

Josh Mangelson 00:17

Welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. This podcast explores the unique spiritual and theological gifts Community of Christ offers for today's world.

Karin Peter 00:33

Welcome to He'Brew, the Project Zion series that reduces Old Testament bitterness, through explanation, exploration, and through experiencing the text. Our guides through Old Testament or Hebrew Scriptures are Tony and Charmaine Chvala-Smith, known well to our Project Zion Podcast listeners. And I'm your host, Karen Peter. In today's episode, we're looking at the development of the law in the Old Testament. And I assume we're starting somewhere near Mount Sinai. So, let's get at that, Tony and Charmaine. What are we looking at today?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 01:12

All right, well, we're going to be jumping, yes, into the 10 Commandments here pretty quickly. But we do like to begin each of these sessions with just a warning or a reminder of how it is that we're looking at scripture. And in each of our previous three podcasts in the series, we've said a little bit about that. And today, we'll just begin with basically, the idea that we do not see scripture as infallible or inerrant or the words right out of God's mouth. We see these as coming from times, and people, and cultures, and therefore, they're amazing and wonderful to explore, and sometimes quite disturbing. And if you want to know more about how Community of Christ looks at scripture, a really good place to look is on the church's website, at this Community of Christ scripture statement. That will give you a better introduction to it than what I just gave you. But we just want to let you know, we value scripture immensely, but we don't see it in certain ways. And so, that's where we'll begin. And Tony is going to be Moses today.

Karin Peter 02:24

[laughter] Woo whoo, Tony!

Tony Chvala-Smith 02:25

Okay, I'm not as tall as Charlton Heston, but I wish I were. So, Charmaine is going to pull up Exodus chapter 20, and we're going to simply read through the text, here. Alright so, this is the Decalogue. And the term Decalogue is a nice, Greek oriented word that actually is a wonderful translation of the Hebrew phrase, "10 words", which is what this text is called in Hebrew, the 10 words. When that was translated into Greek, decalogue, was the proper word to say 10 words. So, there you go. Good shorthand way,

Karin Peter 03:06

Sounds like a Jeopardy answer, but okay.

Tony Chvala-Smith 03:07

It does, yes, yes, perfect. That's perfect.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 03:10

What is the Decalogue?

Tony Chvala-Smith 03:13

So, here we go. "Then 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. 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. 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 fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments. 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. Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. 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. 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. Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. 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." All right, so there we go. This is the 10 Commandments, or is it? So actually, there are three different versions of the 10 commandments in the Hebrew Bible. There's this one. There's one later in Exodus, around chapter 34, that focuses on ritual matters. And then there's a version of these in the book of Deuteronomy. And they each differ in wording and in contextual assumptions, right? So, for example, the Decalogue, as it's given in Deuteronomy, presupposes the existence of a monarchy, which is not anywhere on the horizon right here in this text. And so that suggests that the version in Deuteronomy is a version that develops centuries after this one here. Alright, so that's pretty important to know. That is, there's not one version of the 10 Commandments in the Hebrew Bible. The wording differs among all three versions and so, we have to be careful. This particular version in Exodus, much of it comes from the priestly tradition, because of its focus on the Sabbath. Remember that P tradition likes to focus on rituals, and on things like days, seven days, and so on. And so, this one really comes out of that particular tradition. All right? So, that's kind of an intro to the 10 Commandments.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 06:20

So, one of the questions we really need to begin with is, so, why did these laws develop? Or, why are they even out there? And I think one of the ways to really get at this is to imagine the situation of these folks, right? So, they have been in Egypt, for generations, for very, very long time. One of the texts says 400 years, right? And so, they have been encompassed, they have been able, some at least, have been able to keep their identity as followers of this God of Abraham, not all though. And they're surrounded by a culture that has a very strong set of rules, a judicial system, laws on civility, and how do you interact with the people around you. And most of the folks who are part of this group leaving Egypt are not from those ruling classes, but are from the under, you know, the lower levels of the

society. So, they don't have experience of leading and creating this structure. Because now you've got these, depending on which version that you're looking at for the Exodus, you've got 1000s of people or hundreds of 1000s of people. I mean, it depends on which one you're looking at. And they're moving kind of together, or through the desert. And they have to live with each other. And they may, you know, they may be from different tribal backgrounds. They may be a mix of Egyptian and Hebrew. They may be other ethnic groups all together, because there's an indication that there were a lot of people, different kinds of people who were part of this Exodus, not just those who already had this relationship with Yahweh, the God of Abraham. And so, you've got all of these people with different ideas, and many of them would still be bringing expectations from the Egyptian culture and sense of government. And, you know, what do you do when there's a conflict amongst these people? You know, do you just let it simmer and let this tribal warfare start to happen within this group that's trying to survive together? And so, you can begin to see why it was necessary to start putting in place some structural kinds of laws. How do we deal with each other? But along with that, this is a group of people who are just trying to figure out who this God is. And so, some of those laws also have to do with, how do we exemplify the characteristics of this God? Because they didn't have the chance to do that in Egypt. And when they get to Canaan, there's already a set of laws and religious expectations and gods and goddesses there. And so, within this in between time, it's really essential that as a people they begin to come up, if they're going to be a people. They're going to be an identical, indefinable group with a religious and governmental, in a way, identity. It has to be formed in this trip that they're taking to this promised land. So, some of the laws that we see are the "on the road" laws. Many of the ones that we'll find in Numbers and Leviticus and Deuteronomy actually are laws that are developed, because these laws keep developing, of course, are developed much later, but then projected back to this early time. Because people, when they're writing this down, can't imagine that they didn't always have these laws. And so, they project them back. But there's some of the laws that assume that they're worshipping in a temple. And of course, there's no table at this point, as they're beginning their wanderings in the wilderness. So, it's easy to see that many of these are based on agricultural situations, which they're not in right now. You know, it's like, what happens if you throw a rock over your fence and it hits the neighbor's animal and it kills them? Then, what do we do? What's the law? What's the precedent there? So, that's already assuming an agricultural settledness, which this group wouldn't have had. So, we begin to see that this was a natural progression of, how do we become a society? How do we develop a shared understanding of what living with each other and God means? So, that's just kind of a way to begin to think about, well, why? Why did they need to come up with their own set of rules and laws?

Tony Chvala-Smith 11:35

So, Karin, you can think about it this way. If you're going to take a family trip, you can make some rules before you start. But then there's the rules you make on the road as new situations arise. And so, law in the Hebrew Bible is kind of like that.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 11:48

Mom, he's on my side of the car.

Karin Peter 11:51

Don't make me stop this car!

Tony Chvala-Smith 11:53

Exactly. There's a lot of that going on in the Torah. So, just to take off from what one of the things Charmaine said, the term "Hebrew", by the way, in the Torah, certainly in Genesis and Exodus, the term is a term other people, than the descendants of Abraham and Sarah, use of this group of people. And we do know from other ancient Near Eastern cultures and texts that there's this term that was going around. Sometimes it's spelled Hapiru, and sometimes it's spelled A'piru. We're not exactly sure if it's connected to the term Hebrew. It sounds a lot like it is. But one thing that's for sure, is that that group of people was a landless, kind of rootless, wandering group of people who were easily oppressed, because they moved from place to place and didn't have land. And so, they could easily be enslaved. And so that group of people then, in Egypt, you know, they are subject to all of the stuff that's going on in Egypt. They don't have this body of law that Charmaine is talking about.

Karin Peter 13:00

Like the Roma people in Europe, who are referred to as Gypsies.

Tony Chvala-Smith 13:04

Exactly.

Karin Peter 13:05

Kind of a thing.

Tony Chvala-Smith 13:06

Exactly. It looks in Ancient Near Eastern context, like the Hapiru were something like Roma in modern times. So yeah. So, some other observations then about the 10 Commandments. First of all, context. Let's get something straight. The 10 Commandments were addressed to ancient Israel. They're an intrinsic part of God's covenant with Israel. And they have a very particular setting and intent. So, let's just start off by saying the Decalogue was not addressed to 21st century America.

Karin Peter 13:41

Wait, wait, wait, wait, wait, wait. It's on courthouse steps. It's in schools. Even some of our churches have it posted on the lawn.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 13:50

And that's a great question that raises the great question of, should it be?

Tony Chvala-Smith 13:55

Right?

Karin Peter 13:56

Let's hear it. Should it be?

Tony Chvala-Smith 13:58

No, it actually shouldn't be. Here's the thing about that is that in the Hebrew Bible, though we're going to demonstrate here how these laws developed over centuries of experience, in Exodus, the 10

Commandments is connected to every other rule in the book. And, in a little bit, I'm going to read a few that are kind of strange. And so, we don't also require courthouses to post rules about the bride price of virgins, which I'm going to read to you a little bit later. Right?

Karin Peter 14:26

Alrighty, then.

Tony Chvala-Smith 14:28

And so, in other words...

Karin Peter 14:31

Everybody's waiting for that. They're not hearing what you're saying right now. They're checking. Everybody's like, What?

Tony Chvala-Smith 14:39

So, in other words, this kind of use of the 10 Commandments is an American Protestant proof texting use of the 10 Commandments to make some other kind of political or social point. And it doesn't really take seriously what the 10 Commandments are in the Hebrew Bible and how they how responsibly and carefully they should be interpreted. So, that's just a context point.

Karin Peter 14:58

Okay.

Tony Chvala-Smith 14:59

So, next thing to notice is how the Decalogue actually begins. Charmaine, could you pull the text up again for us? I trust her better with that than me. So, the Decalogue begins with the identification of Yahweh. "I am the Lord your God," and then, "who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." Right. That's really important. There's the Decalogue begins with an identification of the Lord, of God, and then with a historical preamble. And then what you have next is you have four commandments that are obligations Israel is supposed to pay towards God. And then that's followed by six obligations that the Israelites are supposed to keep towards each other, right? So, let me just, follow the pattern with me again; identification of God, and then a historical preamble, and then obligations of the people towards God, obligations of the people towards each other. Here's the really interesting thing about that. The form of the 10 Commandments follows very, very closely what we know about ancient Hittite Suzerainty Treaties, and Charmaine's going to pull that up, give you a couple things to look at here. We have examples of these from the Hittite culture, Hittite Empire. A suzeraint is a lord, an overlord. And these Hittite treaties were treaties between an overlord and, to use a term from Western experience, a vassal, someone under the overlord. And Hittite treaties are widespread. And, in other words, the 10 Commandments follows exactly the pattern of these older Hittite treaties. So, I think that's an interesting thing to know that the 10 Commandments aren't dropped like a stone from heaven, I'm sorry to say, but they follow a pattern of, widespread pattern, of how law was done in the ancient Near East. So, that's...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 17:15

They're borrowing the forms that are available to them.

Karin Peter 17:19

So, in a context that we would understand from our own history, the Constitution is based on the Magna Carta kind of thing, where you're already going to understand the pattern when you see it.

Tony Chvala-Smith 17:31

Right. Exactly.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 17:32

And the importation of European understandings of law came from Roman understandings of the law borrowed and adapted.

Tony Chvala-Smith 17:45

So, this pattern then tells us that what we have in the 10 Commandments is something that's shaped by its wider cultural and religious and political context. This form, this treaty form, is something that ancient people understood, and the Israelites use it in order to give their own expression of their relationship to the Divine. So, I think that's important. And that will help us then be careful not to hyper-absolutize what we have in the 10 Commandments, right? So, by the way, you also see on the screen here the code of Hammurabi. And that's a Babylonian law collection from earlier, way earlier than this period that we're in in this podcast, from around 1750 BC. It's a law collection. You can read these laws in translation. And in a little bit, as we look at a different kind of law in the Hebrew Bible, we're going to see there's a lot of parallels between ancient Israelite law and older Babylonian law and I think that's important too, to know. So, phrasing there's another thing we need to know, phrasing. In Hebrew, the verbs, you shall, you shall, you shall not, you shall not, the verbs are second person masculine. In other words, the 10 Commandments was addressed to Israelite males. That tells us a lot about the originating context of the 10 Commandments. You know, it really would be helpful, see, in English, we don't make that distinction with the pronoun "you". In fact, when we read it, we probably automatically assume it's y'all. When in fact, you know, if you wanted to get the idea of how that verb translates from Hebrew in English, you might say, "You, dude, you shall have no other gods before me. Hey, you guy, you shall not do this." In other words, it's directed to individual male Israelites.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 19:44

And that's because they needed it more than the women?

Tony Chvala-Smith 19:48

Well, I'm not going to argue that point. So, but in other words, the Decalogue presupposes an ancient patriarchal cultural setting. Also, these laws presuppose an agrarian setting. Charmaine mentioned that earlier. And I think that's really important to know. So, we have to be careful not to treat the 10 Commandments again, like it's some kind of Instagram post from God to us. This text, like every other text in the Bible, comes out of a cultural religious context. It assumes certain things of its readers and hearers. It assumes that its readers are male, and it assumes that women are property. And so, if that's

not our cultural assumption today, and I hope to God it's not, then we have to do some very careful responsible interpretation of this text as we use it.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 20:35

And, you know, just in what we have in front of us, we can see how that is the case. Look at the very last one. "You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife." But there's nothing there about coveting your neighbor's husband, or male or female slave again, that they are owned. And the owners in those kinds of situations would be men. So, these are men, talking about men. And so anyhow, I mean, these are the evidences are there that these were from a culture very different from ours, we hope, where it isn't speaking to the whole population. And that's important to remember.

Tony Chvala-Smith 21:26

And I think we need to be clear. We're not trying to dismiss the importance of this text. We are trying to uphold how much this text, like any other text, the Bible requires very careful interpretation and application, so we don't abuse people with it, or create false understandings of what law was. And here, let me say another thing about this in terms of the Hittite treaty form, and that is the 10 Commandments begin with the statement of grace. I'm Yahweh, your God. I got you out of Egypt. I set you free. In other words, there's a statement of the gracious thing God did for the Israelites. Right. So, in other words, it's really important to see that before there's any commandments, there's a gift. The suzerain, in this case, Yahweh, is saying, I totally bailed you out of Egypt. I did this for you. And in the fashion, then, of these treaties, here's what I need back from you in response to my gift. Right?

Karin Peter 22:30

Okay, so, let's talk about that. Let's talk about that. Here's what I need back from you. Because it gets ugly pretty fast there in verse four.

Tony Chvala-Smith 22:43

Yep. Yes. Right. And this verse four is problematic. But also, a thing you should know about verse four, is that it's understanding of transgenerational guilt, is a very early Israelite understanding connected to ideas of corporate tribal personality. But as Israel's self-understanding developed through time, that whole idea disappears. By the time you get to, for example, the prophet Ezekiel, during the Babylonian exile, the prophet Ezekiel, and I think Jeremiah does this a little bit too, but the prophet Ezekiel for sure says, you know that thing people like to say, the fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge? In other words, the children have to bear the punishment of the father's, Ezekiel says, don't say that anymore. You're responsible for your own stuff. I'm paraphrasing, obviously,

Karin Peter 23:37

That's really helpful for the people reading this to understand that this evolves over time as the people live with it.

Tony Chvala-Smith 23:47

Right. You can tell this is an early form of the Decalogue because it assumes a tribal understanding. And a tribal understanding does not think in terms of individual personalities. It thinks in terms of the tribe as a collective. And so, that's so that guilt then is understood as collectively born over time.

Karin Peter 24:07

So, we're not going to carry the sins of our ancestors into eternity. Or our descendants aren't going to carry our sins. It's not going to affect.

Tony Chvala-Smith 24:20

The Hebrew Bible later rejects that understanding. And individual personal responsibility is a different way to think about all that.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 24:30

Right. What might remain is the idea that the consequences of what we do affect future generations, but it's not as in a curse, or as though God holds it against the future generation. It's more of a cause and effect result of more common sense, rather than it being put into the realm of God doing this to future generations.

Karin Peter 24:55

So, kind of like the make Responsible Choices, Enduring Principle.

Tony Chvala-Smith 24:58

Sure, exactly. And so, this is a good lesson on, be careful about people who proof text the Hebrew Bible because the Hebrew Bible is a very big collection of literature. And you better be careful because they change their minds as they go on stuff. So...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 25:15

There is...

Karin Peter 25:15

I'm good with that. That's good.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 25:18

Yeah, that's a very good word, evolution. And it's really important to know that theology is always evolving, and that it's not static, for those who, for the followers of Yahweh, or for Christians. And that's evidence you can actually see in the text.

Tony Chvala-Smith 25:41

So, the type of law we have here in the 10 Commandments is sometimes scholars refer to as absolute law, thou shalt/thou shalt not. There's enough of that in the Hebrew Bible. There's a lot more of another kind, which we would call case law. And this case law sounds similar in form to our own case law, that it follows the pattern of, if x happens, then y should be what you do. Or whenever there's x, then there needs to be y. Or whoever does y, therefore they should receive z. Right. So that's how it works. And

here's an example. And actually, the 10 Commandments is followed by a collection of law that's very, very ancient. It's called the Covenant Code. The scholars call it the Covenant Code and it's full of this kind of case law. So, here's some examples. And you're going to love these examples, Karin, I just know you are. If someone's ox hurts the ox of another, so that it dies, then they shall sell the live ox and divide the price of it, and the dead animal, they shall also divide. But if it was known that the ox was accustomed to gore in the past, and its owner has not restrained it, the owner shall restore ox for ox, but keep the dead animal.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 27:02

Steak for supper!

Tony Chvala-Smith 27:04

It's, right? See, and this is a perfect example of what Charmaine was saying earlier that this is a rule that developed only after there was farms and land divided up and people farming. This is not a rule that made any sense to a bunch of people sitting at Mount Sinai, watching the mountain smoke and burn and so on. Right?

Karin Peter 27:23

Right. Who, if we remember, ran out of food and water, so this was not them.

Tony Chvala-Smith 27:29

So, the next one, you shall not pervert the justice due your poor in their lawsuits. Keep far from a false charge and do not kill the innocent and those in the right, for I will not acquit the guilty. You shall take no bribe for a bribe blinds the officials and subverts the cause of those who are in the right. In other words, this is case law around the problem of judges who can be bought. Right? And that may have a kind of contemporaneous ring to us. But this was a problem in ancient Israel. But, in other words, you have to have courts of justice and legal officials, and a whole practice of lawsuits. That's not at Mount Sinai. That's in the generations that develop after that. So now, here's the one I mentioned earlier. When a man seduces a virgin who is not engaged to be married, and lies with her, he shall give the bride price for her and make her his wife. But if her father refuses to give her to him, he shall pay an amount equal to the bride price for virgins. So apparently, there was a going price...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 28:42

For virgins and not virgins.

Tony Chvala-Smith 28:43

Right. The bride price is like a dowry.

Karin Peter 28:46

Right.

Tony Chvala-Smith 28:47

And so, the father can say, "Hey, you, you spoiled my property. You're going to give me the whole price here, and you don't get her." So, you get a sense in this kind of rule how women were treated.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 29:00

You get a sense of the abuse of women in the culture.

Tony Chvala-Smith 29:03

You totally do. You totally do. So, this kind of law abounds in the Covenant Code. And a lot of it's very ancient. Much of it seems to presuppose a pre-monarchic period in Israel, and you can even see developments in it. But what's interesting is that you find a lot of parallels to this stuff in the code of Hammurabi. And here I've got Coogan's great introduction to the Hebrew Bible here. I'm just going to give you a couple of lines from the from the Code of Hammurabi. If a child should strike his father, they shall cut off his hand. Right? Now, actually, in the Covenant Code, it's worse.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 29:42

Karin's liking that one.

Tony Chvala-Smith 29:43

If a child shall strike his father, the punishment is death in the Covenant Code. But often, in the Covenant Code, the punishments are a little more humane than they are in the Code of Hammurabi. Hammurabi liked the death penalty a lot.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 29:55

Well, there's a fair bit of that in the...

Tony Chvala-Smith 29:57

There's plenty of it. There's even more in the Code of Hammurabi. If a free person of the highest social class should blind the eye of another free person, they shall blind his eye. There's your eye for eye. Right? Right. And so that's older than what's in the Covenant Code. But that's in the Covenant Code too, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand and so on. Kind of a lex talionis, the law of retaliation.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 30:19

Right, and here the idea of it is to not accelerate. Not to...what's the word?

Tony Chvala-Smith 30:25

Yeah, not accelerate violence, or...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 30:28

Right. So, you know, where, you know, your child hit my child, and now I'm going to hit your child and even harder, you know, back and forth and escalates is the word I was trying to think of.

Tony Chvala-Smith 30:38

Escalate. Yeah. Yeah.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 30:39

So, the eye for eye was a way to have a resolution that was fair. It wasn't about equal cruelty. It was a way of how do we stop and not escalate this situation?

Karin Peter 30:57

In a very different contextual environment?

Tony Chvala-Smith 31:00

Yeah, very much so. And when I hear people in contemporary American culture say, I'm for the death penalty, because the Bible says eye for eye, tooth for tooth. They virtually know nothing about the Bible. They're simply pulling a text out of the Bible and they're just trying to use it for political purpose. And it shows no awareness that that kind of law in the Bible is attempt to de-escalate violence, not to increase it. So, I think you know, all these laws, you have to read in terms of their originating context and try to figure out what were they for? And in what ways, are they trying to be humane? And in what ways are they simply not at all usable to us? Right? And so, I think we have to acknowledge, as both Jesus and Paul do later, that there's a huge chunk of law that simply does not apply. And it's okay to say that.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 31:56

Does not apply to Christians.

Tony Chvala-Smith 31:57

Right, right. So that's kind of an introduction to what's in these law codes. There's other law codes in the Torah. There's one, there's a long one in Deuteronomy, and then there's a long one in Leviticus. And so, law codes are how people govern themselves, and how they make sense of their experience and the reality and how they codify life, and how they keep a kind of order. But the fact that law codes change over time, and develop because human beings develop and change, is really important for us to know. So, we don't turn biblical law into some kind of blunt instrument to try and damage and hurt people with. It's really a misuse of it. So that's explanation. We'll go on to exploration. We've kind of been blending a little bit of that already. So, this is where we get to deal with some tough questions.

Karin Peter 32:54

Well, I have a couple of questions. We'll see how tough they are. The first one isn't tough. It's simply that what we learn when we learn to recite the 10 Commandments, when we're little is, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain." And that has been translated, at least my growing up RLDS is, thou shalt not cuss. So, this is a personal question as a person who has been known to use a vast vocabulary of colorful language.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 33:24

Variety is good.

Karin Peter 33:26

Pardon?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 33:27

Variety is good,

Karin Peter 33:28

Variety is good. And to use it, I think, appropriately. What does it actually mean to misuse God's name?

Tony Chvala-Smith 33:34

Yeah, that's a good question. And I share your pain with this one, because I would say maybe you'll like this, Karin, it'll apply to you, I'm bilingual. Right? I can speak, you know, I can speak academize and I also speak central Michigan factory worker, which is a very different dialect altogether. So, what a lot of the scholars will say about that particular phrase is, in context, it means, remember, in our last podcast, we talked about God revealing the divine name Yahweh to Moses, and to the people of Israel, and that makes God vulnerable, in a sense. And so, the misuse of the name is to try to use the name to control or manipulate God, or to try to do sorcery or magic. And in the ancient Near East, sorcery and magic we're almost always connected with trying to communicate with the dead or in some way connect with the abode of the dead. So, in other words, you're not to use the divine name, which is a powerful, powerful name. "He who causes to be", it's a powerful, you're not supposed to use that to get stuff for yourself. Right? So, that's what it's really about.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 34:46

Which is kind of ironic, because in our day, some of the people then who are using the Lord's name inaccurately are using it to subjugate other people or cause them to rely on that person to be the translator of what God's will is. You know, people who say, "Well, God has given me this mantle and I can now tell you what God thinks." Or, "I can judge you." And so, it's not about people who cuss. It's about people who abuse this for their own sense of power, or benefit in some way.

Tony Chvala-Smith 35:26

For example, for a parent to say to a child, if you don't do X or Y, God is going to punish you. That's actually misusing the name of God. Right? That's using the name of God to control someone or control a situation, or to turn God into some kind of demon who's going to get you. That's an abuse of the divine name. So...

Karin Peter 35:51

Yeah, we don't need that. We have Santa for that.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 34:53

[laughter] What? What? That's just...

Karin Peter 35:59

All right. So, we're taking care of my personal issue here, and I appreciate that. But there are some things that come out when we start talking about the law, because this misuse of the 10 Commandments, in particular, has become a hugely divisive issue, at least in the United States. It's become politicized and it's kind of gotten us to the point where we're more willing to want to live as people of literal law than to live as people of grace. And so, what has happened in the interpretation of

why we understand God to have established some kind of civility code with God's developing people. And we've taken it to this extent. What's going on?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 36:51

Yeah. There's a whole bunch of things going on. But some of the things that are going on is, in my view as a Canadian, this mixing of what is the law of this nation, and mixing that with religious understandings, and assuming that the two should go together. And if you look at, you know, back at those the 10 Commandments, you'll see that several of them, the ones that have to do with community, they've already been imported through these different law structures, into, you know, thou shalt not kill and committing adultery, and those kinds of things. Those are already there. They've been accepted over time, as being relevant and helpful. So, those are the social ones that have already been incorporated. But some of those first ones about a relationship with God, those here in this country, have somehow been assumed to also, they should also have control. They should measure meter, everyone's rightness, whether or not they're Jewish or Christian. And so, they've tried to use them as, it's a substitute actually, for our laws of how do we interact with each other. And it's being imposed, forced upon people. And so, for those folks in this country who believe that it's a Christian country, no matter what his behavior is, that, sorry, that's a little sarcastic..

Tony Chvala-Smith 38:36

I like, you can be, please be sarcastic. It's good.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 38:39

But they're wanting to impose how they think people should act towards God, so that it matches what they believe they do towards God. So, it's stepping outside of the purpose of law and trying to impose spiritual law, religious law, upon people.

Karin Peter 39:06

In a way it's going back to taking God's name in vain or using God's name, inappropriately because you're using God's law inappropriately by weaponizing it.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 39:16

Yes.

Tony Chvala-Smith 39:17

Well, yes, I think that's a good way to look at it. And I think, you know, there's some other contextual things going on in American culture. Oh, my goodness. White privilege is worried about itself. And so, somehow, there's this assumption that if we can just go back to the good old days when everybody believed the Bible, we'll be okay. And it's like, I don't know what days that those were, we everybody believed the Bible. Apparently, they're thinking about back to the time when people used the Bible to support slavery or something. I'm not sure what they're thinking about. So, there's that kind of fear. Also, there's this impulse in America created by conservative religion that somehow we should be a theocracy. And so, they want to use the...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 40:05

Define theocracy.

Tony Chvala-Smith 40:06

A theocracy meaning a state run by religion, a state run by God, but always through a particular religion. And so, I think, which is a total misconstrual of the American identity, I think, but it's there in our culture. And so, somehow the 10 Commandments are a way to...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 40:23

A symbol almost.

Tony Chvala-Smith 40:24

Yeah, it's like a symbol of this theocratic impulse. Also, there's a ton, 12 tons, 100 tons, 100 tons of biblical illiteracy in the United States, even among the people who raise up the Bible, and try to say that they represent it. So, this is not a thoughtful use of the 10 Commandments. It's not a thoughtful use of the Bible. It's a symbolic use. I think it's a good term, Charmaine. It's a symbolic use, representing some fear of a lost Shangri-la that we once were mostly in the minds of white people of privilege who think that, so.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 41:11

Well, and even more specifically, whether we know it or not, this is a male to male set of laws. And so, this impulse in the culture right now, to go back in time, to, you know, the idyllic '50s, or '20s, or whatever, where gender identity and roles was all, you know, a sign...

Tony Chvala-Smith 41:40

Yeah, absolutely.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 41:42

...there's a, that's part of it, too. Is going back to this time when some people felt they understood what all was happening in society, because they were at the top...

Karin Peter 41:52

Right.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 41:52

...looked down on everyone else. And so, there is that longing to go back to a, what people say, is a simpler time, when everything was clear cut. Well, it wasn't. It wasn't if you were a woman. It wasn't if you are a person of color. It wasn't if you were poor. So, I think that's part of it, too, this longing for a time, this idealized time, when you didn't have to deal with the awareness that it was an unfair society. And you could point to things like the 10 Commandments and say, we uphold these, look how righteous we are, you know. This is God's nation, and all of those things that go along with that.

Tony Chvala-Smith 42:36

This is why I said earlier that, I was being kind of facetious, nope, everybody wants to print the 10 Commandments on a stone and put them outside the courthouse. Nobody wants to print the bride price of virgins on a stone and put them outside the courthouse. Right?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 42:48

Well, some might...

Tony Chvala-Smith 42:49

Maybe some do. There's this constant, constant abuse of the Bible and abuse of people with the Bible, and the same people. Why not? Why not? If you want to put something on a stone, why not put, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Why would you choose the 10 Commandments over that? And by the way, both Jesus and Paul summed up the law as loving God and loving neighbor. And Paul himself says in Romans 10, Christ is the end of the law. Right? So, I think people who argue for such things are, they don't know their Bibles very well, really. So.

Karin Peter 43:31

So, this conversation is one, a really good way to kind of look at how scripture that doesn't apply to us can still affect our context and culture. And two, it's an advertisement for appropriate and well interpreted Bible studies. So, stay listening to He'Brew as we go forward.

Tony Chvala-Smith 43:53

So, do you have any other questions come up for you, Karin?

Karin Peter 43:56

No. That's those were the ones that came up as we were talking.

Tony Chvala-Smith 44:01

I think just one other I would like to comment on is that lots of times you hear church people caricature the Old Testament as legalistic and then caricature Judaism as legalistic. And again, I think this is an inherited bias. That's simply not true to what's there. Remember, the 10 Commandments begin with the statement of grace. And if you take all the commandments, there's a lot of concern for the underclass, concern for the poor. There's concern for justice. There's concern for the alien, right? Right?

Karin Peter 44:35

Read immigrant. Read immigrant.

Tony Chvala-Smith 44:37

Exactly. Immigrant in ancient Israel, they didn't distinguish between people with green cards and people without. Immigrant was anybody who was just there in the land. And so, there's lots of stuff that's not legalistic. And so, we have to be careful of caricatures about both Old Testament and the God of the Old Testament and Judaism. Because that's the times, what people, the quips that they make about the Old Testament being a bunch of laws, and it's all legalistic, first of all shows they don't know the Old Testament very well, and secondly, it's a very, very silent slap in Judaism too. So, one has to be careful

and needs to learn to read these texts a lot more closely and carefully. So, I don't know. Do you have anything on that, Charmaine,

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 45:20

No, I think that's really important to say. There's, it's a whole mix, and in what is called the law is mostly resident in four books out of the 24 in the Old Testament. And, you know, some in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. So, that's, I think that's really important.

Tony Chvala-Smith 45:46

So, shall we go on to experience the text?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 45:48

We shall try. So, one of the things that I want to do as we go into the Bible study portion, is to just acknowledge that we tend to think of the law as all the "shall nots" and the requisite punishments. And you have to ask, why is it always stoning? You know, why not something a little more intriguing? But, or interesting, but I suppose there was always rocks around. So, it was kind of a convenient one. But, you know, that's what we often think of, as you were saying, the laws and then the punishments, that seemed appropriate in that time. And I think for those of us who have been harmed by the Bible, this is the portion of the Bible that gets misused the most. It's the part of the Bible where people where people are most likely to say, well, God spoke all of these words, and therefore, it's irrefutable. And, you know, they just put it out there. They just pick out the little passage they want to, and, you know, this is an abomination, or this is, you know, punishable by death. And perhaps you've heard something like this, about the words of the Bible, particularly this part, the law. When people will say, "Those words, they say what they say. That's what God thinks. And that's final." And that goes back to that whole idea that they want simple answers, partly to know who's in and who's out, who's good, and who's bad, who God loves, and who God doesn't. But that's something we hear a lot. So, we hope that through these podcasts, you've heard that there's some other ways of approaching the Bible. And we hope that you've heard that these texts were written by particular people, in their time, in their culture. People who sometimes were not that different from us, but their cultures were. And people who are trying to tell of their experience of, or with, God, but they have the limitations of the culture around them, how people think, what people can see. And so, they're limited in telling about their experience of, or with, God, just like we are. Because we have in our culture, blind spots, and limitations that allow us to not fully be able to communicate our experience with God in ways that would last in all times, for all people. And so, it's part of hearing their story, is also understanding and being able to peel away which parts are their culture, which parts are the biases of their particular people in that time? So, people might say, well, if this is such a toxic and misused thing, scripture, why do we use it at all? You know, I think that's always a valuable question. If the people who wrote this were just as blind and biased and broken as us, why are we reading what they wrote? Why aren't we just relying on our own experience? And I think my answer would be to that, well, these people's attempt, these writers from the past, their attempt to put their relationship with God into words has, over centuries and even millennia, helped others to think about God, to reflect on God. And surprisingly, this happens more often than one might think. By reading these writings, people get something of a sense of God's nature and nearness. And so, those writings draw us back again and again because one of the deep needs of human beings is that yearning to connect to that something bigger, that someone bigger, the ultimate, the source, you know,

whatever you want to call it. There's deep need within humans to connect to that and these writings over this stood the test of time and even though they're imperfect, they help remind us of something about this God who loves us and knows us and keeps inviting us. So, today in the Bible study part of this podcast, we're going to visit another side of the law. Tony's touched on some parts of it a little bit. But it's important to know that the norms of behavior that were formed by the Hebrews encompass far more than just punitive rules about, you know, who's doing wrong and how you can tell and what you should do about it, you know. So, they also include invitation to let love lead. And that's a lovely little alliteration that I came up with, to let love lead. And so, that's one of the passages. That's the passage we're going to look at today for our Bible study. This passage from Deuteronomy, the last book in the Torah, the law, is often called the Shema. And what it means is "hear." And I love that wherever you see someone interpreting it, they will put, almost always, an exclamation mark afterwards. It's not just, "Oh, listen to me." It's, "Listen already! Hear me!" So, I want us to just take a minute, and I'll read this through. "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children, and talk about them when you are at home, and when you are away, when you lie down, and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand. Fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates." Those first two lines are the heart, the center of it. "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might." So those two verses have been, well, actually, this whole piece and then there's a couple of other passages that say similar things, have been so important for Jews, past and present, that they will write this text on a little piece of paper and they will put it in a little leather box. And this you'll see mostly among orthodox men, Jewish men. In their time of prayer, they will have a little box leather box attached to their hand or to their forehead. And within it is this passage. And it's a reminder about love, about what this God is about, and about reminding their hearts and their minds and their mights to be directed to this love. And so, and the other place that you would find these, again, written on a little piece of paper and put into a box and then put on to your doorframe, so that as you go out and come into your house, you are reminded of the love of God, but also that invitation to love God with all your heart and your soul and your might. And it's so, it's really all about remembering. These scriptures, this one and the couple of others, are meant to help people stay focused on their relationship. It's not first about rules. It's first and last about love and God as the origin of that love. This passage is also really important, was really important to Jesus' first followers. And in Matthew and Mark and Luke, each of those authors has Jesus quoting the first two verses that you see here, four and five. And when some Trixie Pharisees come and try to get Jesus tripped up in something and they asked him, "Well, what do you say is the greatest commandment?" Jesus says, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might." And then he adds another piece from the law, from Leviticus, of all places, which is where some of the more abhorrent laws are, that get abused on people. But he, it's a part, it's only a fragment of a verse from Leviticus 19:18, that he also includes, which is, "And you shall love your neighbor as yourself." And then Jesus goes a little further and he says, "And on these two commandments, love God, and love your neighbor, hang all the law and the prophets." And so, we hear "law and prophets" and we may think, oh, he's just referring to, you know, what we understand is the Old Testament. Actually, these are the first two parts of the Old Testament that would have been canonized in his time. In Jesus time, the last part, the writings had not been canonized yet. This was recognized, the law, first five

books, and the prophets were recognized as authoritative for all Jews. And so, he's saying that in his time, the whole Bible can be condensed into love God, and love your neighbor. And the Pharisees could find no fault with him. So, I think that this is a really a lovely place to say that, yes, there are some places in what is called "the law" that have been dangerously used among people. But there is also an invitation to let God be about something else. So, we're going to use this passage today and let it ask us just two questions. And the first one is, I want you to think about your own relationship with God or your desired relationship with God. What is the beating heart of my relationship with God? What words would I use to remind myself of God's love for me, or my love or longing for God. And we're going to encourage you to just pause the recording here, and take a few minutes to identify and write down, in a few words or a few sentences, your response to that? What words would I use to remind myself of God's love for me, or my love or longing for God? So, once you have done that, I'm going to invite you to take that and those words, put them on a little piece of paper or a big piece of paper, whatever you want, and to place it somewhere that will be a reminder for you. Just like the Shema is, for others, a reminder, someplace that maybe it's on your bathroom mirror, or maybe it is on your door post, your doorframe as you come and go, maybe it's on the fridge door if that's a place you visit fairly frequently, but someplace where it will remind you of what this whole relationship with God is all about. Alright, so, then I have one second question, which I'm going to call it your homework if that doesn't turn you off. So again, if you want to, at this point after explain this, you can pause and complete it now or you can take it with you. But either way, take some time to consider what would loving God with my heart, soul and might look like in this year? So, how could loving God with my heart look? How could loving God with my soul look? How could loving God with my might look in this year? Thank you.

Karin Peter 1:00:01

Thank you for that reflection and homework, Charmaine, as we and episode four, "What to make of the law?" Are there any last words or comments or ideas that maybe we need to articulate before we close?

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:00:18

I've got one, I think. So, if you think of law in the Hebrew Bible as the tasks that God gives God's people to do, it's also really, really important to remember that the gift always underwrites, undergirds, surrounds the task. That is, the gift precedes and always surrounds the task. And you can never take the task and turn it back into the gift. The gift of God's love and grace, and God's liberating presence and power, is what it's all about. And there are some tasks that come with being liberated.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:00:57

Good. And I had one more piece that I thought, as partway through the Bible study, it's like, oh, I forgot to say this piece. But I think I can tie it in with the bigger understanding of what we're talking about with the law. And that is that Jesus did some interpreting and renaming some things in the law. Because in Matthew, where instead of loving God with your heart, and soul, and might, Jesus is quoted as saying, loving God with your heart, and your soul and your mind. And so, it's kind of that, again, that evolution of the law, and that's that long tradition among the rabbis, over centuries, and again, millennia, of letting the law be the beginning place for the discussions that guide us, then, in how to live, how to love God, how to interact with the people around us and with creation. So, the law was not intended to be stuck in one time, but to keep growing and evolving and being a way to communicate, God with us.

Karin Peter 1:02:28

Thank you so much, both of you, Charmaine and Tony. With that, we say to our listeners, we hope that you have enjoyed navigating the law with us here in episode four and that you will stick around as we continue to explore and grow together through our Hebrew episodes this coming year. Our closing words today actually come from *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. I wanted to find something that reflected our study of the law today. So, here's the quote. "Are you planning to follow a career in magical law, Miss Granger?" asked Scrimgeour. "No, I'm not," retorted Hermione. "I'm hoping to do some good in the world." So, with that, till next time, let's all hope to do some good in the world. And thanks so much for listening.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:03:27

Amen.

Karin Peter 1:03:28

Thank you.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:03:31

That's nice.

Josh Mangelson 1:03:41

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