OLD TESTAMENT BIBLICAL LITERACY
Lesson 10
EXODUS – PART TWO
YAHWEH AND THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

I.   <u>CONTEXT:</u> Genesis gave us the background for the establishment of the Kingdom of God in its Old Testament form. In Exodus, we see the actual establishment of that kingdom.

Last week we had the narrative of Exodus 1 – 19. It took us from the captivity of the Israelites through their deliverance from the might of Pharaoh. It left us with the Israelites at Mt. Sinai awaiting the instructions of the Lord.

II.   <u>GOD'S NAME:</u> Before we delve into the Ten Commandments given by God at Sinai, we need to look a little more in depth at Exodus 3, the account of the burning bush.

In our English bibles, we will see several different ways to reference God. They are:
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> God,
> Lord,
> LORD, or
> Some combination of those words
> with others (e.g., God Most High,
> etc.)

What are these names and where do they come from?

A. "God" most typically translates a Hebrew word *El* or *Elohim.* Both terms are generic words for God. They are not exclusive of the real God as revealed in the Old Testament. In fact, the words can be used of pagan gods as well.

El is the singular form. *Elohim* is the plural form. ("-im" is the masculine plural ending in Hebrew. So a *cherub* angel becomes *cherubim* for the plural. Similarly, a *seraph* angel becomes *seraphim* for the plural.) Interestingly, the Old Testament will frequently use the plural form *Elohim* as a reference to the one true God. This is done, for example, in Genesis

1:1,

> "In the beginning, God *[Elohim]*
> Created the heavens and the earth."

Similarly, if we read in Exodus 3 of the burning bush, we read in verse 4,

> When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God
> *[Elohim]* called over to him from within the bush, "Moses!
> Moses!" And Moses said, "Here I am."

The word translated "God" is the Hebrew plural *Elohim*. Why the plural? Some folks argue that this is an early reflection of the idea of a Godhead, or trinity. Other folks argue that this is a primitive reminder of the early pagan roots of the Hebrews showing an early 'Polytheism." (Belief in multiple Gods.) More likely than either, this is a majestic plural that emphasizes the majesty of God in his glory. There is no doubt the word, although plural in form, is meant and properly translated as a singular noun.

B. But what of the words "Lord" and "LoRD?" Each translates a different word in the Hebrew. "Lord" is most typically a translation of the Hebrew word *Adonai. Adonai* means Lord in a regal or even economic sense. In other words, a servant or vassal would call his master *Adonai.*

"LoRD" is a very different word. Although it is used earlier in Genesis, it finds its meaning explained in Exodus 3. After receiving God's instructions to go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of bondage, Moses asks God what Moses should tell the people when Moses is asked what God's name is. God's response is "I AM wHo I AM." (Verse 14, NIV). Notice again the peculiar capitalization of even the lower case letters. The Hebrew here has a single word repeated twice. The word has the English equivalent letters: yhwh. We believe the word was most likely pronounced *Yahweh.*

The translation of *Yahweh* is uncertain. Many scholars believe *Yahweh* is the present tense of the verb "to be." But this is speculative because known ancient Hebrew did not have a present tense. (In fact some scholars believe that by proclaiming himself yhwh God proclaimed himself the present tense and it is blasphemous to even use the present tense. These scholars argue that the reason Hebrew never developed a present

tense is because it would be blasphemous to do so, since God himself is the present tense.)

While the precise meaning is uncertain, the fact that *Yhwh* is a name is not. In fact, it the only "name" ascribed to God in the Bible. All other words used for God are titles. The name brings into focus God in relationship with mankind.

A word should be said here about "Jehovah." It is an interesting fiction for *Yhwh.* Original Hebrew did not have vowels. It was not until the Massoritic scholars began copying the Old Testament several hundred years after Christ that markings were added to explain the vowel sounds that should accompany words. These vowels were added so that the pronunciation of words would not be lost in a language that very few still spoke.

While adding vowel sounds to the Old Testament, the scholars did so for all words EXCEPT "Yhwh." Their reasoning makes perfect sense. To the Jews, it was blasphemous to even say the name *Yhwh.* Therefore there was no reason to add vowel sounds to aid in pronunciation. The word was not to be pronounced! When a good Jew was reading the Torah and he came across *Yhwh* he would automatically substitute either *Adonai* (Lord) or *hashem* ("THE name"). Around 1100 a.d. some took the Hebrew letters of "Yhwh" and put them into the Latin letters of Jhvh. The scholars then added the Latin equivalent of the vowels from *Adonai* which were "e-o-a" and - -presto, "Jehovah" was born as God's name! This was used in a number of English translations.

Most recent translations, including the NW, translate *Yhwh* as LORD each time so the original word is more clearly understood.

III.   THE TEN COMMANDMENTS. Exodus 20 recites for us the "ten commandments" that God gave to Moses for the nation of Israel. These commandments naturally fall into two categories: Man dealing with God and man dealing with man.

A. Man with God. Here we see the first four commandments. Each deserves a few words:

1. Other Gods. The command is to avoid idolatry and polytheism. It also goes deeper. We often worship or deify many ungodly

things from our appetite to our possessions. We shouldn't. We should revere and honor God alone.

2.   Images. This command builds on the first. Not only are we to have no other God before Yhwh, but we are not to worship anything, God or otherwise, as we do God.

3.   The name of God. The Hebrew "name" ("ha-shem") means not only a title for God (or anyone else) but a statement of God's character or who God is. We take God's name in vain anytime we take lightly who he is or what he has or can do. We are never to doubt him.

4.   Sabbath. As God rested on the Sabbath, the Jews were instructed to rest. This was also to remind them of their release from Egyptian bondage (Dt 5:14-15). In Christ we have the Lord of the Sabbath (Matt. 12:8) who also finished his work, rested the Sabbath, but arose anew on the first day (Sunday) making it the Lord's day. Christians worship Sunday as a day of Sabbath rest out of honor and remembrance of the Lord's resurrection.

B. Man with man. These commandments contain core relational behavior with others.

5.   Parents. To honor ones parents does not mean a mere obedience, but also to take care of ones aging parents and respect them throughout life.

6.   Murder. Not to happen. Jesus explains this was to include hateful anger in the heart as well.

7.   Adultery. Wrong. Period.

8.   Stealing. No different than adultery.

9.   False witness. We are to be truthful in our oaths and dealings with others.

10. Coveting. Don't live out of wanting what others have. Seek your own life with those things you have or seek. Such seeking is to be ion line not only with the will of God but also the heart of God.