

## 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 8<sup>th</sup> 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).