

BUMC Weekly Bible and Sermon Study

Sermon: “No Other Gods” (from the “Written in Stone” sermon series)

Scripture: Exodus 20:1-3

Key take-aways from the Scripture

- In this section of the Book of Exodus, we find the Israelites reaching Mount Sinai after fleeing from Egypt and wandering in the wilderness. Here, Moses, who was leading the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt and summoned by God to Mount Sinai (see Exodus 19). It is here in the beginning of chapter 20 that God reveals to Moses the Decalogue/Ten Commandments as a covenant with His people.
- Although God only permitted Moses to ascend the mountain (and also Aaron in 19:24), the people are gathered at the foot of the mountain (19:17) “to meet God” and to receive the Ten Commandments and other elements of God’s covenant with His people.
- In these first three verses of chapter 20, “God spoke all these words: I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before Me.” This commandment of having “no other gods before me” can also be seen in Deuteronomy 5:7 and Matthew 4:10; 22:37-40.
- As we will see from our study of the Ten Commandments, the laws given to God’s people do not seek to transform the structure of society, rather, the laws are intended to transform God’s people to live within whatever society that they find themselves in. The focus is how to live in a covenant relationship with God.
- The language we see in the very beginning of chapter 20 (“I am the LORD your God”) harkens to the sovereign- vassal treaties that identified the royalty making the treaty in early antiquity. According to the Book of Exodus Shepherd Notes: When you need a guide through the Scriptures, “The first section of the Sinai covenant introduces the covenant maker: “I am the LORD your God.” For the Israelites to accept the covenant, they had to accept the lordship of God.”
- The Book of Exodus Shepherd Notes further explains, “After identifying the treaty maker, a historical prologue then reviewed or outlined the past relationships between the two parties to the treaty. The purpose was to justify the new covenant, and a prologue often did this by emphasizing the gracious acts of the king.”

Key take-aways from the Sermon

- The Ten Commandments for the Israelites seem to be just as much as a “reset” as the New Year is for us. A renewed focus in a different land, and a new look at life in a different time. The Commandments are a re-establishment of a long relationship that now needs a little more clarity and direction.
- Scripture tells us that three months after leaving Egypt, the Israelites find themselves in the desert of Sinai.
- Standing in front of Mount Sinai, Moses instructs his people to stop and set up camp. There, Moses will take several treks up and down Mount Sinai to hear from God and then bring God’s message to His people below. For the first time in generations, they are free to worship God outside of bondage in Egypt. They are able to have complete focus on God.
- In one of Moses’ interactions with God on Mount Sinai, he learns that there are going to be rules and guidelines. The Ten Commandments are broken down into two categories: those regarding a relationship with God and those focused on our neighbors.
- In today’s text, we read: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” Three months into their journey into the wilderness and out of slavery, the Israelites are in need of a reminder of what happened to them and who God is. We forget the God who delivers us and loves us.
- As we read in further Books of Scripture, Israel loses focus and forgets what God has done for them. We lose focus on this even today, which is one of the reasons John Wesley instituted a “covenant service” in worship in the new year to help us affirm our love and faith to God. This service was introduced in 1775 and is meant to help us to focus on: self-examination; reflection; repentance and renewing a covenant with God in the New Year.
- The first commandment given to Israel is “You must have no other gods before me.” Now that they are free from the bondage of serving Pharaoh and his god, they are free to worship their God.
- In the chapter 19 of Exodus, the Israelites are in preparation for what is referred to as *Theophany*, which is an instance of the manifestation of God being visible to humanity.
- We must “feed our relationship to God” and in doing so, we will grow in ways in which we see heaven unfold here on earth.

Questions for Personal Reflection or Group Discussion

- What were your key take-aways from the sermon? How can you apply this to your everyday life?
- Why do you think God validated Himself when delivering His covenant to His people?
- How can our commitment to being loyal to God enrich our lives? How might this conflict with contemporary culture? What can we do about it?
- What does loyalty to God look like to you?
- Why was it important for God to remind the Israelites of what He had done for them at the beginning of chapter 20? How is this important for us today?
- How does Jesus ask us to be loyal throughout the New Testament?
- What is your New Year resolution? How will you re-center your spiritual life this year, to further grow in love of God and neighbor?
- How are you going to “feed your relationship to God”?



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