

# *EXODUS*

**From Slavery to Service**

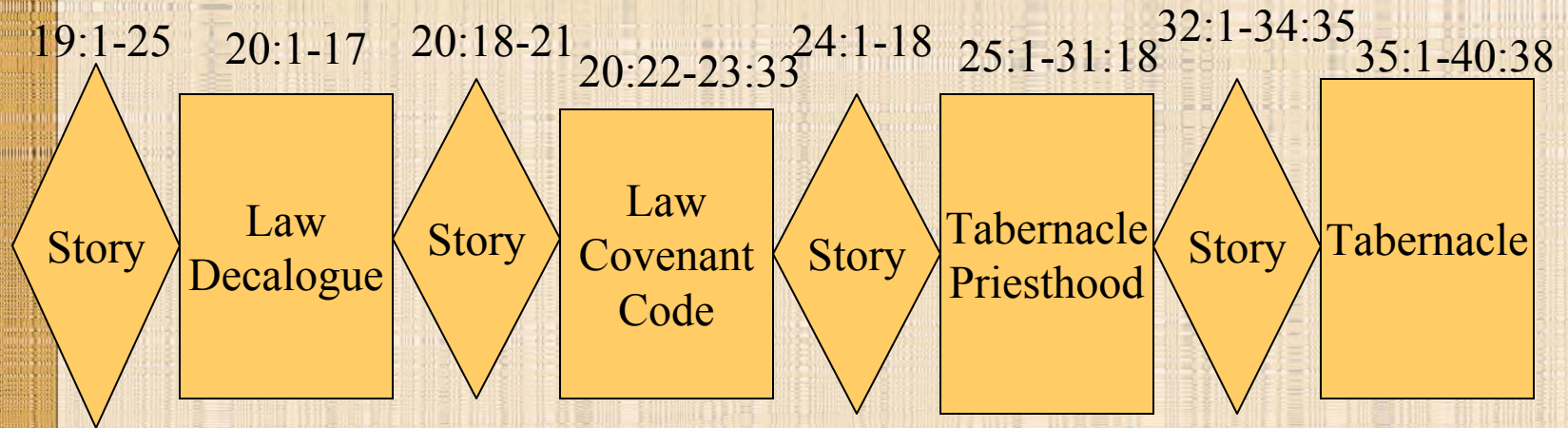
*9. Coming to Sinai*  
**Commitment to the LORD**  
**Who Saves (Exodus 19:1—**  
**20:21)**

## *References*

- **Exodus (from series Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching)** Terence E. Fretheim, Westminster / John Knox Press, 1991
- **From Slavery to Service: A Study of Exodus**, by Diane L. Jacobson, Augsburg Fortress, Minneapolis, 1996 ISBN 0-8066-2978-9 (out of print)

# *Law and Narrative*

Structure of Exodus 19:1 – 40:38  
From Fretheim, p.202



# *Law and Narrative*

- Mingling of law with story is unique in ancient world
- Meaning
  - God gives the law and acts in the story
  - Story emphasizes gift aspects of law
  - Story maintains personal relationship aspects of law
  - Divine action and human response are related
    - Obedience as response to God
    - Points to human role in relationship
  - Upholds creation theology as basic to Exodus
    - Integrates cosmic and social order
    - How God's will is done on earth

# *Law and Narrative*

- God of story norms the law
  - God loved and freed a people in slavery
  - God's people are to behave toward their neighbor in similar ways
- Motive for obedience
  - You were slaves so be compassionate and just towards the oppressed
  - Such behavior will be a witness of God's justice

# *Law and Narrative*

- Law integral to life itself
  - Derived from the history, the life experience of the people
  - Law reinterprets new life situation
    - Not set in stone, but flexible to different needs as they arise
    - Exerts a creative tension between absolutes of law and needs of life
- Obedience of law becomes witness to God
- Combination means Torah is instruction
  - Life in relationship with God is shaped by both law and story
  - Story
    - Shapes the people's identity
    - Reflects a vision of faithful relationship
    - Gives pattern of faithful life

## *On Eagle's Wings – Exodus 19:1-8*

- Fretheim believes this narrative not derived from ancient treaty forms
- With exception of Lev. 26:12, Exodus only text to use “my people”
- Exodus is not the point of “election”, but a continuation of the covenant with Abraham
- Covenant at Sinai is covenant within this larger covenant
- Verses 4-6 tell what God has already done for Israel
  - God is a mother eagle (see also Deut. 32:10-12)
    - Protects the youngest nestlings
    - Pushes the fledglings out of the nest to fly, but catches them on her wings if not ready



## *On Eagle's Wings – Exodus 19:1-8*

- Obedience grows out of the established relationship
- Relationship to God is primary, not obedience to law
- “Keeping the covenant” means faithfulness to relationship
- Verse 8 should be seen as continuing obedience to the continuing voice of God
- Verses 5-6 grow out of “All the earth is mine”

## *On Eagle's Wings – Exodus 19:1-8*

- “Israel is commissioned to be God’s people on behalf of the earth which is God’s.” (Fretheim)
  - Israel is God’s “own possession” for a purpose
  - As a “kingdom of priests”, Israel is to serve as mediator with God for other nations, a servant role
  - As a “holy nation”, Israel is set apart for God’s purpose
  - “This , essentially, is the task of mediation, of obeying the law, not for its own sake, but for the sake of the world. It is a means by which the will of God can move toward realization in the entire earth.” (Fretheim)
  - Church called to similar mission (I Peter 2:9)

# *Theophany and Law – Ex. 19:9-20:21*

- Only time the people of Israel hear God directly
- Purpose to insure God is correctly heard and understood
- Later, Israel's leaders will see God without the fear the community is subject to in this narrative (Ex. 24:9-11)
- Here, the people call on Moses to be their intermediary, reinforcing the role that God has defined for him

# *Theophany and Law – Ex. 19:9-20:21*

- Preparations for encounter with God intended
  - Proper fear is reverence of God
  - Phrase “that you may not sin” not intended to convey total absence of sin, but life in congruence with relationship to God
- Death on touching the mountain
  - Treated like the Holy of Holies
  - Person who touched the mountain does not die as a natural consequence, but must be put to death by the community
  - Reason given: “You shall not see God and live” (Ex. 33:20)
    - Assumes that God can be seen, but there are consequences
    - Exception seems to be Ex. 24:10
    - This prohibition acts to ensure human freedom by preserving the possibility of disbelief

# *Theophany and Law – Ex. 19:9-20:21*

- Law implies testing of faithfulness to relationship
- Point is that the theophany not as important as what God says

# *The Ten Commandments – Ex. 20:1-17*

- Several “decalogues”
  - Ex. 34:17-26
  - Deut. 27:15-26
  - Lev. 19
- Variations suggests the law never intended to be inflexible and unchangeable
  - “Innerbiblical warrant” (Fretheim) to expand on these commandments

# *The Ten Commandments – Ex. 20:1-17*

- Negative nature of 8 commandments
  - Sets boundaries
  - Preserves life
- Apodictic (incontestable) nature
  - Sets up core concerns
  - Preserves order
- Christians not exempt, but called to higher, deeper standard
  - Command to love

## *I Am the Lord Your God – Ex. 20:1-2*

- Obedience derived from relationship with the personal God, Yahweh, not God in general
- God makes promise to be the God of Israel
- God is the God who redeemed Israel
  - Law is instruction for the life of the redeemed
- “God’s surprising and unconditional move on Israel’s behalf is a standing invitation for Israel to go beyond the law. To be gracious as Yahweh has been gracious means that the people of God must always be on the lookout for ever new ways to conform their lives to that of God himself.”  
(Fretheim)



# *You Shall Have No Other Gods Before Me*

- Exodus 20:3
- Defines loyalty for the relationship
- Serving even non-existent gods can result in a break in the relationship

# *You Shall Not Make for Yourself an Idol*

- Ex. 20:4-6
- Different religious traditions number the commandments differently
  - Catholics divide v. 17 into 2 commandments
  - Jews use v. 2 as the first commandment
- Issues of other gods and idol worship overlap in the Bible
- Why no image of Yahweh?
  - Pagan religions in area used lots of images
  - Not merely that God is above all creation
  - Ties God to a static, unchanging, unfeeling, non-being
- “Images imply that not only does God not think or feel or act in relationship to the world but that this is the very character of God. To worship images is to deny some basic things about God’s very nature as well as the divine relationship to the world.” (Fretheim)
- God breaks the mold in Ex. 34:6-7

# *You Shall Not Make Wrongful Use of the Name of the Lord*

- Ex. 20:7
- Intent to protect God's reputation
- God's purpose in Exodus "that my name may be declared throughout all the earth" (Ex. 9:16)
- Association of God's name with casual talk affects God's reputation
- God's name is to be praised

# *Remember the Sabbath Day, and Keep It Holy*

- Ex. 20:8-11
- Time belongs to God
- Sabbath a gift, not a burden
- Reason for Sabbath is that God *finished* creation by resting on the Sabbath
- Sabbath rest includes animals and non-Israelites
- Not keeping Sabbath allows chaos to break out in creation
- Recognizes God as the Source of all our needs

# *Honor Your Father and Mother*

- Ex. 20:12
- Note that both parents included in this patriarchal society
- Commandment does not specify behavior, but leads to consideration of behaviors that would honor parents
- Probably intended originally as exhortation to care for elderly or infirm parents
- “Loose causal weave” means that life will generally be better if we honor parents

# *You Shall Not Kill*

- Ex. 20:13
- Word “to kill” (*rasah*) used in various ways to mean murder, accidental killing, execution, but not killing in war
- Read in conjunction with Num. 35:20-21
- Jesus also expands the meaning of this commandment in Matt. 5:21-26 to include other types of abuse

# *You Shall Not Commit Adultery*

- Ex. 20:14
- God intended human sexuality to be expressed within a context of commitment and faithfulness
- Applies to both men and women
  - Double standard is that men only violate with other married women; women violate with any man
  - Did not include fornication originally, but was expanded to do so later
- Need to consider other forms of sexual violence

# *You Shall Not Steal*

- Ex. 20:15
- Theft does not only affect the material goods, but violates the owner
- Attacks the dignity of God's gift of work and its resulting fruits of labor
- Should not be read as endorsement of specific economic structure
- Consider effects of affluence and the voice of the prophets (Isa. 3:16-26; Amos 8:4-6; Micah 3:1-3)



# *You Shall Not Bear False Witness*

- Ex. 20:16
- Concerned with false testimony in legal setting
- Threatened entire system of justice
- Extended to include lying and slanderous gossip (Deut. 5:20; Lev. 19:16; Hos. 4:2)
- Jesus follows that extended view (Matt. 5:33-37)

# *You Shall Not Covet*

- Ex. 20:17
- Only commandment concerned with intent
- Makes God's standards more apparent
- Best described as prohibiting greed, envy, and lust
- Jesus actually in line with tradition here in Matt. 5:21-22, 27-28
- Highlights the instructional nature of the law
- Since only God can judge intent, exposes relationship of wronging neighbor and thereby wronging God