

# Lent 3

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March 23, 2003

## Prayer of the Day

Eternal Lord, your kingdom has broken into our troubled world through the life, death, and resurrection of your Son. Help us to hear your Word and obey it, so that we become instruments of your redeeming love; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

## Exodus 20:1-17

{1} Then God spoke all these words: {2} I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; {3} you shall have no other gods before me. {4} You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. {5} You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, {6} but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments. {7} You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not acquit anyone who misuses his name. {8} Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. {9} Six days you shall labor and do all your work. {10} 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. {11} 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. {12} Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. {13} You shall not murder. {14} You shall not commit adultery. {15} You shall not steal. {16} You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. {17} 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.

The covenant at Sinai is a bilateral, parity treaty. God agrees to be Israel's God if the people agree to obey him and keep his commandments. In Israel it was the prophets who championed the Sinai covenant against the Davidic covenant in the South, and the urban elites who elected to serve Canaanite gods and the Tyrian Baal in the North. Much of the culture of the two kingdoms developed out of the covenant theology of the Mosaic covenant. The Ten Commandments are the core of the covenant stipulations of that covenant.

The covenant stipulations are of two kinds, those that deal with the relationship with Yahweh, and those that deal with the relationship of Yahweh's people with each other.

3-4: The people are not to worship other gods. This does not necessarily deny that there are other gods, but they are not to be worshipped. Nor are idols to be made, not even images which could represent Yahweh. However, the worship of Israel was not completely without images. For example, in Judges 17-18 there is the story of an silver idol made by Micah which later became a Danite idol in the time of the Judges. Jeroboam, the first king of Israel made two calf images and "said to the people, 'You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough. Here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.' He set one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan" (1 Kings 12:28-30). Some scholars believe that Yahweh was understood to be enthroned on the back of the calf. The deuteronomic historian in Kings characterizes it as a sin. In the Temple of Jerusalem the Ark of the Covenant has a representation of two Cherubim,

probably winged lions (Exodus 25:17-22). Yahweh was believed to be enthroned on the cherubim (Psalm 99:1). Another image, the Bronze Serpent (Genesis 21:4-9), became an object of worship and was destroyed by Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:4). The bronze sea (a great cauldron of water) in the Temple rested on the backs of 12 oxen, and oxen, lions and cherubim were portrayed on stands that supported smaller receptacles of water (1 Kings 7:23-39). Vegetable matter does not seem to have fallen under the prohibition of images. The prohibition of images reflects Yahweh's unwillingness to be reduced to a manageable, domesticated "thing." He is above and beyond all human efforts to control him.

5. *punishing children for the iniquity of parents*: Jeremiah 31:29-30 (but see also Jeremiah 32:18) and Ezekiel 18 reject the principle of vicarious punishment.

7. *wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God*: "The command in Lev. 19:12, 'you shall not swear by my name falsely', seems to reflect most clearly the earliest level of tradition. The prohibition focuses on the one concrete abuse of using the name to support a false oath which had the intent of inflicting evil upon another." [1] In Matthew 5:33-37 Jesus repudiates all swearing of vows, even when the vow or oath is not false. To avoid using Yahweh's name wrongfully Israel ceased to use it at all, and even changed the pronunciation of the name in the scripture to *Adonai*, "Lord."

8-12: Exodus 31:16-17 describes the sabbath as "a perpetual covenant...a sign forever between me and the people of Israel." The sabbath rest is based on Yahweh's rest after six days of creation

12: The commandment to honor father and mother, like the sabbath commandment, is cast in a positive form. "Lying at the heart of the original prohibition was a command which protected parents from being driven out of the home or abused after they could no longer work (cf. Ex. 21.15; 21.17; Lev. 20.9; Deut. 27.16)." [2]

13. *You shall not murder*: "those acts of violence against a person which arose from personal feelings of hatred and malice. The commandment in its present form forbids such an act of violence and rejects the right of a person to take the law into his own hands out of a feeling of personal injury." [3]

14. *You shall not commit adultery*: Fornication outside of marriage, seduction or rape of a virgin are not within the scope of the commandment, but are dealt with by other laws. According to the Hebrew idiom a man can only commit adultery against a marriage other than his own, a woman, only against her own. [4]

16. *false witness*: False testimony is clearly a problem. The requirement for at least two witness who agree (Numbers 35:30; Deuteronomy 19:15); the story of Naboth's vineyard (1 Kings 21); the references in the Psalms (e.g. 27:12) to deceitful witnesses all indicate widespread abuse of truthful witness. Deuteronomy 19:19 provides that "you shall do to the false witness just as the false witness had meant to do to the other."

17. *You shall not covet...*: "...the verb appears to denote a subjective emotion whereas all the preceding prohibitions were directed against an objective action." [5] The commandment, "You shall not steal," prohibits the objective act to which coveting leads.

## Psalm 19

{1} The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. {2} Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. {3} There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; {4} yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun, {5} which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy, and like a strong man runs its course with joy. {6} Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them; and nothing is hid from its heat. {7} The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the decrees of the LORD are sure, making wise the simple; {8} the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the

commandment of the LORD is clear, enlightening the eyes; {9} the fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever; the ordinances of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. {10} More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, and drippings of the honeycomb. {11} Moreover by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. {12} But who can detect their errors? Clear me from hidden faults. {13} Keep back your servant also from the insolent; do not let them have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression. {14} Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

"It has been recognized for a long time already that Psalm 19 is composed of two psalms. Section A deals with hymnic praise of Yahweh in nature, Section B with the glory of the [*torah* "law"].... Tradition has welded the two together.... We have the obligation...to inquire into the reason for the combination and for its meaning." [6] "... the hymn of creation of which Psalm 19A speaks is a message that cannot be perceived by humans.... The cosmos celebrates God's [*kabod*, "glory"], but does not teach his will. For that reason Psalm 19B has been added as a decisive direction, as it were, to reveal the deciphered code word. In the [*torah* "law"]—there God is perceivable, that is where we recognize who god is." [7]

1-6: Songs without words are sung by heaven and earth in praise of Yahweh. Like the sun whose course encompasses the heavens, the silent voice of the firmament spans the earth with the knowledge of God.

7-10. *law...decrees...precepts...commandment...fear...ordinances*: The qualities of Yahweh's law are perfection, dependability, righteous, plain, pure and true.

10-11: The law is of great value and reward.

12-13. *hidden faults...the insolent*: "...there are infractions and unintentional failures that give rise to accusation (v. 12). Praise (vv.7-10) suddenly turns into a petition that Yahweh may absolve 'his servant' of all the failures of which he is unaware." [8]

14: Psalm 19B closes with a formula of dedication (cf. Ps. 104:34; 119:108). [9]

## 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

{18} For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. {19} For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." {20} Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? {21} For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. {22} For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, {23} but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, {24} but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. {25} For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

18. *foolishness...the power of God*: The message of the cross is indeed foolishness to human ears, but it is the power of God by which we are being saved..

19: Isaiah 29:14 LXX.

20. *one who is wise...the scribe...the debater*: Paul seeks those who are wise in the world's eyes to show that their secret knowledge is not foolishness.

21. *wisdom...foolishness*: God's wisdom is to save believers through the folly of the proclamation of Christ crucified, a scandal and foolishness (verse 23).

22. *signs...wisdom*: The world seeks a certainty guaranteed by proof or reason.

24: Christ is God's wisdom and his power...for those who are being saved (see verse 18).

25: God is so wise and powerful that his foolishness and weakness is wiser and stronger than human wisdom and strength. The consequence is obvious. If we trust our own reason and strength we shall perish; if we trust God's weakness and folly,

specifically Christ, "the power of God and the wisdom of God."

## John 2:13-22

{13} The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. {14} In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. {15} Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. {16} He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" {17} His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." {18} The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" {19} Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." {20} The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" {21} But he was speaking of the temple of his body. {22} After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

In the Synoptic Gospels (Mark 11:15-19; Matthew 21:12-13; Luke 19:45-48) the Cleansing of the Temple happens on Monday in Holy Week. In John it is during Passover two years earlier. For John already at the beginning of his ministry Jesus shows his opposition to abuses of Israel's relationship with God.

14. *In the temple...people selling...and the money changers*: These people are in the Temple because of the Passover festival. Greek and Roman coins had a human image on them, so the half-shekel temple tax had to be paid in silver didrachmas of Tyre which had only the designation of value. Animals were kept in the Court of the Gentiles for the first time in 30 ad. "...the merchants and money changers would have been confident of the justice of their position.... these people were not only licensed by the temple authorities, they had no reason to have a bad conscience with respect to their occupation—without which the payment of the temple tax and the temple cultus could not be carried out." [10]

16. *Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!*: In Mark Jesus accused the authorities of turning the Temple into a den of robbers (Mark 11:15-19). Jesus' motivation in John is different. "The Evangelist does not take this affirmation ["Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!"] to mean that Jesus rejects commercial activity in sacred precincts: there are no sacred precincts for the Johannine Jesus, neither on Gerizim or in Jerusalem (John 4:21). What the Johannine Jesus rejects is the delusion that man can buy God's favor with sacrifices." [11]

17: The quotation is from Psalm 69:9. "The missing part of the quotation in Ps. 69.9 says this: '...the insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.' The implication is that Jesus has taken upon himself the shame that has been directed at God. Since shame must always be avenged...Jesus takes upon himself the task of restoring the honor of God." [12]

18. *What sign*: There is a connection with the second lesson, 1 Corinthians 1:22.

19. *"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."*: Verses 21f. offer a comment of this sign: "*he was speaking of the temple of his body.*" "During the feast of Passover, Jesus prophesies that his body will replace the holy temple in Jerusalem." [13] After the resurrection the disciples remembered this incident and believed.

20. *This temple has been under construction for forty-six years*: The Temple reconstruction was begun in the 18<sup>th</sup> year of Herod the Great (20/19 b.c.) according to Josephus. [14]

## Reflection

Why is John's story of the Cleansing of the Temple used on this Sunday instead of Mark's? The issue is not whether there is fraud in the Temple, or even whether selling

and money changing was ethical. The question is, "Who is Jesus?" "Destroy this temple;" "he was speaking of the temple of his body;" "his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed." The pericope is the statement of a prophet, whose authority is established by the fulfillment of his words. When Jesus was raised from the dead, his claim to speak for God was vindicated.

Moses spoke for Yahweh and delivered to Israel the Ten Words of God. Ten statements that established the style of life of Yahweh's people. They required honor to be shown to Yahweh and to Yahweh's people. Jesus' prophetic actions in the Temple make it clear that the God who gave the law on Sinai cannot be bought by sacrifice or bribe.

As great as the gift of the law is, God has an even greater gift to give. But it is a gift that to human eyes is a joke. The message of the cross is God's wisdom and power and, foolish as it may seem, it is greater than the law, greater than the temple, greater than worldly wisdom or human strength.

### **Hymns** [[15](#)]

*With One Voice* (e.g. 762v), *Hymnal Supplement* 1991 (e.g. 725s) and *LBW* (e.g. 32).  
E=Entrance; D=Hymn of the Day; I=First Lesson, P=Psalm; II=Second Lesson;  
G=Gospel

247 --E--Holy Majesty, before

428 --D--O God of Earth

480 --I--Oh, that the

232 --P--Your Word, O

757v --P--Creating God

726v --P--Oh, Sing to God

102 --II--On My Heart

837s, 507, 11, 88, 335

### **Prayers of the People** [[16](#)]

A: Jesus' fury fell upon the traffickers in the temple. Jesus' prophecy about the temple's rebuilding in three days was remembered by disciples after his rising from the dead. We pray, "Keep your word before us, O Christ", and respond, C: Amen.

A: Let us pray for the church's proclamation.

P: O God above our ways, may your church not turn aside from its message of the crucifixion. Keep your word before us, O Christ. C: Amen.

A: Let us pray for the nations pressed by hunger.

P: O God of rich supply, grant sound judgment to those who hunger. May the plantings in their homelands be chiefly for nourishment. May the desire for profit not replace the need to eat. May what they sow be used to feed the empty, not exported to the full. Keep your word before us, O Christ. C: Amen.

A: Let us pray for the judges of our land.

P: O God of wisdom, grant impartiality and an uncommon sense of justice to those who sit on the bench to judge. Help them by the rule of law to guarantee fair trials for all. Keep your word before us, O Christ. C: Amen.

A: Let us pray for those in prison.

P: O God of love, help those who deal with the incarcerated to be clear-minded and compassionate. Let treatment of the imprisoned be redemptive. Grant to those in bonds a new sense of what it is to make a fair contribution to society's well-being. Keep your word before us, O Christ. C: Amen.

A: Let us pray for those under instruction for baptism.

P: May the would-be disciples know what it is to die with Christ in baptism and raised with him. Keep your word before us, O Christ. C: Amen.

P: We thank you, God of every hour and every day, that by your Spirit, you make

worship true and constant. C: Amen.

Or [17]

*Presider or deacon*

Today as we gather in our Father's house, let us earnestly pray to God whose steadfast love embraces all generations.

*Deacon or other leader*

For God's temple throughout the world, and for the holy people who gather in the name of Christ.

For *NN* our catechumen(s) and *NN* their sponsors.

For all nations, peoples, tribes, clans, and families.

For the victims of greed and violence, and for all who are in need.

For the dying and the dead.

For our city and community, and for all those we love.

*Presider*

Blessed are you, God of power and wisdom, who gave us Christ crucified, Christ raised from the dead. Receive the prayers we offer this day for us in our weakness and for all peoples everywhere. Glory to you for ever and ever.

## Notes

[1] Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological commentary*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1974, p. 412.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 418.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 421.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 422, referring to J.J. Stamm and M.E. Andrew, *The Ten commandments in Recent Research*, STB 2.2, 1967, p. 100.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 425.

[6] Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-59: A Commentary*: Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988, pp. 268f.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 275.

[8] *Loc. cit.*

[9] *Loc. cit.*

[10] Ernst Haenchen, *John 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of John Chapters 1-6*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984, p. 190.

[11] *Ibid.*, p.184.

[12] Bruce J. Malina & Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998, p.74.

[13] Gale A. Yee, *Jewish Feasts and the Gospel of John*, Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, p. 62.

[14] Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John (i-xii)*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1966, pp. 115f.

[15] <http://www.worship.ca/text/wpch0203.txt>

[16] [http://www.worship.on.ca/text/pray\\_b1.txt](http://www.worship.on.ca/text/pray_b1.txt)

[17] <http://members.cox.net/oplater/prayer.htm>