

Austin Graduate School of Theology  
 Sermon Seminar Series  
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**Working with the “Ten Commandments”**

**I.  
 Notes on Text**

**Comparison of Primary Text in Exodus and NRSV**

<b>Note</b>	<b>Exodus 20:1-17</b>	<b>Deuteronomy 5:1-21</b>
A	Then <i>God spoke</i> all these words:	<i>Moses</i> convened all Israel, and <i>said</i> to them:  Hear, O Israel, the statutes and ordinances that I am addressing to you today; you shall learn them and observe them diligently. <sup>2</sup> The LORD our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. <sup>3</sup> Not with our ancestors did the LORD make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive today. <sup>4</sup> The LORD spoke with you face to face at the mountain, out of the fire. <sup>5</sup> (At that time I was standing between the LORD and you to declare to you the words of the LORD; for you were afraid because of the fire and did not go up the mountain.) And he said:
B	<sup>2</sup> I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the <i>house of slavery</i> ; <sup>3</sup> <i>you shall have no other gods before me.</i>	<sup>6</sup> I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the <i>house of slavery</i> ; <sup>7</sup> <i>you shall have no other gods before me.</i>
C	<sup>4</sup> You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in <i>heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.</i>  <sup>5</sup> You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the LORD your God	<sup>8</sup> You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in <i>heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.</i>  <sup>9</sup> You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the LORD your God

D E	<p>am a <i>jealous</i> God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, <sup>6</sup> but showing <i>steadfast love</i> to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.</p>	<p>am a <i>jealous</i> God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and fourth generation of those who reject me, <sup>10</sup> but showing <i>steadfast love</i> to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.</p>
F	<p><sup>7</sup> You shall not <i>make wrongful use</i> of the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.</p>	<p><sup>11</sup> You shall not <i>make wrongful use</i> of the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.</p>
G H	<p><sup>8</sup> Remember the <i>sabbath</i> day, and keep it holy. <sup>9</sup> Six days you shall labor and do all your work. <sup>10</sup> But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. <sup>11</sup> <i>For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.</i></p>	<p><sup>12</sup> Observe the <i>sabbath</i> day and keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. <sup>13</sup> Six days you shall labor and do all your work. <sup>14</sup> But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns, so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you. <sup>15</sup> <i>Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day.</i></p>
I	<p><sup>12</sup> <i>Honor</i> your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.</p>	<p><sup>16</sup> <i>Honor</i> your father and your mother, as the LORD your God commanded you, so that your days may be long <i>and that it may go well with you</i> in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.</p>
J	<p><sup>13</sup> You shall not murder.</p>	<p><sup>17</sup> You shall not murder.</p>
K	<p><sup>14</sup> You shall not commit adultery.</p>	<p><sup>18</sup> Neither shall you commit adultery.</p>
L	<p><sup>15</sup> You shall not steal.</p>	<p><sup>19</sup> Neither shall you steal.</p>
M	<p><sup>16</sup> You shall not bear false witness</p>	<p><sup>20</sup> Neither shall you bear false witness</p>

N	<p>against your neighbor.</p> <p><sup>17</sup> You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.</p>	<p>against your neighbor.</p> <p><sup>21</sup> Neither shall you covet your neighbor's wife. Neither shall you desire your neighbor's house, or field, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.</p>
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**NOTES:**

- A. In Exodus, God speaks the "Ten Words" while in Deuteronomy Moses reports what God spoke on the Mountain.
  - a. The Exodus account emphasizes God as the one who speaks and delivers the "Words" (*devarim*) from the mountain.
  - b. Deuteronomy emphasizes two things 1) Moses as the mediator who "stands between God and the people" (Deut 5:5) and 2) the fear of the people (as God spoke with them "face to face" out of the fire) and hence the need for there to be an intermediary, Moses. Deuteronomy continues to emphasis Moses as the authorized spokesperson for God
  
- B. The standard translation of the first commandment is "You shall have no other gods before me." Three things may be noted here:
  - a. The command is predicated upon the central recognition that it is "your God" (the God of Israel) who delivered the people from Egypt, specifically a "house of slavery," not some other god.
  - b. In Hebrew, the commandment may read "*To you*, there are no other gods before me." Since the God of Israel delivered from Egypt, there is "no other" god to the Israelites. The command highlights the unique and singular act that bonds God together with the people: deliverance from slavery.
  - c. The pronoun "you" is masculine singular, indicating that the addressees of the commandments are males (as opposed to males and females). Such indication points to the role of the Israelite male as "head of household" or "head of the father" or other family construction in a patriarchal society. It is the responsibility of the male head of household to ensure that the "house of the father" is organized and maintained according to the structures outlined in the Ten Words. The use of the masculine singular "you" raises the question about how females were to understand and follow these commandments.

- C. As the Israelites were coming from an Egyptian society wherein idols were a prominent feature, the commandment is clear to cover all dimensions of the created order: heaven above, earth, and waters below.
- D. God self-defines as a “jealous” (Hebrew: *qa’na*) God. In Hebrew, the word translated as jealous may also be read as zealous.
- a. The sheer force of the word indicates that God is *passionate about* and *possessive of* the people. Exodus 19:4-6 indicates the LORD taking the people as a treasured possession, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. To these ends, the LORD will not tolerate any other allegiance on the part of the Israelites.
  - b. Exodus 34:14 also indicates that the LORD’s name is “Jealous” and is a z/jealous God” who will not tolerate the Israelites bowing down or worshipping other gods. Again, the referent for this commandment goes back to the LORD being the one who delivered from Egypt, the house of slavery.
  - c. For additional study on the sheer force of “jealousy” as portrayed in the Old Testament texts see the notion of God as “consuming fire” (Deut 4:24), the arousal of God’s jealousy when people worship other gods (Deut 6:15), the consuming zeal for the house of the LORD that consumes the Psalmist (Ps 69:10), the z/jealous “unyielding” nature of the grave (Song 8:6). The strength (and at times destructive) nature of z/jealousy can also be seen in Prov 14:30, Prov 27:4, Eccl 4:4)
- E. The Hebrew word *hesed* is translated as *steadfast love* and is the term for God’s love for the Israelites rooted in covenant. It is a word that denotes a complete and enduring bond to the people that is not based on “feelings” but rather on the commitment to the covenant made with the people at Sinai. God’s primary self-disclosure to the people is found in Exodus 34:6-7, some of which is evident here in the reference to showing *hesed*, or steadfast love.
- F. The Hebrew here is closer to the phrase, “You shall not lift up the name of the LORD unto emptiness (*shav*).” The force of the command or word is the prohibition of invoking or using “name of the LORD” (see Exod 3:14) unto no purpose, as if it were nothing, or in a way that is futile or false (as in a “false report” see Exod 23:1). Other examples of the use of the word *shav*’ include Ps 60:11, and Isa 1:13.
- G. The Hebrew root *shabbat* means to stop. The “Sabbath Day” is literally the “day of stopping,” hence the prohibition of any work being done on this day by anyone under the purview of the male head of household. As in note “B” above, since the addressees are males and the list of prohibited work in 20:8-9 does not mention the wives, then the question is open as to how the wives of the adult Israelite males are to understand this commandment. Are they addressees? Presumably they too fall under the governance of all of the Ten

Words, although the grammar makes it difficult to avoid the question about wives.

- H. Notice that the reason for keeping / observing the Sabbath is different in Exodus and in Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy recalls the defining moment in Israelite history, the Exodus, for a new generation. Exodus account demonstrates the created order emphasizing the nature of God who delivers the Ten Words at Sinai.
- I. The command to honor envisions adults caring for their aging parents as would have been appropriate to Israelite society when individuals arrived at an age where they could no longer care for themselves. Notice that Deuteronomy adds “that it may go well with you,” a theme that Deuteronomy carries out in the latter part of Moses’s sermon toward the end of the book. Note the list of blessing and cursing in Deuteronomy 28 as depicting that which will go well with Israel and that which will not based on Israel’s keeping of commands.
- J. Two words in Hebrew denote the take of another’s life: *ratsach* and *harag*.
  - a. *Ratsach* comes from a Semitic/Hebrew root idea denoting “breaking, brusing, crushing, shattering” and is used to denote “murder,” something akin to “manslaughter”.
    - i. Can be used for “intentional” and “unintentional” murder
    - ii. Intentional with pre-meditation
      - 1. Exodus 20:15, Jeremiah 7:9; I Kings 21:19 (King Ahab and Naboth)
      - 2. Numbers 35:27-30: The “blood avenger”
    - iii. Unintentional
      - 1. Deuteronomy 19:3-6 (cities of refuge)
      - 2. Joshua 20:3-8
    - iv. Stands in support of other Old Testament teaching to preserve the life and dignity of another:
      - 1. Warning against shedding of human blood (Gen. 9:5)
      - 2. Care for the widow, the orphan, and the stranger (Exodus 22:21-24)
      - 3. Love your neighbor as yourself (Leviticus 19:18)
  - b. *Harag* means to kill
    - i. To kill or slay, implying a ruthless kind of violence, a private type of violence, slaying as part of God’s judgment, judicial killing by human beings, killing by beasts, to destroy or ruin
    - ii. Examples include:
      - 1. Cain kills Abel (Genesis 4:1-16)
      - 2. Judicial killing by God (Genesis 20:4)
      - 3. Judicial killing by human beings (Exodus 32:25-29)
      - 4. Killing by beasts (2 Kings 17:25)
      - 5. Ruination (Job 5:2)

- K. The concept of adultery in the Ancient Near East was virtually always known as the “Great Sin.” In the Ancient Near East where women were viewed as the property of the male, adultery was tantamount to theft of another man’s property rendering adultery as a kind of “multiple” transgression. Not only was a man’s property taken through adultery but the man was also shamed as he could not hold on to the property that was his.
- L. The concept of stealing, like adultery, also had familial connections as theft of one’s children or servants also compromised another male’s property. Not being able to hold on to one’s children or servants also meant that the owner lost a part of his household workforce.
- M. Bearing false witness is set in the context of judicial proceedings. It is nuanced beyond simply “lying” about something. Rather it is the intentional misrepresentation of facts in a case that deliberately undermine a fellow Israelite.
- N. Coveting is connected to the desire of what another has. Coveting is seen as a “root” sin since it is a precondition to an action that undermines one’s allegiance to God and to the community. Notice the similarities in the language surrounding those who are to observe the Sabbath and those one is not to covet (a neighbor’s property). When not checked, coveting threatens the stability of Israelite households and therefore the society in general.

## **II. Homiletical Leads / Sermon Illustrations / Starters**

### **Sermon I**

#### **The Top Button Illustration: Do you have your top button buttoned right?**

This is simple illustration that demonstrates the importance of getting the most important thing right. If the most important thing is not right, then everything else that follows will be askew.

Take any button down shirt and hold it up to the audience. Ask the audience what will happen if the top button is buttoned in the right hole (Demonstrate). Then ask what the chances are of the other buttons being buttoned in the correct sequence. It is obvious the chances are high. Now button the top button in the second hole instead of the first. Hold the shirt up and ask the same question: what are the chances now of the other buttons being in the right hole. Zero. The point is obvious: if the top button is not correct, then no other button can possibly be right.

The application is simple: If God is not our first priority each day then we cannot expect to have a well ordered spiritual life. Nothing that we do will fall into the right place. Our lives will be spiritually “skewed.”

### **Sermon II**

Showing a picture of a calendar, holding up a ‘smart phone,’ or making visible some other device we use to mark time, is a good way to illustrate time: the way we mark time, the way we must organize our life within time, the value of our time, and the way in which we can be “over-scheduled” so that we have little time.

In talking about Sabbath it is important to have the audience think about the flow of time and the way in which our schedules and life-styles lock us into a particular way of thinking about the time we have.

### **Sermon III**

This is a particularly challenging sermon as it calls the listener to think about the way in which the “law” is holy, but at the same time is violated. See Samuel Bak’s painting “Memorial” (post-Holocaust art with intentional references to the Ten Commandments and the law “Thou Shall Not Kill) which is shown on a slide after the sermon outline for Sermon III. A good way to start the lesson is to have the audience identify the various aspects of the picture that illustrate the way the sacredness of the law has been violated: the 6 representing the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment “Thou Shall Not Kill” as well as the murder of 6 million Jews.

**III.**  
**Sermon Outlines for Preaching the Ten Commandments**

**Sermon 1: Top Buttons**

Key Scripture: "To you there are no other gods." (Exodus 20:2)

Message: *A well-ordered spiritual life depends on having "no other gods."*

<p>Opening Question and set up of the message</p>	<p>What happens when you put your shirt on and you don't get the top button buttoned right? (illustrate). <i>There is no chance of any other button being buttoned in the right place and you look a mess!</i></p> <p>The Exodus account of the ten commandments comes in the context of YHWH delivering the Hebrew people from Egyptian slavery. Exodus 19:4-6 indicates God chose them to be his treasured possession, a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation. <i>But here is the question: How were the Israelites to know how to be this people? They were a disorganized group of slaves, delivered from bondage, but now dislocated in an inhospitable wilderness!</i></p> <p>They would be a "mess" if they did not have a structure by which to understand what it meant to be the people of God. This structure of "how" to be the people of God is the Ten Commandments. The "top button" of these commandments is the realization that "to them" there is no other God. The rest of the "Ten Words" follow from this first commandment.</p> <p>Note that the Israelites were not just delivered from Egyptian slavery for the sake of being delivered from Egyptian slavery. <i>They were delivered so that they could become a new people: God's own.</i></p> <p><i>The commandments are given unto that end: creating the framework for shaping God's own people as a holy nation kingdom of priests.</i></p>
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Exposition of the Text	<p>(Display a simplified version of the commandments, see example)</p> <p>A. Discuss the structure of the commandments:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The first three commandments have to do with the relationship to YHWH</li> <li>2. The middle commandment has to do with keeping a special day, the Sabbath</li> <li>3. The last six commandments have to do with right relationships with others in Israelite society</li> </ol> <p>B. Discuss the importance of the first commandment (see textual notes). “To you there are no other gods” is predicated on what YHWH has done for the Hebrew people: delivered them out of the house of bondage. No other has done that for them (certainly no Egyptian God).</p> <p>C. For the following commands, the “do not” structure marked the boundary of how Israelite society was to live with God and with each other: what was acceptable and “inside the boundaries” and what was not acceptable and “outside the boundaries.”</p> <p>The “do not” commands marked what was outside the boundaries and detrimental to the coherence of Israelite society and relationship to YHWH: multiple gods, idols, vain invocations of YHWH’s name, staying busy 24/7 with no break, not caring for parents, murdering a fellow Israelite, theft, adultery, false witness, and plotting to get the property of another.</p> <p>The “You shall not” is in the masculine singular. Thus individual Israelite males, presumably the heads of household, were responsible for ensuring that all those in their household were followed the Israelite structure.</p> <p>D. Note that in the commands largely have to do with key relationships as well as property, both in terms of individuals and material possessions, which were necessary for sustaining life.</p> <p>In the Israelite household, there would have been a man and his wife, children, servants as well as physical property (as listed in the commands dealing with the</p>
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	<p>Sabbath and coveting). In the Ancient Near East, a man’s honor was tied up in protecting ownership of his physical possessions as well as his family members, wife and children. To not be able to protect one’s wife and children against such things as adultery and kidnapping (which were also acts of theft) were considered shameful. The commandments act not only to structure society but to protect the honor of the male head of household in a patriarchal society.</p> <p>E. The last command, coveting is unlike the other commandments in that it designates “desire.” If we start at the bottom of the commands, putting our desires first instead of God, we have the perfect recipe for breaking commandments. The breaking of commandments begins with desire gone wrong.</p> <p>Note that one never break just one of the commandments, one breaks commandments in twos and threes. Example: in 2 Samuel 11-12, David first coveted Bathsheba, then committed adultery with her (theft) and then had her husband killed (murder).</p>
Applications	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Do we have our top button buttoned right? When we get up in the morning is our day ordered with God as our “top button.” Or, is our day ordered according to our desires, or by a desire for God to order our day? Are our prayers more like “God show me what you would have me to do today and who you want me to interact with,” OR “God help me get what I want and be with the people I want today.”</li> <li>2. Are we still in the wilderness, having being delivered from sin through our confession of faith and baptism wondering what to do? Or have we understood that we have been delivered from our sin <i>so that we can uphold the honor of God, our parents, our families, and those with whom we work?</i></li> <li>3. Desire in itself is part of how we are made, but has desire gone wrong in our lives? Has uncontrolled desire been a “game changer” for us causing damage to others and ourselves?</li> </ol>

## The “new” identity

To you there are no other gods

No idols

No lifting up the name of YHWH to emptiness

Remember the Sabbath and keep it separate (holy)

Honor Father and Mother

No murder

No stealing

No adultery

No bearing false witness

Do not covet

## Sermon 2: Necessary Interruption

Key Scripture: “Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy.” (Exodus 20:8)

Message: *Keeping one’s spiritual focus on God and Others requires regular and intentional interruption of our busy schedules*

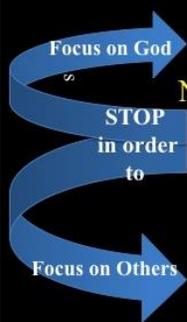
<p>Opening Questions</p>	<p>Have you ever noticed a group of people sitting together at a table in a restaurant but everyone is on their phones not talking to each other? What does it take for them to notice each other?</p> <p>What happens to our relationships when we work all the time 24/7 but never bother to interrupt our schedules long enough to actually spend time with those we care about?</p> <p>Why do we have beepers, buzzers, calendar reminders, the iPhone and now the iWatch that specialize in keeping us on track?</p> <p>Are we over-scheduled? Are our days so busy that we have effectively stopped noticing people around us—that they exist—let alone their needs?</p>
<p>Exposition of the Text</p>	<p>The text moves from the command to “remember” the Sabbath to “keeping it holy.” The remainder of the passage indicates “how” one is to do so.</p> <p>The word “Shabbat” literally means to stop so the Sabbath Day is literally the “ Stop Day.” To be “holy” is to be separate (from something else and unto a different purpose). Thus the “Day of Stopping” or the “Stop Day” is a day that must be separate or different from all other days.</p> <p>The text is explicit: there are six days to do one’s work, but the seventh day, is a Stop Day, no work is to be done on the part of anyone in Israelite society (the absence of the wife here is admittedly problematic): the Israelite male, his son/daughter, male/female slave, livestock (even the animals get a rest), and the non-Israelite that lives among the Israelites. (Also here note that Exod</p>

	<p>12:38 indicates that who left Egypt were a “mixed crowd,” hence not all Israelites.</p> <p>The text works with the notion of time. In the flow of daily work, the Stop Day functions as a scheduled <u>interruption</u> of that “daily grind.” So what is the purpose of that interruption?</p> <p>Notice that it is not simply the adult Israelite male that is to be interrupted but all that work in the household. Thus the hierarchy of father, children, slave, non-Israelite, and livestock is <u>suspended</u> for that one day. On the Stop Day, creation finds rest not simply from work but from hierarchical structures that tend to separate and marginalize. All are suspended in a state of equality by virtue of their common rest on the Stop Day.</p> <p>Note that in the sequence of the Ten Words, the Sabbath is in the middle. The Sabbath, the Stop Day, thus calls the attention of the society to focus on YHWH as well as one another. The day of rest or stopping is thus very purposeful: to be reminded of the wholeness and connectedness of creation: God to all of creation, humans to one another (regardless of status) and humans to animals (also an integral part of creation). Thus what may otherwise be treated as property on six days finds its God-affirmed created identity once again on the Sabbath.</p>
<p>Application</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What would a Stop Day look like for us? Where does our “daily grind” take over and keep us from noticing other people and their needs, even those who are important to us?</li> <li>2. Have we allowed ourselves to be “overscheduled” and so busy (even with “church work”) that we can’t even worship God or serve others authentically? Has our spiritual life turned into a series of “have to’s”?</li> <li>3. If so, then perhaps we need to consider the wisdom of the “Stop Day.” Practicing “Sabbath” or rather practicing interrupting our daily and weekly grind is essential to spiritual health.</li> </ol>

## The “stop” day

Remember the **stop-day**, and keep it **separate**.  
Six days you shall labor and do all your work.  
But the seventh day is a **stop-day** to the Lord  
your God; you shall not do any work—you,  
your son or your daughter, your male or female  
slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in  
your towns. For in six days the Lord made  
heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them,  
but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord  
blessed the **stop-day** and made it **separate**.

## Deliverance, Identity and Sabbath



To you there are no other gods  
No idols  
No lifting up the name of YHWH to emptiness  
Remember the Sabbath and keep it separate  
(holy)  
Honor Father and Mother  
No murder  
No stealing  
No adultery  
No false witness  
Do not covet

### Sermon 3: Law and Order Story

Key Scripture: "You shall not covet."

Message: *We have choices in life, and choices have consequences. Do we have our desire under control so as to make wise and right choices? The law tells us how things should be. Our stories demonstrate how we really are and the consequences of our actions.*

<p>Opening Question</p>	<p>You shall not steal. Yet people do.          You shall not murder. Yet people do.          You shall not covet. Yet people do.</p> <p>The law seems very clear, yet why is it that people though out time and history have broken the laws, over and over again.</p> <p>Has the law failed? Does law ultimately fail?</p> <p>(Show the picture "Memorial" by Samuel Bak). This painting is entitled "Memorial" and was painted by post-Holocaust painter, Samuel Bak depicting the fractured law that has been put back together. The painting recalls the tablets of stone that Moses brought down the mountain and smashed on seeing the people have a festival around a golden calf. No sooner had the law been given than the people broke the commandment concerning idolatry and built a golden calf aided by Aaron the priest.</p> <p>In "Memorial," the "6" recalls the 6 million Jews who were murdered in the Holocaust or "Shoah," and also the sixth commandment, "Thou shall not murder." The star of David features prominently in the middle and the "double yod" opposite the "6" indicates "God" and perhaps the rust running down from the "double yod" suggests God weeping.</p> <p>How do we make sense of the place of the commandments in the wider story of Exodus and indeed the Torah, or Pentateuch, in which it is found?</p>
<p>Exposition of the Text</p>	<p>When the "Ten Commandments" is seen not as a separate stand alone set of laws but as an integral part of Exodus</p>

and the wider Torah we see that it is at home among the legal writings: the last half of Exodus that includes the “Book of the Covenant” (Exodus 21-23) and the instructions and completion of the tabernacle (Exodus 25-31 and 35-40). It is also accompanied by its parallel text as we have seen in Deuteronomy 5 and also Leviticus 17-26, a text known as the “Holiness Code” (wherein a number of the Ten Commandments are found). The law is also recast and retold in the Book of Deuteronomy.

However, within the Torah there is not only “law” but “story.” We know well the stories of the creation, Abraham and the Patriarchs, Moses, and the wanderings in the wilderness. Yet we also notice that the stories are not “clean-cut.” The stories have odd beginnings and jagged endings. For example: The story of the first brothers is a story of murder, Noah is a righteous man who braves the destruction of the earth by water only to wind up “drunk in the tent” and dishonored by one of his sons. Abraham, father of the Patriarchs, seems to doubt the promise of God by producing a son by Hagar rather than wait until God fulfills the promise through Sarah. Two of Aaron’s sons are struck dead because they offer strange fire, Moses, in a fit of anger, smashes divinely scripted tablets (Exodus 32) and is forbidden to go into the promised land because of striking the rock instead of speaking to it (Numbers 20).

What do we make of such clear law, and human stories that are anything but perfect?

In Jewish tradition one speaks of “halakah” (the law) an “aggadah” (story). The conversation between the two illustrates the struggle to live in relationship with God. The law attempts to draw the lines whereby we understand what it means to be the people of God. Yet as human beings we are famous for “coloring outside the lines.” Our human condition does not so easily submit to the boundaries of law.

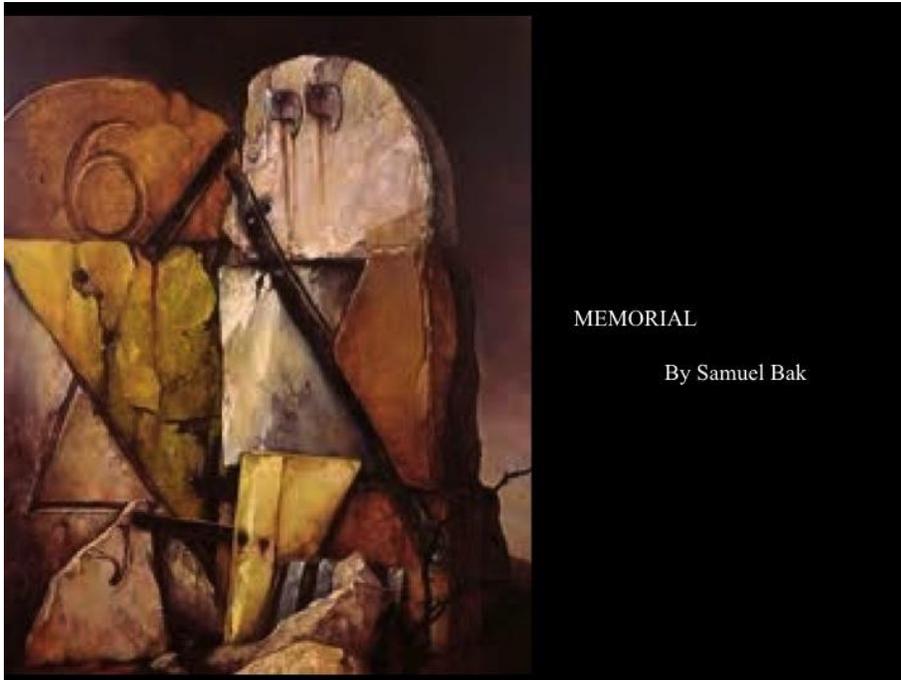
What is to be done?

Accompanying the law and transgression of law in the book of Exodus is the great confession of the Israelite people found in Exod 34:6-7. This text stresses the

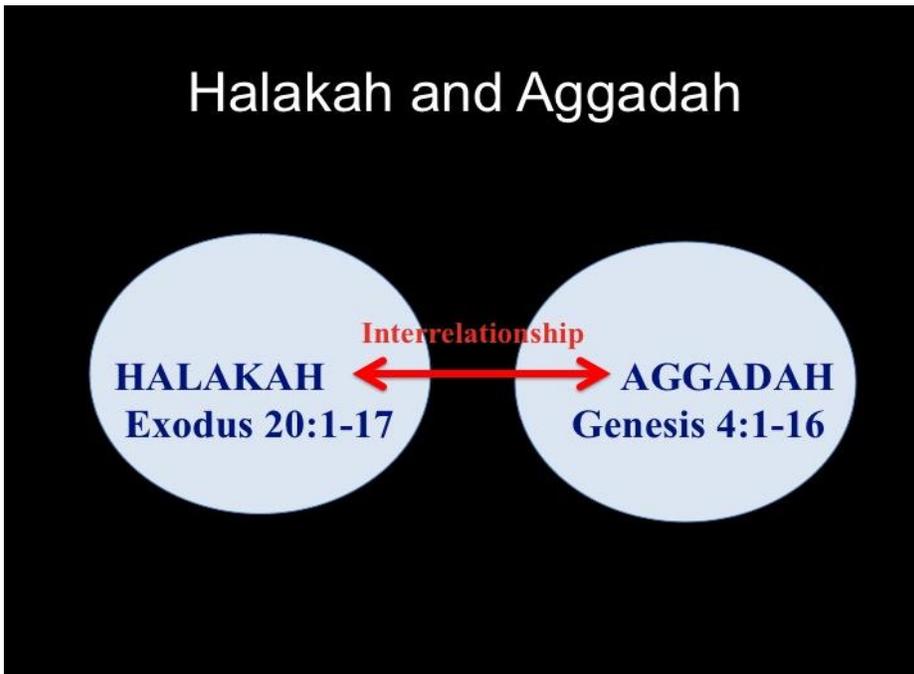
	<p>“hesed” or steadfast love of God who is patient with us but who does not leave transgression unpunished. The story of God is one who saves both from the slavery of Egypt and <i>unto a new identity and a new purpose for life.</i></p> <p>However, even though God is still with us, the conflict between law and story, between Halakah and Aggadah, tells us that we have a “choice” about how we behave. We learn from stories that even though God’s steadfast love is with us, choices have consequences.</p>
<p>Application</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Our transgressions do not deter God from accomplishing God’s purposes through us. We are in a true “relationship” with God, one that is fraught with joys and trouble, both good and bad. God brings us through our disappointment and anger. That Moses was able to convince God not to destroy the people (Exod 32:7-14), there was a “second set of tablets” re-written by Moses (Exodus 34) are examples of God being faithful to the covenant.</li> <li>2. Have we learned that choices have consequences? What have our own stories taught us about our choices and the consequences that result?</li> <li>3. Do we presume upon God’s steadfast love thinking that because God is with us, there will be no consequences for our actions? Has the law failed, or have we failed?</li> </ol>

Slide / Picture for Sermon #3,

Memorial by Samuel Bak



Halakah and Aggadah



**IV.**  
**Bibliography / Further Reading Study**

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