

CHAPTER 20

INTRODUCTION TO EXODUS 20

In this chapter we have an account of the giving of the law on Mount Sinai; the preface to it, (^{<0210>}Exodus 20:1,2), the ten commandments it consists of, (^{<0218>}Exodus 20:8-17), the circumstances attending it, which caused the people to remove at some distance, (^{<0218>}Exodus 20:18), when they desired of Moses, that he would speak to them and not God, who bid them not fear, since this was for the trial of them; but still they kept at a distance, while Moses drew nigh to God, (^{<0219>}Exodus 20:19-21) who ordered him to caution the children of Israel against idolatry, and directed what sort of an altar he would have made whereon to offer their sacrifices, promising that where his name was recorded he would grant his presence and blessing, (^{<0222>}Exodus 20:22-26).

Ver. 1. *And God spake all these words*, etc.] Which follow, commonly called the decalogue, or ten commands; a system or body of laws, selected and adapted to the case and circumstances of the people of Israel; striking at such sins as they were most addicted to, and they were under the greatest temptation of falling into the commission of; to prevent which, the observation of these laws was enjoined them; not but that whatsoever of them is of a moral nature, as for the most part they are, are binding on all mankind, and to be observed both by Jew and Gentile; and are the best and shortest compendium of morality that ever was delivered out, except the abridgment of them by our Lord, (^{<4026>}Matthew 22:36-40), the ancient Jews had a notion, and which Jarchi delivers as his own, that these words were spoken by God in one word; which is not to be understood grammatically; but that those laws are so closely compacted and united together as if they were but one word, and are not to be detached and separated from each other; hence, as the Apostle James says, whosoever offends in one point is guilty of all, (^{<5120>}James 2:10), and if this notion was as early as the first times of the Gospel, one would be tempted to think the Apostle Paul had reference to it, (^{<6130>}Romans 13:9 ^{<8154>}Galatians 5:14) though indeed he seems to have respect only to the second table of the law; these words were spoke in an authoritative way as commands, requiring not only

attention but obedience to them; and they were spoken by God himself in the hearing of all the people of Israel; and were not, as Aben Ezra observes, spoken by a mediator or middle person, for as yet they had not desired one; nor by an angel or angels, as the following words show, though the law is said to be spoken by angels, to be ordained by them, in the hands of a mediator, and given by the disposition of them, which perhaps was afterwards done, (see ^{<4073>}Acts 7:53 ^{<4089>}Galatians 3:19 ^{<4091>}Hebrews 2:2). (See Gill on "^{<4073>}Acts 7:53"). (See Gill on "^{<4089>}Galatians 3:19"). (See Gill on "^{<4091>}Hebrews 2:2").

saying; as follows.

Ver. 2. *I am the Lord thy God*, etc.] This verse does not contain the first of these commands, but is a preface to them, showing that God had a right to enact and enjoin the people of Israel laws; and that they were under obligation to attend unto them with reverence, and cheerfully obey them, since he was the Lord, the eternal and immutable Jehovah, the Being of beings, who gives being to all creatures, and gave them theirs, and therefore had a right to give them what laws he pleased; and he was their God, their covenant God, in a special and peculiar manner, their King and their God, they being a Theocracy, and so more immediately under his government, and therefore had laws given them preferable to what any other people had:

which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt: where they had been afflicted many years, and reduced to great distress, but were brought forth with an high hand, and with great riches, and in a very wonderful and miraculous manner; so that they were under great obligations to yield a ready and cheerful obedience to the will of God:

out of the house of bondage: or "servants"^{f605}; that is, where they had been servants and slaves, but now were made free, and were become a body politic, a kingdom of themselves, under their Lord, King, Lawgiver, and Saviour, Jehovah himself, and therefore to be governed by laws of his enacting; and this shows that this body of laws was delivered out to the people of Israel, and primarily belong to them; for of no other can the above things be said.

Ver. 3. *Thou shalt have no other gods before me*.] This is the first command, and is opposed to the polytheism of the Gentiles, the Egyptians, from whom Israel was just come, and whose gods some of them might

have had a favourable opinion of and liking to, and had committed idolatry with; and the Canaanites, into whose land they were going; and to prevent their joining with them in the worship of other gods, this law was given, as well as to be of standing us to them in all generations; for there is but one only living and true God, the former and maker of all things, who only is to be had, owned, acknowledged, served, and worshipped as such; all others have only the name, and are not by nature gods; they are other gods than the true God is; they are not real, but fictitious deities; they are other or strange gods to the worshippers of them, that cry unto them, for they do not answer them, as Jarchi observes: and now for Israel, who knew the true God, who had appeared unto them, and made himself known to them by his name Jehovah, both by his word and works, whom he had espoused to himself as a choice virgin, to commit idolatry, which is spiritual adultery with other gods, with strange gods, that are no gods, and this before God, in the presence of him, who had took them by the hand when he brought them out of Egypt, and had been a husband to them, must be shocking impiety, monstrous ingratitude, and extremely displeasing to God, and resented by him; and is, as many observe, as if a woman should commit adultery in the presence of her husband, and so the phrase may denote the audaciousness of the action, as well as the wickedness of it; though, as Ben Melech from others observes, if it was done in secret it would be before the Lord, who is the omniscient God, and nothing can be hid from him: several Jewish commentators, as Jarchi, Kimchi, and Aben Ezra, interpret the phrase “before me”, all the time I endure, while I have a being, as long as I live, or am the living God, no others are to be had; that is, they are never to be had; since the true God will always exist: the Septuagint version is, “besides me”, no other were to be worshipped with him; God will have no rivals and competitors; though he was worshipped, yet if others were worshipped with him, if others were set before him and worshipped along with him, or it was pretended he was worshipped in them, and even he with a superior and they with an inferior kind of worship; yet this was what he could by no means admit of: the phrase may be rendered “against me”^{f606}; other gods opposition to him, against his will, contrary to obedience due to him and his precepts: this law, though it supposes and strongly inculcates the unity of the divine Being, the only object of religious adoration, yet does not oppose the doctrine of the trinity of persons in the Godhead; nor is that any contradiction to it, since though the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, there are not three Gods, but three Persons, and these three are one God, (~~GRJ~~1 John 5:7).

Ver. 4. *Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image*, etc.] An image of anything graven by art or man's device, cut out of wood or stone, and so anything that was molten, or cast into a mould or form, engraved by men, and this in order to be worshipped; for otherwise images of things might be made for other uses and purposes, as the cherubim over the mercy seat, and the brazen serpent, and images and impressions on coin, which we do not find the Jews themselves scrupled to make use of in Christ's time on that account; though they vehemently opposed the setting up any images of the Caesars or emperors in their temple, because they seemed to be placed there as deities, and had a show of religious worship: however, any image of God was not to be made at all, since no similitude was ever seen of him, or any likeness could be conceived; and it must be a gross piece of ignorance, madness, and impudence, to pretend to make one, and great impiety to make it in order to be the object of religious worship; on which account, not any image or the image of anything whatever was to be made:

or any likeness [of anything] that is in heaven above; any form, figure, portrait, or picture of anything or creature whatever, whether in the supreme, starry, or airy heaven; as of angels, which some have gone into the worship of; and of the sun, moon, and stars, the host of heaven; and of any of the birds of the air, as the hawk by the Egyptians, and the dove by the Assyrians:

or that is in the earth beneath; as oxen, sheep, goats, cats, dogs, etc. such as were the gods of Egypt:

or that is in the water under the earth: as of fishes, such as were the crocodile of Egypt, the Dagon of the Philistines, and the Derceto of the Syrians: this is the second command, as the Targum of Jonathan expressly calls it; that is, the first part of it, which forbids the making of graven images for worship; the other part follows, which is the worship of them itself: Clemens of Alexandria^{f607} observes, that Numa, king of the Romans, took this from Moses, and forbid the Romans to make any image of God, like to man or beast.

Ver. 5. *Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them*, etc.] Perform any worship to them, show any reverence of them by any gesture of the body; one being mentioned, bowing the body, and put for all others, as prostration of it to the earth, bending the knee, kissing the hand, lifting up

of hands or eyes to them, or by any outward action expressing a religious esteem of them, as if there was divinity in them:

nor serve them; in a religious manner, internally or externally, by offering sacrifice and burning incense to them; by praying to, or praising of them; by expressing love to them, faith and trust in them, hope and expectation of good things from them, and the like. The reason of this second command, relating to the making and worshipping of images, next follows:

for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God; jealous of his own honour and glory, and will not give it to another; even to graven images, nor suffer it to be given to them without resenting it; and jealousy is fierce and cruel, and breaks forth into great wrath, and issues in dreadful scenes oftentimes among men; as a man that has reason to be jealous of his wife, and especially if he takes her and the adulterer in the fact, it often costs them both their lives, being so enraged at such an insult upon him, and such a violation of the marriage bed; and thus the great Jehovah, the God of Israel, their head and husband, is represented, in order to deter from idolatry, or spiritual adultery, than which nothing could be more provoking to him:

visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children; meaning chiefly, if not solely, the iniquity of idolatry; which being such an insult on his honour, “*crimen laesae majestatis*”, is treated by him as high treason is among men; not only he punishes the authors and perpetrators of it in their own persons, which is meant by “visiting”, but upon their children also, which are parts of themselves; and whatsoever is inflicted on them is the same as on themselves, and is an addition to, and a sensible aggravation of their punishment; and especially these are visited in such a manner, when they tread in their father’s steps, and fill up the measure of their iniquity. So the Targum of Jonathan,

“visiting the iniquity of ungodly fathers on rebellious children:”

unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; as all idolaters must be thought to do, whatsoever love and affection they may pretend to God, by worshipping idols before him, besides him, along with him, or him in them: “the third and fourth generation” are mentioned, because sometimes parents lived to see these, and so with their eyes beheld the punishment inflicted upon their posterity for their sins, which must be distressing to them; or, however, these being but small removes from them,

might impress their minds and affect them, to think what their sins would bring upon their descendants, who would quickly come after them, and share in the sad effects of their iniquities, and so be a means to deter them from them.

Ver. 6. *And showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me*, etc.]

And show their love by worshipping God, and him only, by serving him acceptably with reverence and godly fear, by a cheerful obedience to all his commands, by all religious exercises, both internal and external, as follows:

and keep my commandments; not only this, but all others; for keeping these from right principles, and with right views, is an instance and evidence of love to God, (see ⁴⁴⁵John 14:15,21,23) and to such persons he shows mercy and kindness, performs acts of grace, and bestows on them blessings of goodness; and indeed it is owing to his own grace, mercy, and kindness to them, that they do love him, and from a principle of love observe his precepts; and this is shown to thousands, to multitudes, who are blessed with such grace as to love the Lord, and keep his commandments: though rather this is to be understood of a thousand generations, and not persons, and should have been supplied, as in the preceding verse, “unto a thousand generations”, God being more abundant in showing mercy, and exercising grace and goodness, than he is rigorous in inflicting punishment.

Ver. 7. *Thou shall not take the name of the Lord God in vain*, etc.] Make use of the name Lord or God, or any other name and epithet of the divine Being, in a light and trifling way, without any show of reverence of him, and affection to him; whereas the name of God ought never to be mentioned but in a grave and serious manner, and with an awe of the greatness of his majesty upon the mind. The Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan restrain this to swearing by the name of the Lord; and so the Jewish writers generally interpret it either of swearing lightly, rashly, or falsely; and to this it may very well be extended, though not limited; and so forbids, as all profane oaths; imprecations, and curses by the name of God, which the mouths of wicked men are full of, so swearing by it in matters trivial, and of no importance; for swearing even by the name of the Lord ought not to be used but in matters of moment and consequence, for the confirmation of a thing, and putting an end to strife, and where a matter cannot be determined and decided without an appeal to God. And great care should be taken that a man swears to that which is true, and not false; for false swearing, or perjury, is a very grievous sin, and as it is strictly

forbidden, it is severely punished by the Lord, as follows; (see ^{<18912>}Leviticus 19:12 ^{<3894>}Zechariah 5:4), this is the third command, and the reason enforcing it follows:

for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name is vain; will not look upon him as an innocent person, and treat him as such; will not acquit and discharge him as just and righteous; but on the contrary will consider him as a guilty person, a profaner of his name, and a transgressor of his law, and will condemn and punish him, if not in this world, yet in the world to come; and so the Targum of Jonathan, by way of explanation, adds, ``in the day of the great judgment;”

(see ^{<3015>}Malachi 3:5).

Ver. 8. *Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.*] By abstaining from all servile work and business, and from all pleasures and recreations lawful on other days, and by spending it in religious exercises, both internal and external. This the Israelites are bid to “remember”, by observing it in such a manner, because this command had been given them before at the first time the manna was rained about their tents, (^{<12123>}Exodus 16:23,25,26) and because it was a command of positive institution, and not a part of the law of nature, and therefore more liable to be forgotten and neglected; for, as a Jewish writer ^{f608} observes, all the laws of the decalogue are according to the dictates of nature, the law and light of reason, and knowledge of men, excepting this: wherefore no other has this word “remember” prefixed to it; there being somewhat in the light of every man’s reason and conscience to direct and engage him in some measure to the observation of them. In what day of the week this sabbath was to be kept next follows; for all to the end of the eleventh verse belongs to this command, which is the fourth.

Ver. 9. *Six days shalt thou labour,* etc.] This is not to be taken for a precept, but a permission; not as a command enjoining men to work and labour with their hands, to provide for themselves and families things useful and necessary, and honest in the sight of God; but as a grant and allowance of so many days to employ themselves in, for their own profit and advantage, and that of their families; the Lord only reserving one day out of seven for his service, which ought to be looked upon as a singular favour, that he required no more of their time for his use, and the rest they might spend as they pleased, so that they did not indulge themselves in sin. It is required indeed of all men to labour in some sort and way or another, with their heads or with their hands; though all are not obliged to labour in

the same way, or to the same degree, for he that will not work ought not to eat; but this law is not an injunction of that kind, only a toleration of labour on the six days of the week, if proper and necessary, when it is forbidden on the seventh:

and do all thy work, which is incumbent on a man, he is called unto, and is necessary to be done for the good of him and his family; particularly care should be taken, that all should be done on the six days that could possibly be done, and nothing left to be done on the seventh.

Ver. 10. *But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God*, etc.] Not which he rested on, and ceased from the works of creation in, though he did rest on the seventh day of the creation, and so on every other day since, as well as that; nor does it appear, nor can it be proved, that this day appointed to the Jews as a sabbath was the seventh day of the week from the creation of the world; but was either the seventh day of the week from their coming out of Egypt, or from the raining of the manna: but this is called the Lord's sabbath, or rest, because enjoined by him to the people of Israel, and not to them until they were separated from other people, and were a distinct body of men under a certain meridian; for it is impossible that one and the same day, be it the seventh, or any other, should be kept to exactness of time by all the inhabitants of the earth; it being night with one part, when it is day with another, and not the same day to them all:

in it thou shall not do any work; of a servile nature, exercise any trade or any hand labour, or any kind of work for pleasure or profit, only works of mercy and necessity. No labour or handicraft was to be exercised, according to the Jewish canons^{f609}, until the going out of it, or the appearance of the stars:

thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter; neither a man nor his children, male and female, such as were under age, and under the tuition, direction, and care of their parents, who were to instruct them in this kind, and not suffer them to work on this day, and much less oblige them to it; for as for those that were grown up, and no longer under the inspection of parents, and were heads of families themselves, they are included in the word "thou", and are in the first place charged in this command;

thy manservant, nor thy maidservant; this is to be understood, according to the Jews, not of hired servants, concerning whose rest from labour a man was not bound^{f610}, but of such as were born in their house, and

bought with their money; and of such menservants as were circumcised, and in all things professed to be proselytes to the Jewish religion, and to conform to it; for as for one that only received the commands of the sons of Noah, and was not circumcised, he might do work for himself on the sabbath day, but not for his master; and no Israelite might bid him work on the sabbath day for the necessity of an Israelite, though he was not his master^{f611}. If a servant does work without the knowledge of his master, and it is known to all that he does it without his knowledge, there is no need to separate him from it, or take him off of it^{f612}: so maidservants, when they did things without the knowledge of their masters and mistresses, and without being bid to do it, they were free to do it: thus, for instance, they say^{f613},

“a cheese which maids make of themselves, of milk that belongs to an Israelite, is lawful when he does not bid them make it:”

nor thy cattle, of any sort whatever that is used to labour, because if the cattle did not rest, servants could not, who are concerned in the care and use of them: in (~~Exodus~~ Deuteronomy 5:14), the ox and the ass are particularly mentioned, because laborious creatures; the one were used in ploughing, and treading out the corn, and the other to ride upon, and carry burdens; and concerning the latter the Jews have this canon^{f614},

“he who is going in the way, (or on a journey,) and has sanctified for himself the day, and has money with him, and has an ass; and though he has with him an idolater, he may not put his bag upon his ass; because he is commanded concerning its rest; but he may give his bag to the idolater to throw it upon it; and at the going out of the sabbath he may receive it from him, and even may not give him a reward for it;”

but not only those, but all sorts of cattle were exempt from labour on this day, as horses, camels, mules, etc. which, according to the Jewish canons, as they were not to be employed in work by the Jews, so they were not to be let or lent out to an idolater^{f615}: nor the stranger that is within thy gates: who was a proselyte of the gate, and not of righteousness; as for the proselyte of righteousness that was circumcised, and professed the Jewish religion, about him there could be no doubt concerning his rest on this day; but the proselyte of the gate, his case was not so clear, and therefore is particularly expressed; and by which description it should seem that he was not obliged by this law, had he not been within their gates, or a sojourner

in anyone of their cities; since it was contrary to the laws and usages among whom they dwelt, and might be an offence to some, and a snare to others, and, as Grotius thinks, might be to their detriment, get their work and their gain from them, they are forbid to work; and yet, according to the Jewish writers^{f616}, they might work for themselves, though not for an Israelite, as before observed.

Ver. 11. *For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is,* etc] And of which six days, and of the several things made in each of them, see the notes on the first chapter of Genesis:

and resteth the seventh day: which does not suppose labour, attended with weariness and fatigue; for the Creator of the ends of the earth fainteth not, neither is weary, (²⁴⁰⁸Isaiah 40:28) nor ease and refreshment from it, but only a cessation from the works of creation, they being finished and completed, though not from the works of Providence, in which he is continually concerned: now this circumstance, before recorded in the history of the creation, is wisely improved to engage an attention to this command, and to the observation of it; there being an analogy between the one and the other, that as God worked six days, and, having done his work completely, ceased from it and rested, so it was fit and proper, that as the Israelites had six days allowed them to labour in, and do all their work, they should rest on the seventh, they and all that belonged to them, or had any connection with them:

wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath, and hallowed it: he separated it from all other days of the week, and set it apart for holy use and service, by obliging his people to cease from all work on it, and to give up themselves to the exercises of religion, as hearing, reading the word, prayer, praise, etc. and he blessed it with his presence, and with the communications of his grace, as he still continues to do, whatsoever day his people make use of for his worship and service. The note of Jarchi is,

“he blessed it with manna, by giving double bread on the sixth, and sanctified it by manna, that it might not descend on it;”

so that there was a provision made for it, which was blessing it; and it was distinguished from all other days, no manna falling on it, which was the sanctification of it; and all showed it to be a day the Lord had a particular regard to, and that it was to be a day of rest, and exemption from labour.

(This verse shows that the days in the first chapter of Genesis were real twenty four hour days. For you compare like things to like. Just as God worked six days and rested on the seventh, so the Israelites were to do also. The comparison would make no sense if the days were “seven ages” or were “seven ages” that overlapped each other (Day Age Theory) or if there was a huge gap between the days (Gap Theory). These are modern compromises to accommodate the alleged geological ages with the Biblical account of creation.

Further this verse allows one to determine the age of the universe. Using the biblical genealogies Bishop Ussher determined the date of creation to be 4004 B.C. Although this may be off by one or two percent, it is a very accurate estimate based on biblical revelation not man’s speculation.

Editor.)

Ver. 12. *Honour thy father and thy mother*, etc] Which is the fifth commandment of the decalogue, but is the first commandment with promise, as the apostle says, (~~400~~Ephesians 6:2) and is the first of the second table: this, though it may be extended to all ancestors in the ascending line, as father’s father and mother, mother’s father and mother, etc. and to all such who are in the room of parents, as step-fathers and step-mothers, guardians, nurses, etc. and to all superiors in dignity and office, to kings and governors, to masters, ministers, and magistrates; yet chiefly respects immediate parents, both father and mother, by showing filial affection for them, and reverence and esteem of them, and by yielding obedience to them, and giving them relief and assistance in all things in which they need it; and if honour, esteem, affection, obedience, and reverence, are to be given to earthly parents, then much more to our Father which is in heaven, (~~3006~~Malachi 1:6 ~~8129~~Hebrews 12:9)

that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee; that is, the land of Canaan, which he had given by promise to their fathers, and was now about to put them, their posterity, into the possession of: this further confirms the observation made, that this body of laws belonged peculiarly to the people of Israel: long life in any place or land is a blessing in itself, not always enjoyed by obedient children, though obedience to parents often brings the judgments of God on persons; so that they sometimes die an untimely or an uncommon death, as in the case of the rebellious son, for whom a law was provided in Israel, and Absalom and others, (see ~~6310~~Leviticus 20:9 ~~6218~~Deuteronomy 21:18) (~~3084~~2 Samuel 18:14

<8117>Proverbs 30:17) Aben Ezra takes the word to be transitive, and so the words may be read, “that they may prolong thy days”; or, “cause thy days to be prolonged”; meaning either that the commandments, and keeping of them, may be the means of prolonging the days of obedient children, according to the divine promise; or that they, their father and mother, whom they harbour and obey, might, by their prayers for them, be the means of obtaining long life for them; or else that they, Father, Son, and Spirit, may do it, though man’s days, strictly speaking, cannot be shortened or lengthened beyond the purpose of God, (see <8145>Job 14:5) the Septuagint version inserts before this clause another, “that it may be well with thee”, as in (<8156>Deuteronomy 5:16) and which the apostle also has, (<8183>Ephesians 6:3) and where, instead of this, the words are, “and thou mayest live long on the earth”; accommodating them the better to the Gentiles, to whom he writes.

Ver. 13. *Thou shalt not kill.*] Not meaning any sort of creatures, for there are some to be killed for the food and nourishment of men, and others for their safety and preservation; but rational creatures, men, women, and children, any of the human species, of every age, sex, condition, or nation; no man has a right to take away his own life, or the life of another; by this law is forbidden suicide, or self-murder, parricide or murder of parents, homicide or the murder of man; yet killing of men in lawful war, or in defence of a man’s self, when his own life is in danger, or the execution of malefactors by the hands or order of the civil magistrate, and killing a man at unawares, without any design, are not to be reckoned breaches of this law; but taking away the life of another through private malice and revenge, and even stabbing of a man’s character, and so all things tending to or designed for the taking away of life, and all plots, conspiracies, and contrivances for that purpose, even all sinful anger, undue wrath and envy, rancour of all mind, all malice in thought, word, or deed, are contrary to this precept, (see <8151>Matthew 5:21,22) and which, on the other hand, requires that men should do all they can for the ease, peace, and preservation of the lives of men: this is the sixth command, but, in the Septuagint, the strict order in which this and the two following precepts lie is not observed, rehearsing them thus, “thou shall not commit adultery, thou shall not steal, thou shall not kill”; and so in (<8109>Mark 10:19 <8130>Romans 13:9) the order is inverted.

Ver. 14. *Thou shall not commit adultery,*] Which, strictly speaking, is only that sin which is committed with another man’s wife, as Jarchi observes;

but Aben Ezra thinks the word here used signifies the same as another more commonly used for whoredom and fornication; and no doubt but fornication is here included, which, though it was not reckoned a crime among some Heathens, is within the reach of this law, and forbidden by it, it being an impure action, and against a man's body, as the apostle says, (^{<4158>}1 Corinthians 6:18) as well as sins of a more enormous kind, as unnatural lusts and copulations, such as incest, sodomy, bestiality, etc. and even all unchaste thoughts, desires, and affections, obscene words, and impure motions and gestures of the body, and whatever is in itself unclean or tends to uncleanness; as it also requires that we should, as much as in us lies, do all we can to preserve our chastity, and the chastity of others, pure and inviolate, (see ^{<4158>}Matthew 5:28), this is the seventh commandment.

Ver. 15. *Thou shall not steal.*] Which is to take away another man's property by force or fraud, without the knowledge, and against the will of the owner thereof. Thefts are of various kinds; there is private theft, picking of pockets, shoplifting, burglary, or breaking into houses in the night, and carrying off goods; public theft, or robbing upon the highways; domestic theft, as when wives take away their husbands' money or goods, and conceal them, or dispose of them without their knowledge and will, children rob their parents, and servants purloin their masters' effects; ecclesiastical theft or sacrilege, and personal theft, as stealing of men and making slaves of them, selling them against their wills; and Jarchi thinks that this is what the Scripture speaks of when it uses this phrase; but though this may be included, it may not be restrained to this particular, since, besides what have been observed, there are many other things that may be reduced to it and are breaches of it; as all overreaching and circumventing in trade and commerce, unjust contracts, not making good and performing payments, detention of servants' wages, unlawful usury, unfaithfulness with respect to anything deposited in a man's hands, advising and encouraging thieves, and receiving from them: the case of the Israelites borrowing of the Egyptians and spoiling them is not to be objected to this law, since that was by the command of God, and was only taking what was due to them for service; however, by this command God let the Israelites know that that was a peculiar case, and not to be drawn into an example, and that they were in other cases not to take away another man's property; and so the case of an hungry man's stealing to satisfy nature is not observed as lawful and laudable, but as what is connived at and indulged, (^{<4160>}Proverbs 6:30,31), this law obliges to preserve and

secure every man's property to himself, as much as in men lies: this is the eighth commandment.

Ver. 16. *Thou shall not bear false witness against thy neighbour.*] Neither publicly in a court of judicature, by laying things to his charge that are false, and swearing to them, to his hurt and damage; nor privately, by whispering, tale bearing, backbiting, slandering, by telling lies of him, traducing his character by innuendos, sly insinuations, and evil suggestions, whereby he may suffer in his character, credit, and reputation, and in his trade and business; Aben Ezra thinks the words describe the character of the person that is not to bear witness in any court, and to be read thus, "thou shall not answer who art a false witness": or, "O thou false witness": meaning that such an one should not be admitted an evidence in court, who had been convicted already of being a false witness; his word and oath are not to be taken, nor should any questions be put to him, or he suffered to answer to any; his depositions should have no weight with those before whom they were made, nay, even they should not be taken, nor such a person be allowed to make any; but this is to put this precept in a quite different form from all the rest, and without any necessity, since the word may as well be taken for a testimony bore, as for the person that bears it: this is the ninth commandment.

Ver. 17. *Thou shall not covet thy neighbour's house,* etc.] This is the tenth and last commandment, and is an explanation of several of the past; showing that the law of God not only forbids external acts of sin, but the inward and first motions of the mind to it, which are not known, and would not be thought to be sinful, were it not for this law; nor are they known by this law until the Spirit of God by it convinces men of them, in whose light they see them to be sinful; even not only the schemes and contrivances of sin in the mind, the imaginations of it, thoughts dwelling upon it with pleasure, but even the first risings of sin in the heart; and such motions of it which are not assented unto, and unawares spring up from the corruption of nature, and are sudden craving desires after unlawful things, even these are forbidden by this law; which shows the spirituality of the law of God, and the impossibility of its being perfectly kept by fallen men. The apostle has reference to it, (^{<R07>}Romans 7:7). Several particulars are here mentioned not to be coveted, as instances and examples instead of others. Thus, for instance, "a neighbour's house" is not to be coveted; "nor his field", as the Septuagint version here adds, agreeably to (^{<R021>}Deuteronomy 5:21), a man is not secretly to wish and desire that such a man's house or

land were his, since this arises from a discontent of mind with respect to his own habitation and possessions; and a man should be content with such things as he has, and not covet another's, which is not without sin:

thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife: and wish she was thine, and lust after her; this is a breach of the seventh command, and serves to explain and illustrate that. This clause stands first in the Septuagint version, as it does in (~~the~~ Deuteronomy 5:21),

nor his manservant, nor maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's; which, with the first clause, serve to explain the eighth command, showing that we are not only forbid to take away what is another man's property, any of the goods here mentioned, or any other, but we are not secretly to desire them, and wish they were in our possession; since it discovers uneasiness and dissatisfaction with our own lot and portion, and is coveting another man's property, which is coveting an evil covetousness.

Ver. 18. *And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings,* etc.] That is, they heard the one, and saw the other; they heard the dreadful volleys of thunder, and saw the amazing flashes of lightning, which were like lamps and torches, as the word used signifies; by a communication of senses, one sense is put for another, and the sense of sight being the principal, as Ben Melech observes, it is put for the rest, and so in the following. It is an observation of Austin's ^{f617} that to "see" is used of all of the five senses, seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, and feeling:

and the noise the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: they the sound of the trumpet, which made them tremble and saw the mountain all in a smoke, which made it look very terrible. Though the words may be rendered, as they are by some, "they perceived the thunders", etc. ^{f618}; had a sensible perception of them with their eyes ears, which greatly affected them, and made strong impressions upon their minds, and filled them with fear and dread:

and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off; their minds were not only terrified and distressed, and their bodies shook with fear; but they could not stand their ground, but were obliged to retreat, who but just before were curious to draw near, and gaze and see what they could, to prevent which bounds were set; but now these were needless, what they saw and heard were sufficient to keep them at a distance, nay, obliged them

to quit their places; they were at the lower part of the mount before, and now they removed a good way from it, even to their camp, and to their tents in it, (see ^(REB)Deuteronomy 5:30). The Targum of Jonathan says, they removed twelve miles; and so Jarchi, who observes, that this was according to the length of their camp.

Ver. 19. *And they said unto Moses*, etc.] Who was now come down from the mountain, and to whom the heads of the tribes and elders of the people came from the camp, and out of their tents, by whom the people said to him, as follows, (see ^(REB)Deuteronomy 5:23,30),

speak thou with us, and we will hear; their request is, that whatsoever it was the will and pleasure of God to declare to them, that he would communicate it to Moses, and he deliver it to them, promising that they would hearken to it, and obey it, as if they had heard it from the mouth of God himself:

but let not God speak with us, lest we die; pray to him, that he would not speak immediately, but by a mediator, which they now saw the need of; that there was no drawing nigh to God, nor hearing nor receiving anything from him without one; that his law, as it came from him to them sinful creatures, was a killing letter, and the ministration of condemnation and death, and injected such terror into their minds, that if it was continued they must die under it: thus, as the apostle observes, when “they heard the voice of words, entreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more, for they could not endure that which was commanded”, (^(S129)Hebrews 12:19,20).

Ver. 20. *And Moses said unto the people*, etc.] By representatives and messengers, the heads of the tribes and elders:

fear not; be not afraid of God with a slavish fear; be not afraid of the thunders and lightnings, as if they were like one of the plagues of Egypt, which terrified Pharaoh and his people; be not afraid of being consumed by them, they will do you no hurt; be not afraid of dying by the hand of God, at his presence, and through the voice of his words spoken to you; be of good courage, for the design of God is not to destroy you, but to instruct you, and do you good:

for God is come to prove you; whether, being now freed by him from Egyptian bondage, they would take and own him for their King, and be subject to his laws and government; whether they would abide by what

they had said, all that the Lord hath spoken will we do, (^{<0208>}Exodus 19:8), whether they thought they had purity and righteousness enough to answer to the divine law, and whether they imagined they had strength enough to fulfil it, and whether they needed a mediator between God and them or not: some Jewish writers ^{f619} give a different sense of this clause, as if the coming of God to them in this grand and majestic manner was to exalt them, and make them great and honourable among the nations of the world; taking the word used to be derived from a root, which signifies to lift up, as a banner or ensign is lifted up on high: but the former sense is best;

and that his fear may be before your faces; not a slavish fear of death, of wrath, and damnation, before dehorted from; but a reverence of the divine Majesty, an awe of his greatness and glory, a serious regard to his commands, delivered in so grand a manner, and a carefulness to offend him by disobeying them:

that ye sin not: by breaking the law, and transgressing the precepts of it, which they might be deterred from, as it might be reasonably thought, when they reflected with what solemnity, and in what an awful manner it was delivered to them.

Ver. 21. *And the people stood afar off*, etc.] Still kept their distance in their camp and tents; or the heads and elders of the people having had this conversation with Moses, returned to their tents as they were bid, (^{<0130>}Deuteronomy 5:30) and to the people in the camp, and there they continued while Moses went up to God with their request:

and Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was; the thick cloud, (^{<0199>}Exodus 19:9,16) as Jarchi interprets it, and who observes from their doctors that there were three enclosures about the divine Majesty, darkness, a cloud, and thick darkness; and so Moses passed through the darkness, and the cloud, to the thick darkness where Jehovah was, and where he is said to dwell when the temple was built, (^{<1038>}1 Kings 8:8:12) and they have an observation that the word rendered “drew near” is transitive, and should be translated, “he was brought near” or, “made to draw nigh”; Michael and Gabriel being sent to him, took hold of his hands and brought him against his will unto the thick darkness ^{f620}; but if the word will admit of such a version, the sense is either that he was caused to draw near through the importunity of the people; or rather through the call of God to him, or an impulse of his upon his mind, which obliged him to it.

Ver. 22. *And the Lord said unto Moses*, etc.] When Moses was come near the thick darkness where God was:

thus thou shalt say unto the children of Israel; at his return unto them, and which he was to deliver in the name of God, and as his words:

ye have seen that I have talked with you from heaven; descending from heaven on Mount Sinai in a cloud and fire, he talked with them out of the cloud and fire, and delivered to them with an audible voice the above ten commands; the cloud and fire they saw with their eyes, and the words expressed from thence they heard with their ears; or heaven may mean the air on the top of Sinai, from whence Jehovah spoke.

Ver. 23. *Ye shall not make with me*, etc.] This is a proposition of itself, as appears by the accent Athnach placed at the end of it, which divides it from the following, and therefore “gods of silver” belong to the next clause or proposition; something seems to be wanting to complete the sense, which the Talmudists^{f621} and Jarchi after them supply thus,

“ye shall not make with me as the likeness of my ministers which minister before me on high;”

as the seraphim, ministering angels, etc. as the sun, moon, and stars; and so the Targum of Jonathan paraphrases the words,

“ye shall not make, to worship, the likeness of the sun, and of the moon, and of the stars, and of the planets, and of the angels that minister before me:”

or rather, “ye shall not make any likeness with me”, or any likeness of me; and so the words stand connected with the preceding verse, that since they only saw the cloud and fire, and perceived the voice of God from thence, but saw no likeness or similitude of him, therefore they were not to make any under a pretence of worshipping him with it, or in it, or by it; and so Ben Melech adds, by way of explanation, although your intention is to my service: “gods of silver and gods of gold ye shall not make unto you”; for so this clause is to be read: that is, images made of gold and silver, images of angels, or of the host of heaven, the sun, moon, and stars, or of great men on earth, as kings or heroes, or of any creature in heaven, earth, or sea; these they were not to make unto them, in order to serve and worship them, or to worship God in them, or by them, or with them: the first images for idolatrous worship were made of gold and silver, because, being

rich and glittering, they more affected the minds of the people, as the golden calf a little after made, and perhaps the gods of Egypt were such, at least some of them; wherefore this law against idolatry is repeated, because the people of Israel were prone unto it, and many of them had been ensnared with it in Egypt, upon every occasion were ready to relapse into it: or images made of meaner materials, as brass, wood, and stone, though not mentioned, are equally forbidden; for if those of richer materials were not to be made and worshipped, much less those of baser ones.

Ver. 24. *An altar of earth thou shall make unto me*, etc.] This was a temporary precept, and only in force until the tabernacle was built, and respects occasional altars, erected while on their travels, and were to be made of turfs of earth, and so easily and quickly thrown up, as their case and circumstances required, and as easily thrown down, as it was proper they should, after they had no more use for them, lest they should be abused to superstitious uses; for afterwards the altar for burnt offerings was made of Shittim wood covered with brass, and that in the temple was wholly a brazen one, (^{<0270>}Exodus 27:1,2 ^{<400>}2 Chronicles 4:1) this precept seems to suggest the plainness and simplicity in which God would be worshipped, in opposition to the pomp and gaudy show of idolaters intimated in the preceding verse; though Tertullian ^{f622} relates of the Romans in the times of Numa Pompitius, that they had neither images, nor temples, nor capitols, only altars made of turfs of earth hastily thrown up; and this altar of earth might be, as Ainsworth observes, a figure of the earthly or human nature of Christ, who is the altar, whereof believers in him have a right to eat, (^{<830>}Hebrews 13:10)

and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings, and thy peace offerings, thy sheep, and thine oxen; which were the creatures offered in the said sacrifices, as also in the sin offerings and trespass offerings, which, though not mentioned, are included:

in all places where I record my name; or, “cause it to be mentioned”, or “remembered” ^{f623}; where he manifested himself, displayed the glory of his nature and perfection; or, as the Targum of Jonathan expresses it, caused his Shechinah or divine Majesty to dwell, or gave any intimations of his presence, as at the altar now erected to him, and at the sacrifices offered up thereon, and afterwards in the tabernacle, between the cherubim over the mercy seat, and ark of the testimony; which was removed to various places before the temple was built at Jerusalem, where he took up his residence,

and his name was called upon, made mention of, and recorded for many generations: but that being destroyed and worship there at an end, men may now worship God in any place, so be it they do it in spirit and in truth; and wherever the name of God is truly called upon, and the glory of his divine perfection, as displayed in the salvation of sinners by Christ, is set forth, and Christ and him crucified is preached; and mention is made of his name as the only one in which salvation is; of his glorious person and offices, of his righteousness, blood, and sacrifice, for justification, remission of sins, and atonement; and his ordinances are administered, which are memorials of his love and grace; there Jehovah grants his presence:

I will come unto thee: not locally or by change of place, nor by his omnipresence merely, so he is everywhere; nor in any visible way, but in a spiritual manner, by the communications of his grace and favour, (see ^{<6142>}John 14:21-23), and I will bless thee; with his presence, than which nothing is more desirable and delightful; with the supplies of his grace, with peace and pardon, with a justifying righteousness, with a right and title to eternal life, with enlarged views of these blessings and of interest in them.

Ver. 25. *And if thou wilt make me an altar of stone*, etc.] If they chose instead of an earthen one to make one of stone, as they might in rocky places, where they came, and in such an one where they now were, Mount Sinai, under which hill an altar was built, (^{<1214>}Exodus 24:4),

thou shalt not build it of hewn stone; which would require time and occasion expense, to hew and polish them in an artificial way; but it was to be built of rude and unpolished stones, just as they were taken out of the quarry, or found lying by the way, and which were laid up in an heap one upon another, and was done with little trouble, and without any ornament, and easily separated and thrown down, when become useless: the reason of this law, as given by Maimonides ^{f624}, is this,

“because the idolaters of that time built their altars of hewn stones, therefore God forbid it, lest we should be like them, and that we might shun it in all things, he commanded the altar to be made of earth, as it is said, an altar of earth shalt thou make unto me; and if it could not be made without stones, that the stones should remain in their own natural form, and be neither hewn nor polished; as he after forbid a painted stone, and a plantation of trees by an altar; for in each of these there is one and the same intention and design,

namely, that we might not worship him in the same manner in which idolaters used to worship their fictitious deities:”

for if thou lift up thy tool upon it; or, thy sword^{f625}; it signifies any tool or instrument made of iron as a sword is, and here such an one as is used in hewing of stone; which, if lifted up on the altar, or on any of the stones of which it is built, to strike and hew them with,

thou hast polluted it; and so made it unfit for use: how this should be done hereby is not easy to say, no good reason seems to be assignable for it but the will and pleasure of God; who so appointed it, and reckoned that a pollution, and would have it so thought by others, which with men is accounted ornamental; his thoughts and judgment are not as man’s: the Targum of Jonathan is,

“for if thou liftest up iron, of which a sword is made, upon a stone, thou wilt profane it;”

the reason which the Misnic doctors^{f626} give, and Jarchi from them, is,

“because iron was created to shorten the days of men, but the other was made to prolong the days of men: and therefore it cannot be just that that which shortens should be lifted up and agitated over that which prolongs:”

but Maimonides gives a better reason of it, as Abarbinel understands him, which was to prevent persons making images in stones^{f627}, which image making is the thing guarded against and forbidden in the context; but still better is that of Isaac Arama^{f628}, that the hands of the artificer were to abstain from the stones of the altar, lest that good which men obtain of God at the altar should be attributed to any work of theirs: though, after all, it is right what Aben Ezra, says, that it does not belong to us to search after the reasons of the commands, at least not in too curious and bold a manner, and where God is silent and has not thought fit to give any.

Ver. 26. *Neither shalt thou go up by steps unto mine altar*, etc.] That is, you priests, the sons of Aaron, as the Targums of Jonathan and Jerusalem paraphrase the words; the altar of burnt offering built when the tabernacle was seemed not to require any, being but three cubits high, (⁴²⁷⁰Exodus 27:1) but that in Solomon’s temple did, being ten cubits high, (⁴⁴⁰⁰2 Chronicles 4:1) and therefore some method must be used to ascend it, and do the business that was to be done on it: now the Jews say^{f629}, there was

what they call “Kibbesh”, a sort of a causeway made of earth thrown up, which rose gradually and led to the top of the altar, and was about thirty two cubits long and sixteen broad: and so the Targum of Jonathan paraphrases the words,

“thou shalt not go up by steps to mine altar, but by bridges;”

express mention is made of stairs to the altar in Ezekiel’s vision,
(~~3617~~ Ezekiel 43:17)

that thy nakedness be not discovered thereon; that part of the body which is not to be named, and ought not to be seen, and which would be exposed if there were many steps, and these at a distance from each other; which would oblige them to take large strides, and so be in danger of discovering those parts which would make them the object of contempt and ridicule with the people; since as yet breeches were not used, and the garments were long loose ones, which were easily turned aside, or the parts under them seen by those below; to prevent which, afterwards linen breeches were ordered to be made for the priests, and to be used by them in their service: Maimonides^{f630} thinks the reason of this was, because formerly the idolatrous worship of Peor was performed by uncovering of their nakedness before it; and so by this is expressed God’s detestation of such an impure and abominable practice; but this is uncertain; however, this we may be sure of, that this is the will of God, that all immodesty and indecency, and whatever tends to create impure thoughts and stir up unclean lusts, should be carefully avoided in his worship.