

## Foundations (8000 B.C.E. to 600 C.E.)

interpretation flatly rejected by Jews as incorporating a uniquely Christian belief). No general agreement exists on this question.

(5) Some scholars maintain that God must be thought of here as having a human form; others argue that the resemblance is purely spiritual in nature. Contemporary feminists have pointed out that both sexes are created in God's image.

(6) The idea of absolute dominion over an abundantly productive earth must have been highly appealing to people struggling to scratch a living from the soil of ancient Israel, prey to attacks by wild animals. The image of the earth as a rich garden would have indeed seemed a paradise lost. Some interpret this passage as idealizing vegetarianism.

(7) Up to this point the original Hebrew text has called God *Elohim*; but in the subsequent passages, he is given the title now usually translated as *Yahweh*. Because this latter name was considered too sacred to utter in later Jewish tradition, various substitutes were devised. Here "Lord " capitalized indicates occurrences of the sacred name.

(8) The naming of the Tigris and Euphrates as rivers flowing from Eden locates the original Paradise somewhere in Mesopotamia, which is also the region to which the Hebrews traced their ancestry.

(9) The paradox that this prophecy is not fulfilled literally has led to many ingenious explanations, including the one dominant for centuries in Christianity: that by eating the fruit Adam and Eve fall from the state of divine grace into the death-like state of sin.

(10) Patriarchal interpretations of this story stress that the woman is a secondary creation, brought into being to serve the man; but some feminists have argued that the texts stresses the unity of the two.

(11) Jews shunned nudity far more than most of their neighbors, but seemed to view the sense of shame as a curse.

(12) Later interpretations, both Jewish and Christian, identify the serpent with Satan, but the latter is a figure whom many scholars believe to have been introduced into Judaism at a comparatively late date.

(13) Again, the fact that the serpent's prophecy comes true while God's does not has led to much speculation. Whatever interpretation is followed, guilt and shame are the result of the Fall. Traditional Christianity gave the incident a sexual interpretation, often arguing that eroticism itself was a shameful by-product, whereas Jews seldom accepted this view. The doctrine of an inherited curse called "original sin" is also alien to mainstream Judaism, but is the main focus of Christian commentary on this passage.

(14) The kind of fruit is not specified. It was often identified as a fig in the early Middle Ages; but an irresistible pun eventually settled the matter for Christians: *malum* in Latin meant both "apple" and "evil."

(15) Presumably snakes originally had legs like other animals, but lost them because of this curse.

(16) Christian artists made much use of this passage to create images of the Virgin Mary crushing a serpent beneath her heel.

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## The Law: Exodus 20-21:27, 22:16-23:9

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*The Jewish Bible is divided into three parts: the Law (Torah), the Prophets, and a miscellaneous group of works known as the Writings, which correspond roughly to the Christian Old Testament. (The Catholic text contains passages and works not admitted into the Jewish Bible.) Of these three, the Law is in some ways the most important, for it is the law that defines for Jews what God expects of them and provides a means ensure win his favor and protection. The Law is viewed by pious Jews as a special blessing granted God's chosen people to show them the path to virtue while other peoples languish in ignorant sin. Many people assume that the ethics of Judaism and Christianity are based primarily on the Ten*

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*Commandments, but in fact Jews are called to observe some six hundred commandments and Christians usually do not observe two of the ten, having rejected the Jewish Sabbath for the Lord's Day early in their history and freely violating the commandment against graven images by sculpting innumerable images of Christ as the divine savior. The first ten are set apart, and repeated, in the text, and are obviously considered as important; but in some ways the subsequent laws are more revealing. Almost all peoples have outlawed murder, theft, and adultery, however they defined them; but the other Jewish laws reflect the attitudes and customs of the people who followed them. An orthodox Jew is expected to observe strictly all of the laws (except, of course those relating to ritual sacrifice which were suspended after the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE). Unlike in Christianity, belief is not the central issue--obedience is. The delivery of the law is depicted as the aftermath of generations of slavery in Egypt followed by forty years of wandering in the wilderness of the Sinai Peninsula.*

*What provision in the law might discourage many Hebrew slaves from seeking their freedom? What laws enforce respect for parents? In what ways are the laws on slaves different from those of Hammurabi's Code? What does the law have to say about the proper treatment of enemies and aliens?*

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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. (1)

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. (2) 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, 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. (3)

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. (4)

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. (5)

When all the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking, they were afraid and trembled and stood at a distance and said to Moses, You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, or we will die. Moses said to the people, Do not be afraid; for God has come only to test you and to put the fear of him upon you so that you do not sin.

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Then the people stood at a distance, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.

The LORD said to Moses: Thus you shall say to the Israelites: You have seen for yourselves that I spoke with you from heaven. You shall not make gods of silver alongside me, nor shall you make for yourselves gods of gold. You need make for me only an altar of earth and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your offerings of well-being, your sheep and your oxen; in every place where I cause my name to be remembered I will come to you and bless you. But if you make for me an altar of stone, do not build it of hewn stones; if you use a chisel upon it you profane it. You shall not go up by steps to my altar, so that your nakedness may not be exposed on it. (6)

These are the ordinances that you shall set before them: When you buy a male Hebrew slave, he shall serve six years, but in the seventh he shall go out a free person, without debt. (7) If he comes in single, he shall go out single; if he comes in married, then his wife shall go out with him. If his master gives him a wife and she bears him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her master's and he shall go out alone. But if the slave declares, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out a free person, then his master shall bring him before God. He shall be brought to the door or the doorpost; and his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; (8)

When a man sells his daughter as a slave, she shall not go out (9) as the male slaves do. If she does not please her master, who designated her for himself, then he shall let her be redeemed; (10) he shall have no right to sell her to a foreign people since he has dealt unfairly with her. If he designates her for his son, he shall deal with her as with a daughter. If he takes another wife to himself, he shall not diminish the food, clothing, or marital rights of the first wife. (11) And if he does not do these three

things for her, she shall go out without debt, without payment of money.

Whoever strikes a person mortally shall be put to death. If it was not premeditated, but came about by an act of God, then I will appoint for you a place to which the killer may flee. (12) But if someone willfully attacks and kills another by treachery, you shall take the killer from my altar for execution.

Whoever strikes father or mother shall be put to death.

Whoever kidnaps a person, whether that person has been sold or is still held in possession, shall be put to death.

Whoever curses father or mother shall be put to death.

When individuals quarrel and one strikes the other with a stone or fist so that the injured party, though not dead, is confined to bed, but recovers and walks around outside with the help of a staff, then the assailant shall be free of liability, except to pay for the loss of time, and to arrange for full recovery.

When a slaveowner strikes a male or female slave with a rod and the slave dies immediately, the owner shall be punished. But if the slave survives a day or two, there is no punishment; for the slave is the owner's property.

When people who are fighting injure a pregnant woman so that there is a miscarriage, and yet no further harm follows, the one responsible shall be fined what the woman's husband demands, paying as much as the judges determine. If any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe. (13)

When a slave owner strikes the eye of a male or female slave, destroying it, the owner shall let

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the slave go, a free person, to compensate for the eye. If the owner knocks out a tooth of a male or female slave, the slave shall be let go, a free person, to compensate for the tooth. . . .

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.

You shall not permit a female sorcerer to live. (14)

Whoever lies with (15) an animal shall be put to death.

Whoever sacrifices to any god, other than the Lord alone, shall be devoted to destruction.

You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. You shall not abuse any widow or orphan. If you do abuse them, when they cry out to me, I will surely heed their cry; my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children orphans. (16)

If you lend money to my people, to the poor among you, you shall not deal with them as a creditor; you shall not exact interest from them. (17) If you take your neighbor's cloak in pawn, you shall restore it before the sun goes down; for it may be your neighbor's only clothing to use as cover; in what else shall that person sleep? And if your neighbor cries out to me, I will listen, for I am compassionate.

You shall not revile God, or curse a leader of your people.

You shall not delay to make offerings from the fullness of your harvest and from the outflow of your presses. The firstborn of your sons you shall give to me. You shall do the same with your oxen and with your sheep: seven days it

shall remain with its mother; on the eighth day you shall give it to me. (18)

You shall be people consecrated to me; therefore you shall not eat any meat that is mangled by beasts in the field; you shall throw it to the dogs. (19)

You shall not spread a false report. You shall not join hands with the wicked to act as a malicious witness. You shall not follow a majority in wrongdoing; when you bear witness in a lawsuit, you shall not side with the majority so as to pervert justice; nor shall you be partial to the poor in a lawsuit. (20)

When you come upon your enemy's ox or donkey going astray, you shall bring it back.

When you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden and you would hold back from setting it free, you must help to set it free.

You shall not pervert the justice due to 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.

You shall not oppress a resident alien; you know the heart of an alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.

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(1) Although later Judaism insists that only one god exists, some scholars have argued that this wording reflects a time when Jews acknowledged the existence of other gods but forbade their worship.

(2) This has usually been broadly interpreted by orthodox Jews as a prohibition against all figurative art, establishing a pattern also followed by orthodox Muslims. Although at some periods Jews have decorated buildings and manuscripts with images from the Bible, their general avoidance of divine sculpture led to a historic misunderstanding when the Romans invaded the sanctuary of the Temple in Jerusalem and, finding it empty, announced to the world that the Jews were atheists. More strongly than circumcision, the

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rejection of idols set the Jews apart from the people who surrounded them.

(3) The desire to avoid misusing God's name led eventually to the custom of not pronouncing it or spelling it out fully. Some English-speaking Jews even today follow this pattern by writing the deity's name as G\*d.

(4) The Sabbath was a unique Jewish invention, which attracted some criticism from outsiders as an excuse for laziness, but most modern people are probably grateful to it as the ultimate origin of the custom of the weekend.

(5) Sometimes interpreted as prohibiting mere envy, this may have been more narrowly intended at those who would plot to seize what was not theirs.

(6) Steps might cause a parting of the front of the skirt which men wore.

(7) Following the pattern of six days of labor followed by a day of rest.

(8) A mark of enslavement, comparable to branding, and he shall serve him for life.

(9) Be freed.

(10) Bought back by her parents. It is assumed that she has been bought as a wife or concubine.

(11) Compare the prohibition in the Qur'an against treating multiple wives unequally.

(12) The concept of places of refuge or sanctuary was also held in ancient Greece, and to some extent in Medieval Europe. A fleeing criminal could take refuge at an altar or other sacred spot and demand protection from justice. Here the law provides an exception for what is now called involuntary manslaughter.

(13) Note that the death of a fetus is treated as much less serious than lasting injury to the mother. The "eye for an eye" pattern used here and elsewhere was moderated later in Jewish practice by allowing money fines to substitute for mutilation; but in various periods both Christians and Muslims have also used the severing of members as punishment.

(14) Used as the classic justification for witch-burning by Christians.

(15) I. e., has intercourse with. Many of the laws prohibit various sexual activities.

(16) This unequivocal demand for mercy and hospitality to foreigners is repeated elsewhere in the Jewish Bible, and becomes a hallmark of the prophetic era.

(17) This prohibition against charging interest to coreligionists was also maintained by the Medieval Catholic Church; but the capital necessary for trade was provided by all owing Jews, who could not charge each other interest, to be lenders to Christians. Christians maneuvered Jews into this position and made it impossible for the moneylenders to enforce repayment in court (despite the fantasy depicted in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*). They then bitterly reproached them for their greed. One of the crucial foundation stones for modern capitalism was laid when Protestants accepted the legitimacy of interest.

(18) To the Hebrews, this dedication of the first-born to God (as priests) reflected the tradition that their first-born had been spared when God killed those of the Egyptians. Christian theologians later saw in it an anticipation of the sacrificial offering of Jesus as God's son in the crucifixion.

(19) Muslims are also prohibited from eating carrion.

(20) This passage spells out in more detail what is meant by the commandment against bearing false witness.

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## The Mandate of Heaven: Selections from the *Shu Jing*

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from James Legge, trans, *The Sacred Books of China: The Texts of Confucianism*, in F. Max Mueller, ed., *The Sacred Books of the East*, 50 vols., (Oxford: Clarendon, 1879-1910), Vol 3. pp. 92-95, repr. in Alfred J. Andrea and James H. Overfield, *The Human Record: Sources of Global History*, Vol 1, 2d. ed., (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1994), pp. 25-27