

Kirk Brothers

NO OTHER GODS

Exodus 20:3

One Main Thing

The Ten Commandments are the ten wedding vows for God's marriage with Israel. At the heart of the laws is a relationship.

Introduction

I refer to the events of Exodus 19–20 as “The Marriage on the Mountain.” The section we refer to as “The Ten Commandments” is given various labels in Scripture:

1. “The Ten Commandments” (Exod 34:28)
2. “The words of the covenant” (Deut 34:28)
3. “The tables of the covenant” (Deut 9:9)
4. “The covenant” (Deut 4:13)
5. “The two tables” (Deut 9:10–17)
6. “The testimony” (Exod 16:34; 25:16)
7. “The tablets of the testimony” (Exod 31:18)
8. “The commandments” (Matt 19:17)

I prefer to refer to them as “The Ten Vows.” I understand that this phrase is not found Scripture, yet it does illustrate the significance of these sayings. If we can see these events as a wedding proposal and a wedding ceremony, then it can not only transform how we understand these sayings, it can transform how we view all of Scripture. This lesson focuses on the first commandment in terms of a covenant relationship, a marriage ceremony.

Going Deeper

The Proposal

Before there can be a wedding, there has to be a proposal and the acceptance of that proposal. Exodus 19 contains the proposal from God and its acceptance. Moses delivers the proposal on behalf of the Creator. In fact, Exodus 19–34 finds Moses traveling up and down the mountain numerous times carrying messages to and from God.

- Trip 1: God offers covenant to Moses (19:3–7)
- Trip 2: Moses reports & the people accept (19:8–15)
- Trip 3: God tells Moses how to prepare (19:20–25)
- Trip 4: God gives Law in greater detail (20:1–32:33)
- Trip 5: God meets with Israelite leaders (24:9–11)
- Trip 6: God gives tabernacle guidance (24:12–31:18)
- Trip 7: Moses receives Law second time (34)

The proposal itself can be found in Exodus 19:4–6:

You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and *how* I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to Myself. Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

God begins by reminding them of how much he loves them. He loved them enough to deliver them from the hands of the Egyptians. He wants them to be his own people. He is offering a covenant relationship to them. He also tells them that this is a proposal with a purpose. They are to be a "kingdom of priests" (19:6). Priests function as mediators between God and human beings. Many falsely assume that the Father chose Israel because he did not care about the rest of humanity. He actually chose them as a kingdom of priests who were to help the rest of the world to know about him. Israel, by and large, forgot this purpose. Moses delivered the proposal to the elders of Israel and they said, "Yes": "All that the Lord has spoken we will do!" (Exod 19:8).

The Ceremony

God arrives for the wedding ceremony in all his regal splendor. The mountain explodes in fire and smoke from his presence (Exod 19:16-19). Fire is regularly associated with the presence of God in Scripture:

Burning Bush (Exodus 3)
Fiery Pillar (Exodus 13)
Mount Sinai (Exodus 24)
Tongues of Fire (Acts 2)

It is important for Israel to know with whom they are entering a relationship. This is the creator of all that is. To enter into a covenant with him is not a trivial thing. God also reminds them that he cares about them: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (Exod 20:2). It is this dual understanding of God's greatness and love that is going to be important as foundations for their relationship together.

Wedding ceremonies typically feature the exchanging of vows. An example might be as follows:

Do you, _____, take this _____ to be Your wedded _____, to live together after God's ordinances in the holy state of matrimony? To love, comfort, cherish, honor and keep in sickness and in health, in prosperity and adversity; and, forsaking all others, keep yourself only for _____, as long as you both shall live?

The vows describe the level of commitment the two are making to each other. Their love will continue in sickness and health and in prosperity and adversity.

The commandments found in Exodus 20:3 and following are the vows for the wedding ceremony between God and Israel. These vows flow out of the two great

commands: 1) Love God and 2) Love your neighbor (Matt 22:37–40). Love for your neighbor can be found in vows 5–10 and love for God can be found in vows 1–4. For a marriage to last, a couple must share some core values that they hold in common. If one believes that it is a good idea to rob banks and kill people and the other does not, it is going to be hard for their marriage to survive.

Vows 5–10 highlight the common values God and Israel are to share: respect for others, faithfulness, honesty, etc. Couples in a marriage relationship should also be committed and faithful to each other. That is what commandments/vows 1–4 are about. They are nothing more than the reasonable expectations of someone making a lifetime commitment to the one he or she loves.

God says, “You shall have no other gods before me” (Exod 20:3). This is no different from a husband expecting his spouse to “keep yourself only for him, as long as you both shall live.” In fact, you might put the first four commandments in modern terms as follows:

- No other gods: Don’t sleep with another man
- No images: No pictures of old boyfriends in your wallet
- Name in vain: Do not dishonor my name
- Sabbath: Make time for me in your weekly schedule

God has been and will be faithful to Israel. He wants them to be faithful to him. Idolatry was a way of life in

the ancient world. God consistently referred to worship of false gods as adultery in Scripture.

A tremendous example of this is found in the book of Hosea. Hosea was to marry a prostitute because this prostitute became a living illustration of Judah's unfaithfulness to God (Hos 1:2). They were told to name their second child, "Lo-ammi, for you are not my people and I am not your God" (1:8). Lo-ammi means "not my people." Contrast this with God's statement in Exodus 19:5, "Now then, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, then you shall be *my own possession among all the peoples*, for all the earth is mine" (emphasis mine). They had failed to keep their wedding vows. God goes on to declare, "Contend with your mother, contend, for she is not my wife, and I am not her husband; and let her put away her harlotry from her face and her adultery from between her breasts" (Hos 2:2). God does not take unfaithfulness to him lightly.

When one reads through the books of 1 and 2 Kings, one finds that the kings were not evaluated so much on their military or economic prowess as their faithfulness to God. An example of this can be found in 1 Kings 11:1–8. Solomon took many wives and concubines "who turned his heart aside after other gods; and his heart was not wholly devoted to the Lord, as the heart of his father David had been" (11:4). King David had his issues, but one thing you could say about him is that he was a one-God man. He never worshiped any idols. That can be said of very few of the kings of Israel and Judah. Most of these kings forgot the commitment

to have no other gods that their nation made in the original wedding ceremony with God. God is regularly described as a jealous God (Exod 20:5; 34:14; Deut 4:24; 5:9; etc.). He wants Israel all to himself. That is what any bride or groom would want from his or her spouse.

Application

The first thing we must remember is that God uses the same language of the church that he used of ancient Israel. Consider Peter's words: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy" (1 Peter 2:9–10). We too are "a people of God's possession." We are his people and should be faithful to him. Are we? We are also "a royal priesthood." We are his representatives in the world to help the world know about him. Are we living up to this responsibility?

The second thing that can be helpful in light of this passage is to see the commands in Scripture in terms of a relationship. The 600+ commands in scripture are basically expansions and applications of the ten found in Exodus 20. The Ten are expansions of the two great commands (Matt 22:37–40) which are basically the expansion of the one great command: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matt 22:37). All of

Scripture boils down to love for and faithfulness to the God who loves us and is faithful to us. Understanding this can transform how we view commands in God's word and the very nature of our Christian lives.

Conclusion

I do not need a command to make me be faithful to my wife, Cindy. I love her with all my heart. I could not imagine being with anyone else. I would never want to do anything to violate her trust. It should be the same in our relationship with God. It is my prayer that this lesson will transform how we view Scripture. Commands are not just checklists for avoiding hell or to access heaven. They are the vows for our wedding ceremony with God. They represent the level of commitment to God and the values we share with him. They are just what you do when you are in love.

Discussion

1. Why do you think Israel was unfaithful to God (golden calf) even after seeing his greatness on the mountain?
2. How can viewing the Ten Commandments as wedding vows change us?
3. What are the implications of being a "royal priesthood" for evangelism?
4. What are some ways in which we are unfaithful to God?