

Exod 03-11-23b

Let's pick up our study in Exodus chapter 20 now. 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. This is the preface.

This is the introductory declaration to this covenant. And it is spoken of as a covenant and as a testimony. I mentioned before that we have places where it is referred to as the ten words.

You also find that they are called the two tables of the testimony in chapter 31 verse 18 of Exodus, in chapter 32 verse 15, chapter 34 verse 29. The two tables of the testimony. It is God's declaration of His will.

And the covenant aspect is what we saw in Deuteronomy chapter 5 and chapter 6. If you will keep these words, these testimonies, these injunctions, then you will live long in the land. You will be prospered. You will multiply.

You will have a good, wonderful and fulfilled life. If you do not, the Lord God will destroy you off the face of the earth. So there is not a third option.

There is not an option that says, well you can sort of observe them and you will sort of be blessed. It is either observe them and be blessed, or fail to observe them and be wiped out. We tend to think, well there is this tiny extreme of people that just really pay no attention at all, and there is a tiny extreme of really holy people, and most of us are in the comfortable middle, where things are just kind of gray and indeterminate.

In God's mind, you have got black and white. You are either obedient or you are in line for destruction. That is how He presents it.

That is how He offers it here. So, these ten words. I mentioned that the first one here in verse 3, You shall have no other gods before me.

This in Hebrew is, Lo means there shall not be, or do not, or no. Yit-yeh is the future tense of the verb for being. It is the same word that God's name Yahweh is based on and derived from.

You have the YH motif there, and the Yod and the Waw tend to interchange in the middle of that in its various forms. So, lo yit-yeh le-ka, to you. There will not be to you.

Yit-yeh is the future. There will not be to you. Elohim ah-heh-reem, other gods, or another God.

Now, ah-heh-reem would normally sound like a plural. Elohim would normally sound like a plural. But because Elohim is itself a special word, it is hard to tell whether this is another God, because the adjective is just going to agree with the noun in form.

So, Elohim ah-heh-reem, you will have no other God, or no other gods. Either way is equally

correct. I would translate this in the singular.

You will have no other God before me. Because, technically, as an English major, just think about it. If it says, you will have no other gods before me, that means I can't have two or more ahead of Him, but maybe I can have one.

But what this says is, I am the Lord your Elohim, you will have no other Elohim before me. And in the immediate context, the Elohim idea is singular. It is Elohim who is talking.

And He says, no one will take my place. When it says before me, this is al-pannai, and this means ahead of me. Pushing me to the side.

Taking center stage in my place. This literally has the idea of being before someone's face. What is in view? What do you have before your face? Is it God, or is it something else? If Elohim, if Yahweh Elohim is not before our face, if He is not what is in view as we go through our day and our life, then something else has become Elohim.

We have Aharin Elohim. We have some other thing that has taken His place, and God says, don't do that. That is the first commandment.

Nothing takes the place of God. God stands in His place, and that place is in our view, before our eyes, before our face. When we think about life, that's where God is supposed to be.

This is what He spoke to Israel. You will have no other Elohim before me. Now, that is the first word, and the word is Elohim.

Who is going to be the Elohim? Who is going to be God? So that's word number one. The second word, you shall not make for yourself a carved image, any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, and the earth beneath, the water under the earth. As a result of this, if you look at Jewish coins, back in the days before Christ and so on, you find that there are no people ever pictured.

Unlike the Egyptians and other surrounding cultures, you don't find in the observant portions of Israel and in the faithful areas where they are actually worshipping God, you don't find what you find in the medieval times or in ancient church times where they would have murals and frescoes and mosaics depicting different great people. There is no mosaic or mural or bas-relief of Moses or Elijah or any of the other. They wouldn't even put a face on their coins.

And one of the things that they resented, in fact, that's part of what's going on when they say, should we pay our taxes to Rome? And Jesus says, show me a coin. And he says, whose likeness is on it? And they said, Caesar's. This was one of the things that really gripped the Jews because they believed it was evil, it was against this commandment to make a graven image of a person.

And they said, well, it's Caesar's image. And he says, well, render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's. There are parts of this world that we have contact with, that we have to deal with that

are a part of corruption and a part of evil and a part of the fallen world.

We have to cope with the fact that there's crime. Most of us have a lock on our doors and most of us lock our doors. It was not always this way, but it's that way now.

You're pretty well considered to be remiss if you don't deadbolt your door, if you don't lock your car. Well, let me ask you this. If you're trusting in God and if God puts a wall of fire around his people and if your safety and security is not in the arm of flesh and in the efforts of man, why do you lock your door? I'm trusting in God for my security.

God will make sure no criminal comes in and assaults my person or my family or takes my stuff. Wouldn't that be a legitimate part of what this idea is in Jesus saying, render to Caesar, looking at that image on the coin, is taking into account the fact that you have to use coins that violate at least the spirit of this command. What their understanding of their Bible was that they shouldn't be using coins that had pictures of people on them.

That was their understanding. But Jesus says, there's a certain amount of contact and a certain amount of commerce and a certain amount of interaction that you have to have with the fallen world. It's a fact of life.

So don't get so prissy that you can't be practical. There is a practical wisdom that says, look, lock your door. Take some precautions.

Don't step out into traffic and expect God to preserve your life when you're a fool. You have to deal with the realities of this life. We're in a fallen world and part of what God uses to protect us is our God-given common sense.

And of course the outworking of that may vary from person to person. We do what we do as unto the Lord. Some people wouldn't make a move without everything being fully insured.

Other people carry the bare minimum of insurance to satisfy the law. That's a judgment call. Sometimes in different times in your life, God may provide enough for you to have all kinds of insurance.

Other times you may have very skimpy or no insurance at all. It's a judgment call before the Lord and it's part of the outworking of our exercise of wisdom to discern what is the better thing. But we have to take into account the realities of life.

So now back to this. You shall not make for yourself a carved image. The Jews actually took this overboard because the context here is not making an image, a carving that you bow down to and serve.

Look at verse 5. You shall not bow down to them nor serve them. It doesn't mean that you can't carve a picture of a menorah into a cliff or into a tombstone or into a bone box, an ossuary. It doesn't mean that God was prohibiting them from ever making any sort of an image on

anything.

The letters that form the Hebrew alphabet themselves began as pictographs. The letter Beit was a representation of a house. Is that not something that is on the earth? Many of those letters began life.

The Aleph, the A, was an ox's head. And we have actually preserved the very earliest ancient form of the letter A in our alphabet. It started out on its side, but if you take the letter A and turn it upside down, it's an ox's head with two horns, broad forehead coming down to the snout, the point.

And if you look at the alphabets down through history, that letter has morphed and rotated in various ways, but that is the oldest and earliest pictograph for representing language. So this is not a prohibition for using pictures or pictograms or images, although it became that. Talk about straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel.

They were very careful to not make statues, to not make bas-relief, to not represent people or animals in Israel and miss the spirit of this. You shall not make a carved image, a likeness of something in heaven, in earth, or under the earth, to bow down to and serve. This is a prohibition specifically against idolatry.

And this is the reason we can distinguish between the first and second commandment here and not combine them the way Augustine did. Because this is not the same thing. The first command is don't let anyone or anything take God's place before your face.

God's presence and God's plan and purpose, our relationship with God needs to be at center stage all the time. Secondly, do not, not only do you not allow him to be superseded by anything else, but don't go out and create something to supersede him. Don't let the works of your hand take the place of God.

And this second commandment, unbeknown to most, not making a carved image, what could you do with your hands that was illegitimate? Most of the things that people did in the ancient world were to survive. You had to sow, you had to reap, you had to cultivate, you had to manage oxen and cattle, you had to weave textiles. You did everything with your hands.

It was a manual life. So what could you do, what could you use as a picture of wrong activity? Making an image to bow down to. This is one of the few, I mean you could go murder someone through your hands, we'll get to that later, but in terms of engaging in an activity, if you use the work of your hands to create a substitute for God, this is what would be our interpretation application.

What if our hobby takes the place of God? What if there is an activity that we really, really love? It could be, I've told you before, the first time I really came to a good understanding and illustration of this was a man in a church that we went to up in Tulsa who was a Sunday school teacher. Everybody looked up to him, kind of a tall guy, athletic build and really personable and

all. And he substituted for the pastor one Sunday and he said he was talking about this idea of something getting in the way of our relationship with God and for him it was tennis.

He was really good at tennis, loved the game and just became a fanatical tennis player. And tennis was in the Elohim position in his life. He organized his work schedule and his family schedule, his TV viewing schedule, his church schedule, so everything was secondary to, when can I get a court, who am I going to play.

That was just the hub, the axis around which the rest of his life revolved. God says that Elohim point, that axis, that point of rotation is to be the Lord God and nothing else. So the first commandment is don't let anything else become the center.

However legitimate it may be. This was what really struck me when he made this presentation because I had always thought if you make some sort of vice or bad activity the center, that's obviously a sin. But what's sinful in tennis? It's a sunshine game.

You're out there swinging a racket, wearing a white outfit. What's the harm? But you take something that is harmless and legitimate and fun and turn it into an evil when it becomes the focus. And it really stuck with me.

I'm sure I heard that probably 35 years ago and I still remember that illustration because it was the first time I really came to realize that we can take something and make it sinful. And that's what this is. Making a carved image to bow down to it and serve it.

The work of our hands, the things that we do. We do it. We take it and we place it in that God position, that Elohim location in our life.

The work of your hands to bow down to it and serve it. Men, all of us, we are built. God made us and designated us after the fall to earn our bread by the sweat of our brow.

That is what we do. And you talk to any psychologist, you read any elementary textbook on the differences between men and women. Women are relationship oriented.

Men are task oriented. Women derive their satisfaction and their fulfillment in conversation, in interaction, in soft fuzzy things. Men want to go out and knock something down or build something up or dig a ditch and see how far they got.

Our satisfaction and fulfillment comes from see the hill, take the hill. Men want to do that. Women want to talk about the hill and analyze the hill and paint a picture of the hill and tell their friends about the hill.

We want to go, seize it, take it and crack open a cold one and talk to our friends about the next hill that we are going to take. So, task orientation versus relationship orientation. And this goes all the way back to what God said in the garden.

Women are going to be the nurturing, child bearing ones. And men are going to be the

sweating, bread carrying ones. It has always been this way.

If you look at yourself in terms of gender, where is your area of temptation going to be? For women, they are more likely to move a person or a relationship or some sort of bonding, some sort of membership in a community. I am a feminist. I am a marigold grower.

I am a member of the Persian Cat Society or whatever it may be. I go to the Christian Women's Club or whatever it may be. Something that gets you circulating with people or family, my kids or my husband or whatever it may be.

It tends to often be that if there is something displacing God, it is going to be in the area of relationship. For men, it is something that we do. Women were not idol makers in Israel.

It was the men. Women were not idol makers in Canaan. It was the men.

The men would get a tree and say, you know what? I can picture a bale face right there. See where that branch sticks out? There is the nose. They would want to hack it up and make it into an image.

Or carve up a rock. You notice that when Rachel took the terrapheme, who did they belong to? Her father, Laban. They were his.

He got them. He made them. They were his special thing.

So it is much easier for men to take an activity like a sport or sports in general. I will not miss, I have heard guys say, a Dallas Cowboys game. Be they up, be they down.

I am a Bears fan. I am a Redskins fan. Whatever it may be.

Everything revolves, at least in a part of life, come Sunday, and you can find me at 315 planted in front of the set. I am going to see my game. Just get over it.

And we will take things and put their activities. Women will say, I am going to go see my mother. That kind of thing.

Or the kids are coming. Get ready. The kids are coming to spend the holiday or whatever it may be.

Anyway, you would not think, when you are reading the Ten Commandments, when you are thinking about the ten words, but when you get to number two, do not make for yourself, and the word here is PESEL. P-E-S-E-L. And this means, a thing to be worshipped.

It generally speaks of an image or an idol. But PESEL has within the word, the idea this is an object of worship. Whatever it is.

Shroud of Turin, Finger bone of the Saint, Splinter from the Cross, Holy Shrine, Mosque, Statue of Mary, you name it. That is a PESEL. You can make anything a PESEL.

You can make an urn of ashes of grandma into a PESEL. You can make an activity. You can make a relationship, a hobby, anything that you just ask God to stand aside, put a little pedestal there, and then you set something on it.

This is what I organize my life around. This is my guiding principle. I get this done, everything else is secondary.

That is PESEL. Or, it says, you shall not make yourself a carved image, or any likeness. And this is a second word called TUMUNAH.

T-apostrophe-M-U-N-A-H. The first one was P-E-S-E-L, the second one is T-apostrophe-M-U-N-A-H. Now, TUMUNAH is the more normal word for a similitude, or a likeness, or an image.

This is a copy of something. And the problem with putting something in the place of God is we like to treat it as a copy. A lot of people today worship in their mind the gentle Jesus.

It's a copy of Jesus. It's an imitation Jesus. It's a plastic dashboard Jesus.

It's an iconified Jesus made in our own image that people want to worship. And you see this in the praise chorus singing crowd. You find it in the ones who are imbalanced about the Holy Spirit.

They don't know the Lord Jesus. Now, someone might see me kiss my daughter on the forehead, and they say, you know, he's just the most loving, sensitive, caring father I've ever seen in my life. And they weren't upstairs when I was beating the daylights out of that same child for some malfunction.

They didn't see me when I was commanding a platoon. They didn't see me when I was commanding a tow company anti-tank. They didn't see me when I was yanking a lanyard to shoot artillery shells and kill people in Lebanon.

They haven't seen that side. If all they saw was a little vignette of me kissing my two daughters or doing some fun thing with them, they would have a very radically wrong idea. They haven't seen me when I am sinfully angry.

They haven't seen me when I'm impatient and short. If they saw that, they would have a more balanced and more accurate view. Well, people who do nothing but see Jesus with a child on his knees saying, suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not, have one tiny... I saw this thing on Mars.

You remember the Mars picture that came back? There's a face on Mars. Look at this. And a guy did a three-dimensional model and turned it every which way and he said, civilization, symmetry, look at that.

It's a humanoid face. Well, they sent a subsequent satellite up there and purposely looped it right over that mountain and took a fresh picture. There is no face there.

It was a trick of the light, time of day, configuration. There was a hollow spot that looked like an eye. The newer, fresher, more high-resolution picture, it's just a lumpy hill with a little crater in one side.

It looks nothing like a face. But taking one isolated view distorted the whole thing and gave rise to a whole theory of occupation of Mars. Same thing here.

Do not make a pascal. This is something to be worshipped. Do not make a substitute.

Do not make a likeness, a similitude of something. Don't deal in copies, even of God. Because this is what people tend to do.

Crucifix on the wall. Well, that's just sort of an intermediate symbol. I am worshipping God, but the crucifix is a holy symbol.

God says, don't do that. This is why there are no portraits of Christ hanging in our house. I don't know what he looked like, and if I did know, I wouldn't hang the picture up.

It's a similitude. When people see an image, remember the shiny building down there in Mexico or someplace where as the mirroring on the glass kind of deformed over time, they started seeing an image of Christ on there. So people were coming down to lay flowers at the feet of it.

The picture will sweat or bleed or something, and people come and start worshipping the picture. God says, don't deal in similitudes. Don't deal in copies.

You focus on the real thing. If you have Elohim in his spot, this stuff will all be seen in perspective. So, a likeness of something that's in heaven above.

What would be in heaven above that you'd make an image of? The sun. Just look at the Japanese flag. You know what that big round spot is? It's the sun.

By the way, I still think that is the best battle flag idea that anybody ever had, because when Japan is at peace, you have a white flag with a little red sun in the middle, and then when it's time for war, and they're all angry, all of those rays come out from the sun, and it's like, this is the sun like you don't want to see it. They are so good at graphics, and there is nothing that communicates like that sun with all the rays coming out of it. Anyway, that's something in the heavens.

Don't make an image of that and set it up to worship. Do not make a representation or something in the earth or the water under the earth. Now, what do they mean by water under the earth? Well, this is underground level.

In the thinking in the ancient Near Eastern world, when you say under the earth, you're talking about deeper than I am standing, and that also includes the surface of lakes, rivers, and seas. And so this is talking about fish. What do we know about fish? What happened over there in Philistia? Dagon, the fish head god, down he goes and his head came off.

And it hasn't happened here yet, but God says, don't be symbolizing me. This is why I don't have a fish on my car. God says, you don't need symbols.

You've got the real thing. I have nothing against the fish. If you've got a fish, you don't have to take it off.

But I'm just saying, it's the idea. And if you understand what you're doing, use whatever you want. Hang a cross on the wall, put a fish.

But I don't even have a cross on the front of this pulpit because I believe we have a greater, grander reality within us. We don't need a symbol. I don't need a fish.

I don't need a cross. And you see so many people wearing crosses who know nothing about what they're wearing it for. Nothing above, on, or beneath the earth.

You shall not bow down to them or serve them. This is the main thing. Nothing wrong with a fish.

Nothing wrong with a cross. There's nothing intrinsically wrong with a crucifix. The problem the Protestant church in general has had with the crucifix is the fact that it leaves Christ on the cross.

The victory is when he rose from the dead. Now, we have a crucifix that is a family heirloom from days gone by. But when I look at that crucifix, it reminds me not only of what happened on the cross, but everything that happened after.

And it is possible for a believer to look at any particular picture or symbol. You can have a picture of Jesus on your wall. There was one on the wall of our house when I was growing up as a boy.

I loved that picture. I thought it was great. I've seen a picture of Jesus downtown knocking on the side of a building.

It's a fine picture. There's nothing wrong with that. It's our understanding that counts.

The Jews got messed up on this and wouldn't make an image of anything. They were so paranoid about it. And they missed the point.

The point is, what is before your face? Don't let your activities, don't make something, don't take something and set it there. God says nothing should be there but me. Don't you take something or make something and put it there.

Two separate commands. Why? I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God. I don't like not being the center of your attention.

Now if you're married, you understand this. If you're married, if you're a woman, and you go to

a restaurant, do you really want to sit there and watch your husband, I, each woman that walks by the table? Hey, I'm over here. You married me.

You focus your attention on me. I mean, it's understandable. I don't think it happens so often.

But as a husband, I wouldn't want my wife turning on Wide World of Wrestling to watch all the hulked out guys. Or, you know, have the pool man come over because he's well built or something. You want someone with whom you have a relationship to focus their attention on you.

Well, God built this into us so that we would understand His attitude. When He says, I am a jealous God, you know, jealousy is a sin in the wrong context. But He says, I'm a jealous God, meaning what? I expect your full and undivided attention.

That's what God says. If you are not giving me your full and undivided attention, you're in sin. And, I will visit the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation.

Do not leave out this phrase, if you ever quote this verse, of those who hate me. Hate here is not emotional hate. This is, Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated.

This means to either treat with favor or treat with disrespect and contempt. This is not, I hate green peppers or I hate communists. This is, I treat with contempt.

To disregard and ignore something is the worst form of contempt. Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. Be ye imitators of me, says God.

To ignore God and disregard Him is contempt. That is hate. And, if you have in these days in Israel, a father and a son and a grandson and perhaps a great grandson, who as a family and as a trend, disregard God.

God says, I'm going to make a picture for you out of this family. I'm going to snuff them out. And, their line will not continue.

This was called the third generation curse. If you have a family who perpetuates generation by generation, disregard for what we read in Deuteronomy 5 and 6. Talk about the Lord when you rise up and when you lay down. Have it on the door post of your house.

Keep it before your eyes. Bind it on your hand. If three or four generations within a clan or a family, totally disregard this.

God says, I'm going to cut them off. It's bad seed. But, showing mercy to thousands, to those who love me.

Notice there is no generational requirement on those who love me. You could have had a father, grandfather and great granddad, who didn't care about the Lord. And, if you do, the curse is lifted.

And, mercy is reserved for thousands, who love Him and keep His commandments. And, those two things go together. Do not say that you love God, if you don't honor Him.

This is like saying, well, I love my wife. I just don't spend any time with her. I don't honor her.

I don't take care of her. But, I love her. No, you don't.

Same thing with a woman. Same thing with children, for parents. You can't say you love someone and then disrespect and disregard them.

They go together. That's why God says, those who love me and keep my commandments. They are two sides of the same coin.

Jesus says it in the New Testament. He reiterates it. The one who has my words and keeps them, He is the one that loves me.

Go to John 14, 15, and 16. The one who has my words and keeps them, is the one that loves me. You don't keep my words, you don't love me.

It's that simple. Now, the next word, and this is the last one we'll have time for this morning. 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.

God will hold the Israelite guilty, who takes His name in vain. What does this mean? Is this cussing, as we say in the American South? What does it mean? You know where the word cuss came from, right? That's how people in the South say the word curse. The R's fall out in the South, and C-U-S-S is just a corruption of the word curse.

Some people say, well, taking the name of the Lord in vain, this is using the Lord's name as an epithet, as an exclamation, as an interjection, as a useful gap filler while you're trying to think of something else to say. What does it mean to take His name in vain? Well, we first of all have do not, it's low, and then we have Teshuvah et Shem Yahweh. S-H-E-M, Shem means name.

Do not take the name of the Lord your Elohim, and then it says Le-Shava, S-H-A-W-A. Two or four, the preposition Le there means two or four. So taking the name of the Lord your God, two or four, Shava.

So what does this word mean? Well, Shava here has the idea of falsehood, deceit, lying. It is used of calamity and destruction. For example, Job, over in Job chapter 7 and verse 3, he says, I am allotted months of vanity and nights of trouble are appointed to me.

And he goes on to talk about his skin oozing in one thing and another, the trouble that he's having. But when it says, I am allotted months of vanity, that word vanity is this word, Sha or Shava or Shav if you're German. It is something that is deceitful.

There is a promise that is not fulfilled. There is hope that doesn't come true. We're coming to

your rescue and we never get there.

Calamity and destruction. Job says, months are going by where I wait for rescue and none comes. It is a deceitful calamity.

It's a calamity characterized by falsehood or lie. It is used in Isaiah chapter 30 and verse 28. His breath is like an overflowing torrent which reaches to the neck to shake the nations back and forth in a sieve and to put in the jaws of the peoples the bridle which leads to Shav, to destruction, to ruin.

Because normally when you bridle an animal, you're going somewhere productive. But instead, you're bridling it and leading it to its own destruction. So you thought you were going one place and you actually go somewhere else.

So what does this have the idea of? It has the idea of swearing an oath, giving someone a promise in the name of God and not fulfilling it or using it to destroy someone. You could make an oath in the name of the Lord and fulfill it and still violate this command because your intention was to defraud or to get ahead or to do someone wrong. You could be obligated to do something over here but then in order to get out of that, you make a vow to someone over here.

And then when this person comes and says, hey, you need to do this and so, you say, oh I can't, I've made a vow in the name of the Lord and I'm unable. This is what the Pharisees did with their goods when they were supposed to do certain things and they said, oh no, it's Korban. I've dedicated it to the Lord.

It can't be allocated to the poor or anything else done with it. My parents willed their estate to charity but I made a vow to the Lord that it would be dedicated to Him so I've got to keep it, I'm sorry. It is using the Lord deceitfully and it's not just breaking a vow.

And what happens on television today, there are people that break this all the time. Send us your money and your prayers will be answered. We'll lay hands on these postcards and sow into our ministry and you will reap a hundredfold and all of this.

That is breaking this commandment, taking the name of the Lord deceitfully for the purpose of causing calamity to someone else for one's own benefit at the expense of someone else. Now that can include a lot of things. God says don't.

Whatever we do, we're supposed to do in the name of the Lord. Hardly is unto the Lord, right? But if we present ourselves as someone doing that and we're actually helping ourselves, aggrandizing ourselves at others' expense, we're breaking the principle behind this command. Well, there's much more we have to say about these ten words and we'll review them and continue next week.

But we need to close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the truth of your word.

Thank you that you've preserved for us in such great detail your dealings with the nation of Israel so that we can observe, interpret, and apply and see what your will and your purpose and your desire is for us.

We pray that God the Holy Spirit will give us wisdom as we discern and seek to apply these truths in our own lives. We pray that as a result we will grow in grace, we will be equipped for every good work, and we'll glorify our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray it in His name.

Amen.