

Lecture 10: Revelation at Sinai; Decalogue; Laws.

Reading: Exodus 19-24; the three Decalogues: Exodus 20, Deuteronomy 5, Exodus 34; Kugel 240-279.

Topics:

- What is the significance of the Decalogue?
- What is “the book of the covenant”?
- How do the different versions of the Decalogue differ from each other?

Two climaxes to the exodus from Egypt:

- passage of the Red / Reed Sea (Exodus 15, the Song of the Sea);
- Covenant between God and Israel (Exodus 20, the Ten Commandments).

The Ten Words or perhaps “The Ten Revelations” (Exodus 34:28, Deut 4:13, 10.4) = Decalogue:

- “Ten Commandments” is not a biblical phrase;
- Stipulation of the rules governing the treaty (= covenant) between the suzerain (God) and the vassal (Israel) (Kugel);
- Chosen people idea 19:1-6 (from D?);
- The text clearly implies that these laws are special: only these were accompanied by thunder and lightning, only these (or some subset) are revealed to the entire people without Mosaic intermediation;
 - ♦ Later Jewish readers (see Kugel) understood these ten as headings or rubrics that encompass all the laws of the Torah; some modern scholars have suggested that the laws of the book of Deuteronomy (which otherwise seem to be entirely random and in a random order) are in fact expansions of these ten in order.

The Decalogue – indeed all the laws of the Torah – contains laws that are:

- common or standard in many societies including the ANE (honor parents, prohibition of murder, theft, adultery);
 - ♦ Not “thou shalt not kill” but “thou shalt not murder”;
- laws that are unique to Israel (exclusivity of the worship of God; Sabbath).

The Torah does not classify its laws:

- Medieval Jewish philosophers will distinguish *rational* laws from *revelatory* laws and will try to classify the commandments under various schemes;
- The Torah provides no headings or rubrics; no separation between civil, criminal, public, or cultic law, or what we would call “ethics”; see Leviticus 19 (ascribed by MBS to P or H) for a spectacular example.

Different versions of the Decalogue, Exodus vs. Deuteronomy:

- Usual assumption is that Deut revises Exod; Deut replaces creation of the world with the exodus from Egypt as the rationale for the Sabbath -- why?
- MBS try to reconstruct a shorter version of the Decalogue at the basis of both versions;
 - ✦ Demand for exclusive worship of the one God seems to have been the innovation of the prophets in the 8th centuries BCE so our version of the Decalogue would postdate them.
- Does Exodus 34 contain yet another Decalogue (usually called “ritual Decalogue”)?

Different ways of counting the ten words/commandments (see notes in JSB);

- Jewish counting takes “I am the Lord your God” as a “commandment” which seems unlikely; various Christian traditions split “You shall not covet” into two commandments which also seems unlikely.

Decalogue is immediately followed by a series of laws that modern scholars call the Covenant Code; much of this is common to the great law codes of the ANE (Kugel).

This fact seems to bother Kugel a great deal and I’m not sure why.

The Israelites have “Israelized” the law of the ANE just as they naturalized the flood story, converting it to a morality story; three important postulates:

- God himself legislates; elsewhere in the ANE kings legislate (Kugel) just as in Deuteronomy Moses speaks in the first-person singular;
 - ✦ ancient Israel develops the idea that the king is beholden to the law (Deut 17:14-20).
- Equality before the law, at least in civil and criminal law; no favoritism shown to upper classes as in ANE (but this does not diminish the reality of slavery);
- Only the perpetrator suffers for his crime, and s/he suffers commensurately:
 - ✦ *Lex talionis* (“the law of retaliation,” Exodus 21:23-25): the point in context that you may not kill someone who knocks out your eye; and that you punish the perpetrator, not the perpetrator’s offspring (see JSB on 21:31).