promising Israel here. He's entered into an agreement where they are very very privileged. But then he goes on with some other descriptions of Israel later on into verse 6.

You shall be for me a priestly kingdom. Different ways of translating this but in a sense two ideas mesh together. Israel will be priestly. That is they'll be mediatorial.

That is there's a sense in which Israel is not just being called to be gods and sort of luxuriate in the privilege but they have a function to be mediators of God to the world.

Now one of the things we also see in these chapters is that not only is Israel to be a mediator to the world but Moses is to be a mediator between God and God's people. Indeed Moses in many respects functions as a prototype of Jesus as our ultimate mediator.

A comparison that's made several times in the New Testament. John 1 and Hebrews 3 for example. So Israel firstly is to be priestly. To somehow mediate what God is on about to the world at large.

[12 : 01] But also they are a kingdom or some other expressions would put it the other way around a royal priesthood. That is they are royal, regal, they reign.

Now both those ideas we can see in a very sketch form perhaps in the very first chapter of scripture. where God creates humanity to have dominion over the world and in a sense to, because humanity is made in the image of God, in a sense to mediate God to the rest of the created world.

It's very sketchy there but here it becomes very much more focused about the people of Israel for the whole world. But it's a joint theme, this priestly idea and this royal idea that go hand in hand through scripture.

We find it coming out in Jesus himself who is both a king and a priest and we find the two ideas mesh together in the words that we've just sung in that hymn from 1 Peter 2.

Christian church, Christians together are a royal priesthood or priestly kingdom, two words meshing together. And you find the same thing in the book of Revelation chapter 1, that God's people are in effect a priestly kingdom or a royal priesthood.

[13 : 17] And in heaven God's people will in a sense have crowns upon their heads, though they lay their crowns down before the king and the lamb, but there is a sense in which Christians ultimately will reign in heaven with Christ.

So here are those two themes coming out here. Nextly God says of Israel, you will be a holy nation. Now at one level we could say this is Federation Day for the people of Israel.

Israel. This is their 1901 when they become a nation. Up to this point they're sort of a people group descended from Jacob, but now perhaps formally at this occasion they're becoming actually a nation, though at this point still a landless nation.

But they're called to be a holy nation. And we often think of the word holy as being a word to do with morality and being good and maybe even perfect. But at its base level what it's doing is saying you are a nation set apart.

Different from all the others. That's been clear at the end of verse 5 and into verse 6. Indeed the whole earth is mine but you shall be for me. So Israel is set apart and throughout the Old Testament from time to time various inanimate objects are called holy.

[14 : 29] Garments and so on in the temple. Not because they're morally perfect or it's particularly nice cloth or something like that, but purely because it's set apart for a special purpose. And the same technically in an Anglican church, what's behind me is a holy table.

Not because the wood's special or it's got a little plaque saying it's in memory of somebody. It's holy because it's set apart for the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Derivatively, holiness leads to morality.

Because if someone or something is set apart to God, if they're people, then there's a derivative or secondary sense in which therefore they are to reflect something of the character of God. God is morally pure and hence that sort of attribute should be carried over into people who are wholly set apart to him.

And we'll see the obligations of that in time to come in these chapters. verses. Well, the people respond extraordinarily, I think, to these words. Moses came from God, summoned the elders, set before them all the words that God had commanded him.

And the people now, maybe Moses spoke to the elders who then spoke to the people, maybe the people came later, I'm not sure. The people all answered as one, everything that the Lord has spoken, we will do.

[15 : 44] Now, I think already we can probably suspect that they're a little bit ambitious in that statement. If you remember where we finished last week, Israel was grumbling and whinging in the wilderness time and time again about their food, about their water, about just being in the wilderness and everything.

So, here all of a sudden to get Israel boasting, everything you say we will do, I think we're meant to say, oh, this is a little bit of an outrageous statement here. And certainly as we'll see next week.

Very clearly so. Moving on into the next section, the end of verse 9 and the paragraph that follows, what happens now is that the people are getting ready for hearing God's word to them.

It's not a casual word. God doesn't sort of get on the mobile and say to Moses, hey Moses, could you just take down a few words and pass it on to the guys down there? You know, don't murder, don't commit adultery sort of stuff.

There is a very serious ceremony in a sense of preparation to hear God's word. Sometimes we take God too lightly perhaps. Sometimes perhaps we don't recognise the sort of how we should almost be trembling under God's word when we hear it read or preached or when we read it for ourselves.

[17 : 04] So here we see God giving very clear instructions to Israel to get ready to hear his word. He says, wash your clothes firstly in the end of verse 10 and prepare for the third day because on the third day the Lord will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people.

You almost expect that they're going to see God, although of course they don't. You shall set limits for the people all around saying be careful not to go up the mountain or to touch the edge of it.

It's hard to determine where a mountain begins I would have thought but anyway somehow that's meant to be clear. Any who touch the mountain shall be put to death. You might think, well that's a little bit unfair but it does show the seriousness of approaching God here.

No hand shall touch them so if somebody else touches the mountain nobody else shall touch them but they shall be killed by either stoning or an arrow. In a sense you've got to keep your distance.

Maybe there's a sense even that you might be polluted if you physically touch them but they've got to be put to death by means whereby you don't actually physically touch them and it implies to animals as well as human beings.

[18 : 16] And when the trumpet sounds a long blast they may go up on the mountain. So Moses went down from the mountain to the people. He consecrated the people and they washed their clothes.

It may look a bit odd washing clothes but there's a sense in which I guess in the end it's symbolic of washing yourself. And one of the things we'll see here is that this old covenant is pointing towards a greater covenant where washing is not just external but where hearts are cleansed.

He consecrated the people, they washed their clothes, he said to the people prepare for the third day, do not go near a woman. They don't have sexual relations basically is what it's saying.

Now some people might say, well does this say that sex is bad, that it makes you unable to come near to God, that it's a sort of no-no. And through the Christian church's history there's been many wrong understandings of sexual practice and as though somehow it's almost a necessary evil just to keep the human race going.

But I think what God is saying here is that where sexual activity is in the closest and most important human relationship, that has got to be set aside for an even greater relationship, the relationship between people and God.

[19 : 38] So it's saying, it's not saying it's bad, but it's saying there's something even more important and better, a better relationship for you to enter into.

Now we know of course that in heaven there won't be marriage. Jesus made that clear. And here I guess is, you know, a similar sort of idea being expressed. There is one enduring relationship that matters above any other.

the relationship we have with God, even more than our relationship with our spouse. That's not to say that we shouldn't treat lightly our marriage relationships, far, far from that.

But even more importantly is our relationship with God. On the third day, on the morning of the third day, there was thunder and lightning. Here was I preparing for tonight and there was thunder and lightning outside.

I thought, what's happening here? As well as thick cloud on the mountain and a blast of a trumpet so loud that all the people who were in the camp trembled. They're afraid.

[20 : 41] God has arrived dramatically. No red carpet perhaps, but a sort of, we might say, natural accompaniment to his arrival on Mount Sinai.

Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God. They took their stand at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the Lord had descended upon it in fire.

The same means by which God revealed himself and spoke to Moses in chapter three at this same place, through the burning bush of course. And time and again in scripture, fire and cloud and trumpets for that matter, signify the presence or arrival of God at special occasions.

This of course you see is the transcendent God who has somehow condescended to come to meet with, at least at some level of intimacy, his people who are sinful.

They don't deserve it. That was clear in the chapters we saw last week. But God in his grace has come to them. Not absolutely in the sense of God wandering in the Garden of Eden and Adam and Eve sort of taking tea with him on the lawn or something.

[21 : 51] That intimacy is being broken and still is to this point. But there is an intimacy here. God has made an approach. He'll make closer approaches later in scripture through his son, through the giving of his spirit and the closest of all will be when we live face to face with him in heaven, of course.

In the remainder of that chapter, chapter 19, Moses goes up to God. He gives another warning about not even the priests can come up, in a sense foreshadowing the approach of priests to the temple later on in Jewish history.

But he does ask for Aaron, Moses' brother, to come up and Moses goes down the mountain and tells them all what God has been saying. All of this fanfare and overture, if you like with fire and trumpet and cloud and smoke, is in a sense the preparation for the delivery of the words that follow.

It tells us that what follows is important. There's been a build up to it. Indeed a build up that goes all the way back to Abraham. But especially a build up in the previous chapter, chapter 19.

It tells us also the seriousness of God speaking. You see more than seeing God, even though it talks about God coming down the mountain in their sight.

[23 : 13] It is his voice that is heard above all. And so we come to the Ten Commandments. If you ask the people on the street, do you know the Ten Commandments or live by them?

A lot of people say, yes, I live by them. Yes, they'd say I know them. Ask somebody to say one of them. Oh, well, do unto others as you do, you know, to yourself and that sort of thing. Most people don't know them.

I think if I was, to be honest, if I was to ask most people here, would you be able to recite all Ten Commandments in order, I suspect there'd be a very significant number that couldn't.

I'm not meaning to chide you too much about that, but for all the importance that the Ten Commandments have had in Christian history and in the Bible, we are in some sense surprisingly ignorant of them and certainly of their place, I think, for Christians.

The context is again stressed. I am the Lord your God, Yahweh your God, the personal name of God is used again, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

[24 : 14] That is, it's not do this, don't do this, don't do this, don't do this, and at the end of the tenth if you've done it all then I'll be your God and you can be my people. But rather I've already saved you. I'm your God. We're in a relationship already.

See, this is now your obligation to keep a relationship that I've established. You see, what in effect the New Testament calls grace, God's established a relationship with the people who don't deserve it, now he says this is how you can keep the relationship I've established.

Let me make a couple of brief comments about the Ten Commandments as a whole before just some running comments of each of them individually. These are the laws that are set apart from all the other laws of the Old Testament in a number of ways.

These are the only words that all of Israel heard God speak. All the other laws were spoken to Moses who relayed them to Israel. These laws, the Ten Commandments, come first in sequence of all the laws that follow in the Old Testament.

Here they are in Exodus 20, a whole lot of other laws will follow in 21 to 23, and in Leviticus, and in Numbers, and in Deuteronomy. And in Deuteronomy the Ten Commandments reappear at the beginning of all the laws of Deuteronomy.

[25 : 25] So they're placed in a place of priority. They are written by the finger of God on tablets of stone, a bit after this passage, just sort of at the end that's beginning to happen. All the other laws are not written by the finger of God, but they're written by Moses.

The tablets of stone written by God with the Ten Commandments on are put inside the ark later on. The rest of the law is put beside the ark, written by Moses. So it's all important, but the Ten Commandments have a greater priority.

One way in which we might think of it is that the Ten Commandments, in one sense, summarise all the laws that follow. So when we look at 21 to 23 very briefly, we'll see how in a sense it's elaborating on some of the Ten Commandments.

Now it's probably not a total summary, because there are other things you say, well, this doesn't fit any of the Ten. But by and large there's some truth in that matter as well. Also let me say that within these Ten Commandments there is perhaps a priority within them of most important onwards.

Not to say that they're unimportant at the end, but the death penalty applies for the first seven, sometimes for the eighth, maybe just occasionally for the ninth, but never for the tenth.

[26 : 40] There seems to be a progression from direct direct relationship between people and God to people and people, to people and property in a sort of slightly declining importance throughout.

So then, and the last thing to say by way of introduction is that the context of putting direct relationship with God first and then the human ones about killing and adultery and parents and so on, is to tell us, I think, that our relationships with each other will only ever be right if our relationship with God is right.

That's the fundamental relationship. So firstly, you shall have no other gods before me. God, Yahweh that is, is top dog. He's defeated all the gods of Israel after all, but he is to be first.

Now it doesn't really imply that you can have sort of second gods and third gods as though you've got a sort of, you know, football ladder of gods with Yahweh at the top. It does really imply that in practice Yahweh alone is the god that you are to worship.

No other gods can come into competition with him. He alone. It's an exclusive relationship. Secondly, and developing from the first, you shall not make for yourself an idol, a graven image, something out of wood or clay or metal, anything that is a representation of something in heaven like birds or stars that is, or an animal or a fish or anything like that.

[28 : 08] Of course, they've come out of Egypt where all those things were common and they are not to make any sort of representation of God, either a representation of something else or to try and represent Yahweh himself by something else.

Now, of course, this picks up the theme that God can't be seen. Israel hasn't seen God. There's been cloud and fire and thunder, but there's no form of God for them to see.

So any representation will fail. Sometimes Christians worry about things like crucifixes and statues and so on.

There's a sense in which sometimes those things are innocent and helpful, artistic perhaps, but to the point where people might bow down to them or somehow worship that image or representation, I think they're breaking the second commandment.

Thirdly, you shall not bow down to them and worship them. And then it says, words that are very tricky, I think, for I, Yahweh your God, am a jealous God. Now, sometimes we think jealousy is a sin, but what it means here is that Yahweh wants an exclusive relationship with his people and so he's going to be jealous of any other relationship between his people and another God.

[29 : 30] Just like in a marriage relationship, any husband or wife is rightly jealous of the relationship they have with their spouse. That is, it's an exclusive relationship and it should not be sort of compromised by inappropriate relationships with other people because there are other relationships, but not in a marriage sense.

It's the same sort of thing that's being said here of Yahweh, I think. He wants an exclusive allegiance to him. Then he says, I punish children for the iniquities of parents to the third and fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

The difficulty that people have with this is that it looks as though God is punishing children for the sins of their parents and the children presumably are innocent. I think I want to make two brief comments just on this.

The statement is, God punishes children for the iniquities of parents to the third and fourth generation of those who reject me seems to imply the continuation of the sins in the third and fourth generation rather than God punishing innocent children.

But also, notice the balance, three or four generations for punishment, a thousandth generation for love.

[30 : 51] You cannot help but see the imbalance there. God's love will triumph. It's more dominant even in this sort of statement here. The third commandment is about making a wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God or taking the Lord's name in vain more traditionally.

That can mean, I guess, swearing, as you hear at football crowds where it seems that the Lord is the player on both teams in every position sometimes. But it's a bit more than that.

It's not just swearing or blasphemy, though that perhaps is part of it. But also, I think, where perhaps you make an oath, somehow invoking God's name but don't keep that oath.

That's taking the Lord's name in vain. That is, if you're using the Lord's name in some way to say an oath or swear, some promise to do something, you break this commandment when you don't keep that promise.

God is a God of truth and integrity and faithfulness to his promise. God is a God of truth and righteousness.

[32 : 20] There are a lot of things, that is, that is, the permanent immigrants from other countries. And the reason that's given here is God made everything in six days and rested on the seventh. Now, in Genesis 1 and 2, where this comes up, that God rests on the seventh day, it's not actually made into a command for God's people there.

Some would say it's a creation ordinance from the very beginning. But here is really the first time that the Sabbath is commanded of God's people. now the tape's been changed at this point of course Solomon's the greatest example of all the problems of having lots and lots of lives you shall not steal and now we've moved from human life to property now the punishment later on for this is not death but some sort of restitution because God has a sort of fairly fair punishment punishment by death for all the things preceding but not for theft although if it's theft that includes kidnapped then possibly death may apply you shall not bear false witness against your neighbor that is a legal sort of context about giving witness in court but it also doesn't just mean don't tell a lie it also forbids being misleading you know how we can not tell a lie but just sort of somehow mislead by the things that we say our yes must be yes to put it in a different expression must be clear what we're saying and then finally one that's unusual because in one sense you can't legislate for it you shall not cover it shall not cover anything housewife ox ass anything wrong desires but it's it's probably some would say it's desires that lead to the action of taking but in one sense also the actions of taking are already covered by the previous commandments so here i think it's very much attitudinal and it is reminding us that from the beginning the law is not just about externals and actions it's about what's inside us in the end as well now i want to say a brief comment here there's a lot more that can be said about how these ten commandments and the law generally applies or doesn't apply to christians but i want to pick up one idea because i think it's something that's overlooked sometimes jesus said in at least two places that he came to fulfill the law he didn't mean by that that he would be perfect in doing it because to fulfill something is to suggest that the something being fulfilled is sort of prophesying or anticipating something that is looking forward to something jesus could have said i came to do the law but he used the word fulfill and in context where the law and the prophets are prophesying so there's a sense in which the old testament law is prophetic now not in the sense that it's predicting something which sometimes the prophets in the old testament do predicting god's judgment or this that or the other but prophesying in the sense by in the sense in which it's anticipating a bigger reality or pattern or standard we might say it's a prophecy of a paradigm or model that is the law is looking to some greater picture now let me give you a couple of instances of what i mean by that jesus in the sermon on the mount says uh you know the old testament tells you don't commit adultery but i say don't lust jesus is expanding the old testament law there and it's in that sermon on the mount that he says i've come to fulfill it so what i think he's saying is the old testament uh law is good because it's actually pointing towards the great you know sort of reality of purity which jesus takes a step further at least by saying you know don't lust and don't hate that's murder too but that itself is looking forward to the biggest picture which is heaven where there's great purity now in heaven there's no law

do not commit adultery because we'll all be pure and not want to there won't be any law in heaven about not committing murder because we will love each other as we ought and in heaven there won't be a law about don't coveting don't covet not because we don't want anything else but because we're actually more positively giving in place of coveting that is the perfection is there in heaven and the law in a sense is anticipating or prophesying that that perfect purity which jesus came to fulfill and makes possible now summarize that very briefly this whole theses i guess in all that sort of stuff but i'm trying to help us see how do we might relate to this we shouldn't be bound in one sense by the letters of ten commandments and other laws in the old testament but it's pointing to greater great and abiding principles that indeed in some ways are strengthened and expanded by jesus and sometimes i think when we read individual laws in the old testament that seem very foreign to us rather than toss them out as being redundant we should try and capture the the principle or the ethical principle of the law and then perhaps reapply it in the light of what jesus does with those principles and expanding them often or sometimes turning them into something completely different well let me move on the people respond um with fear in verse 19 this time they're they're afraid they tremble they stood at a distance and they said to moses you speak to us and we'll listen but don't let god speak to us or we'll die isn't that extraordinary back in chapter 19 they said yeah everything he says will do but now there's real fear but it's not the fear in saying oh we don't want to have anything to do with this god it's a fear of moses we want to hear what he's saying but but you tell us we don't want to come too close because we recognize in these words and in this god something extraordinary it's a fear that leads to obedience which time and again in scripture is true when you read in the old testament the fear of the lord don't think it's a bad thing don't think it's something that's overdone or replaced in the new fearing god is a good thing because it stirs us to obedience and faith well later on in chapter 20 from verse 22 we begin what is often called the book of the covenant these now are other laws in some ways an elaboration on the ten commandments the style of these laws though is very different most of them are laws about a particular situation or case that is if such and such happens then this is what you're to do the ten commandments for example said don't murder but now in these laws that follow we get things like if somebody does commit murder or if somebody kills somebody then this is what you've got to do now at one level that's acknowledging that the people will fail they won't be perfect but it's also now applying the ten commandments to particular situations and it's adding in things like punishments how do you determine what punishments what restitution is appropriate so in a sense what's following is an elaboration of these laws we'll see a few other things as well by comparison with ancient cultures babylon and egypt and others the laws here are very fair they're egalitarian that is no privileges are given to upper classes over lower classes indeed at various times the old testament is quite insistent on looking after the poor and not being exploited by the rich and so on that's very different from other ancient near eastern law codes they're very humanitarian punishment is limited if you steal something you're not going to be put to death for stealing but restitution must be made for example some of the ancient near eastern

cultures would be much more harsher much harsher much more strict in the punishments that would be meted out to people who break the law we see here an integration of the religious and what we today would call the secular there was no distinction in the old testament everything came under god so throughout the laws that follow not just here in exodus but in leviticus and deuteronomy as well almost every aspect of human life is covered relationships economics government looking after property your thought life your worship life it's all an integrated package we can't actually separate out secular and religious or sometimes people try to separate civil ceremonial and moral you can't do that in the end it's more integrated than that distinction i think but it does remind us as we read these laws that god is to have a part in every aspect of our life every waking moment there's no dichotomy between sunday and monday for example our allegiance to god must be expressed in everything that we do now in we haven't got time to deal with all these laws but i just want to highlight just a couple of things briefly before we finish with chapter 24 in the uh there are laws about slavery and there are laws about interest loans and there's laws about later on land ownership type things now the tape's being changed there's very much a an integrated system of economics shall we say which protects the poor protects slaves from being over exploited limits the world in one sense limits the wealth people can accumulate and the depths of poverty for example every seventh year land must lie fallow slaves are released after seven years every 50th year land has to go back to its own owner that's not in exodus but in leviticus it's all part of a big package of sharing equal in one sense not equally but fairly the goodness that god has given there is an underlying principle that god has given sufficient in his land for everyone to enjoy the benefits of his land there is uh there are a number of issues about negligence we are responsible for our things or other things like from other people that are given or lent to us and you'll see in chapter 21 and uh and so on issues of being responsible and careful for our property for our animals we might be liable if our animal does does wrong to somebody else's property or something like that there are principles here i think that are important loving our neighbor means that we take responsibility for our things and our care of our property and other people's property uh and so on there are there are issues of restitution if you steal something and you're caught and different situations in which that happens uh and so on there are people singled out for special care widows and orphans because they couldn't own land so they were on the they were vulnerable to becoming poor and enslaved so they're singled out for attention later on the levites the same because they also were landless another group that's singled out are resident aliens the permanent immigrants if you like people who've come from other countries but for various reasons want to settle in israel and live with the israelites accepting their culture and their religion they are not quite first class citizens but they are not to be despised or oppressed or trodden on and the reason that's given that in both chapters 22 and 23 is because you were aliens in egypt so israel's own experience of slavery and its its oppression is meant to be a warning about how they're not to treat other people who come into their own country um one uh instance of uh protection of

the poor is uh in chapter 20 uh 22 verse 26 where you shall not take a person's cloak as a pledge overnight that is they they want to borrow something from you you say okay well in return i'll take your cloak as a pledge that's okay for a day but your cloak would be your coat by day uh but your blanket by night and so nobody's life was meant to be under any threat so if this person somehow couldn't repay the loan nonetheless you were to give them their cloak back because it was such a basic uh requisite for them for living and being warm at night so that's one of the ways in which there's compassion it's actually tied to compassion in verse 27 of chapter 22 and um and care for the poor so that they don't end up in in great oppression then uh in chapter 23 verse 10 there's a section of laws about ceremonies uh and and onwards to the end of verse 19 i made a brief comment about the sabbatical year which is every seventh year and then the sabbath law comes up again in verse 12 then in verse 14 it mentions three festivals passover though it doesn't call it that interestingly it calls it unleavened bread but it's clearly the passover festival then it mentions in verse um 16 you shall observe the harvest of the festival of harvest and later on that piece that's called the festival of weeks but at this point uh you see the festival of weeks uh later on in israelite history came to be not only a past a harvest festival but it also came to be the festival whereby the israelites would remember the giving of the law because roughly the seven weeks was the time from the passover to arrival at sinai now of course here at sinai is there's no instruction about this is what it's about but it's significant that when you get to the new testament that same festival the festival of weeks seven weeks after passover which by jesus day was well and truly a festival to commemorate the giving of the law at mount sinai is the time when god's spirit was poured out the greek name for this festival is pentecost and the holy spirit's major role is to write god's law on the heart so in the old testament you've got a an event where the law is given on tablets of stone the commemoration of that that through the festival of pentecost becomes when the spirit writes the law on the heart the other festival is called the festival ingathering at the end of the year that's in the september october period later on it's called tabernacles or booths and that commemorates the wilderness wanderings but of course here it's you can't commemorate the wilderness wanderings because they haven't happened yet but later on it becomes tabernacles and booths in geonomy and uh and there in particular uh it commemorates god's provision for the people through 40 years of wilderness by jesus days two symbols come to signify that festival light because god led the people by a pillar of fire and water water from a rock and the time the one time i think when this festival is explicitly mentioned in the new testament is in john 7 where there is water and light and jesus picks up both images and says firstly about water that uh out of the heart will flow living streams of the holy spirit in effect and then in john 8 the day after the ceremony's finished when all the candles in the temple's precincts would have been extinguished he says i'm the light of the world so there's a sense in which each of the feasts passover we saw last week and these two major ones now all culminate or find their fulfillment in jesus in the new as well intriguingly at the end of all that a little sentence almost by itself the end of verse 19 you shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk now almost looks a little bit bizarre sitting there it doesn't quite look to be so important but nonetheless this actually is a law that occurs three times in the old testament so it must be important it's probably prohibiting some

[48 : 44] other religious practice that would perhaps in a magic or occult way mix mix an animal with its mother's milk in some cooking product so it's confusing death and life maybe some ritual to try and in you know get the gods to bless you or something like that there seem to be some indications of this from a place called ugarit which is in modern syria i think but of course this law has become the foundation of jewish cooking today how can you know whether the milk product and the meat product are related mother to kid well you don't so what the jews have developed over the years is well we won't have any milk and meat product together at all just in case we infringe this law i think they've lost the principle of it to be honest but actually it becomes the foundational kosher food law for jews today and indeed for hundreds of years the last bit of chapter 23 is to do with the conquest of the land these laws i just want to pick on one or two little things firstly it promises protection by god and his angel in verse 20 and 21 of chapter 23 if israel is obedient yahweh will fight for them and bring them victory but there will be destruction of the inhabitants of the land they're arriving in the land of canaan some of them are listed here and in other places of the old testament sometimes people object to these warfare laws and say well how can god be so barbaric when in the new testament he's a god of love and gentleness let me just say two or three brief things just by way of helping us think through this ethical issue the people of canaan were not innocent they were guilty of sin god made that clear in genesis 15 to abraham he said you're not going to get the land for a few hundred years by that stage the sins the amorites will be filled or complete so you've got to wait but they're sinners secondly they worship wrong gods and that's sin it's breaking the top commandments in effect now we might think in our day and age we're worshipping another god i mean you know there are people around us who go to the synagogue down the road or the the mosque down the other road and so on but that's fundamentally opposed to god and uh and god is is punishing or will punish those sorts of people so they are guilty of sin but thirdly the punishment of the canaanites and all the other ites who lived in the land is in a sense the same sort of principle of what will happen on the last day when jesus comes again and those who do not know him or deny him will face his eternal judgment it's in effect the same thing qualitatively the same although in the old testament the agent of judgment is israel in battle for us perhaps the way that we're agents of judgment is in the preaching of the gospel but ultimately the agent is jesus the judge on the last day if we try and water down the punishment of guilty people here in the old testament we will water down god's judgment of people at the end of time and if we water that down then we water down the importance of sin and then we water down the importance of jesus death and we water down the importance of grace and like a whole series of dominoes in the end the whole christian faith capitulates so let me warn you we've got to take these words seriously they're not pleasant they're not nice we can't in a sense sit easily with them we've got to cringe and be sad when people are judged by god but we've also got to rejoice that he's the king and he's sovereign and he's holy and righteous the canaanites also lastly were not to be kept alive because they would represent a threat to israel they would go into the land they'd settle there and what would happen verse 33 the last verse of chapter 23 says they shall not live in your land or they will make you sin against me notice that it doesn't go the other way you will make them

worship me you see it has a very realistic view of human ability to be righteous or not they're not we've seen israel whinge all the time we know they're not going to be perfect in a way that attracts the canaanites to them and we shouldn't have such a high view of ourselves that we think that we're immune from temptations around us israel was to live geographically distinct lives not so us where to be lived scattered among the pagans 1 peter 2 tells us we face temptations all the time to worship other gods money perhaps most of all we can't think that we're invulnerable to that we can't kid ourselves that we're safe for as paul says in 1 corinthians 10 if you think you're standing firm then be careful lest you fall god has a very realistic view of israel's ability here if you cohabit the land with them you will fall into idolatry the worst of sin end of the book of covenant beginning of 24 is a ceremony to ratify it to agree god has brought people into a relationship now he said now these are the conditions of continuing that relationship and now in effect he says are we going to agree to this and there's a ceremony just in a few details verse 3 mooses came and told the people all the words of the lord and all the ordinances and all the people answered with one voice all the words of the lord has spoken we will do yes we accept the terms of this covenant maybe a bit rash but actually the right thing to say in the end so mooses wrote down all the words of the lord not the ten commandments god was going to write them on the tablets but god wrote all the other ones mooses wrote all the other ones down himself he rose early in the morning he built an altar at the foot of the mountain he set up 12 pillars corresponding to the 12 tribes of israel he sent young men of the people of israel who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed oxen acknowledging that the people are not righteous in their own right sacrifices need to be made burnt offerings dealt with sin and sacrifices of um well-being or offerings of well-being were offered usually after a sacrifice for sin the burnt offering to express a renewed relationship so to speak mooses took half of the blood this is from the animals and put it in basins and half of the blood he dashed against the altar don't think of worship in the old testament as being like a nice english cathedral it's more like an abattoir then he took the book of the covenant that he'd just written and he read it in the hearing of the people this is actually the second time because he's already told them what god said the people said yes we'll do it he then wrote it down now he's reading it again making sure that they're going to agree to it he read it in the hearing of the people and they said all that the lord has spoken we will do and we will be obedient then what does mooses do with the blood that's left in the basin this is the awful bit he took the blood and dashed it on the people can you imagine if i'm mooses walking around here with a great big bowl splashing blood all over you and the ladies on the cleaning roster would have a fit for a start and your mothers won't be very happy when you get home with smelly clothes see the blood of the covenant that the lord has made with you in accordance with all these words what on earth's going on here this covenant agreement is in effect signed by blood when i was a little kid i remember once with i think a cousin or a neighbor trying to prick my finger to write my name in blood on some little club that we start and we buried the document in the ground i don't know whether it's still there but it doesn't matter but you know how you know you try to do something very serious and so on and you know in pirate films are always signing things with blood well this is a bit more serious than that but it is nonetheless sort of it's recognizing the importance in a sense of an agreement there's not a casual agreement you get a pencil out and sign your name to this is signed in blood the blood that's splashed on the altar in a sense represents god's commitment to the to the relationship

the altar representing him in effect the blood that's then splashed on the people comes after their agreement verbally to do what he says okay you've agreed verbally now we'll splash you with blood to signify in a sense that agreement they're covered in blood because they belong in a covenant relationship with yahweh the blood of course suggests death there's a sacrificial animal at the heart of this relationship that's in part bringing the two together now of course this is ultimately leading to a new covenant which we find in the new testament same word literally it's a new covenant that's made in blood jesus blood it's a sacrificial death at the heart of that covenant as well but thankfully we're not literally covered in animal blood but we are covered spiritually let's say with the blood of jesus and therefore we have access to god but we're cleansed not just externally with washed clothes and abstaining from sexual intercourse in order to approach god on a mountain but our hearts have been cleansed our conscience is purified by the blood of jesus so that we have access to the most holy place by means of his blood and perhaps symbolically we don't keep ratifying the covenant but we keep expressing our thankfulness for being part of that covenant when we celebrate the lord's supper with bread and wine this is my body and this is the blood of the new covenant which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins so at the heart of this covenant is blood because there's a sacrifice that needs to be made because we cannot stand before god in our own terms but we are bound by god's blood in effect he does it all he pays the price that's the extraordinary thing in the end for us to be in a lasting relationship with him in that sense you see this law is prophetic too this law is fulfilled in the cross in jesus blood shed so that we would be forgiven and that our relationship with god would be secure to the end well let's uh stand and sing i think uh it's an act of grace it's not because he's more more qualified to by being a better person but he's singled out uh for that mediatorial role i guess and um uh to relay god's words to the people he foreshadows in that sense jesus as the great mediator between god and all his people i suppose um as well so say again uh he allows him to come in or to go up the mountain i should say um it's god just you know letting mooses come up the mountain or telling him to i should say i mean it's not just letting him it's commanding him to um god choosing who who will come i mean later on only the high priest can go into the holy of holies in the tabernacle and temple only on one day only with the blood of the atonement um we could say well why the high priest i mean by chance he's a levite um but you know why couldn't it be somebody from another tribe why not anybody so you know god has set set that in part as a teaching thing too i guess you know we've got to approach god very carefully very strictly according to his rules um in part i suppose it helps us see our own privilege we can all go into the most holy place not just one day a year jenny this um eye for eye tooth for tooth is um a biblical principle occurs elsewhere and i think more than

anything it limits punishment so it's not actually to increase punishment but it actually is to limit it compared to the ancient world where people might be punished more severely for say stealing a loaf of bread and so on you know being sent to the colonies sort of thing so it's limiting punishment uh i think and um so i think that's the issue there um yeah yeah and it's against presumably the pregnant woman so if there's a miscarriage um there is a fine imposed but if there is harm done to the pregnant woman herself in addition to the miscarriage i think then there will be this eye for eye tooth for tooth type response oh oh um sorry sorry um the question is uh does this eye for eye tooth for tooth apply in other parts of the bible for other things apart from violence well um uh i can't remember off the top of my head other contexts where it occurs so i better be careful in saying yes or no to that i think it's more general than just here i think it's a general principle to be honest of restitution and punishment but um i'd have to think more about where else it look where else it occurs no we often think of it as being rather barbaric and harsh any other questions they're all heavy work days let me say but um um no i don't i don't think there is any other um sort of statement there in the old testament i think um you know to be honest my my view on this is that we're not bound by the specific day 24 hour period i mean christians traditionally have changed it anyway from being friday night through to saturday saturday sunset to being sunday because of the lord's resurrection and to distinguish themselves in part from the jewish people of the early church i think uh but to commemorate the resurrection so you know to my mind i think well you know some people not just priests have to work on sunday i i think though the principle of a day off to rest and also i mean it's a holy day so in one sense also to be set apart for god is important um i'm probably not as strict as previous generations of protestants have been on that in what in one sense of the things that you would or wouldn't do on that day but i think keeping the day special is um is quite a significant thing to do but i don't think really we're bound by the the actual day but even in the new testament there's no command to keep the sabbath um so of all the ten commandments this is the one that to be honest i think in one sense we can sit more lightly to but on the other hand it's clearly anticipating the the goal of creation the harmony of the creation with god in a perfect relationship enjoying his rest and his presence so at that level that's a very significant thing that that certainly gets it you know boosted in the new testament i think one more question if any and then we'll uh pray okay paul just in time the comment is it's getting more difficult for young people to know how to honor their parents not being a parent i'll take it as a comment not a question so thank you

not sure about the honoring of memory but anyway thanks for the comment one day maybe when i've got personal experience but don't hold your breath let's pray for two or three people would like to pray out loud things that have come out of this and then we'll sing a final hymn you