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The Decalogue in Ancient Israel: In search of contemporary relevance.

by

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree MA (Old Testament) in the Faculty of
Theology, University of Pretoria.

30 September 2016

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Summary

This dissertation attempts to look at the Decalogue from the perspective of its first recipients, which is Israel and then attempts, from that perspective, to build a bridge to find contemporary relevance. It was discovered during the course of this dissertation that there are major challenges with regard to the comparison between actual and remembered history. The challenge here is the fact that remembered history sometimes strays from actual history. We see this a few times in the history of Israel, starting from the Patriarchs up to the exodus and surrounding events.

A further challenge we came across was that of the origins of YHWH worship. The understanding we find in the Hebrew Bible is that YHWH was and has always been the God of Israel, because He worked in through the lives of the Patriarchs. Here YHWH directs the paths of those through whom He would start His own chosen nation. When we look at actual history, scholars attempt to trace the origins of Yahwism, which probably started among the Midianites. The reasoning they give for this is partially because Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, a Midianite priest leads Israel in a sacrificial meal for YHWH on the mountain of God. But this is not the only suggestion, as we do eventually discover is that there is no full certainty of where He originated from.

Another is the question of the time frame in which the Decalogue became relevant to Israel as a nation. There were suggestions, and names such as Hosea and Josiah came into play. During Hosea's service, there are suggestions that the commandment on having or worshipping a single deity was either invented or enforced for the first time. This is because before the time of the prophet, this commandment was unimaginable or even unheard of. With Josiah and his reforms, the nation was introduced to imageless worship, where they were expected to worship, make sacrifices or bow down to other gods, and

this either informed or was informed by the second command. This, according to scholars was also new to Israel during this time.

We then got to the final stage of the dissertation, which is the contemporary application of the Decalogue. In this section, we see how the first four of the Ten Commandments apply to the present age. We discover that the dynamics of certain things, such as idols has changed through the ages. Yet the final realization we get to in the dissertation is that the Decalogue refuses to be confined a single or specific time frame, and that is possible a good thing in terms of application.

Key terms

1. Decalogue
2. Monolatrie/henotheism
3. Monotheism
4. Yahwism
5. Worship of images
6. Book of Exodus
7. Exodus event
8. Hosea
9. Josiah
10. Relevance

I declare that the dissertation/thesis, which I hereby submit for the degree MA (Old Testament) at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution.



MT Gumbi

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Many thoughts have been expressed and many views defended with regards to the Bible. With all of these, inevitably, debates ensue, and a lot of time is spent as scholars thoroughly hash things out. One of these is the book of Exodus and the events described in the book, and that includes, among other things, the Sinai Theophany and the exodus event. One of the biggest issues concerning the exodus narrative is the historicity of the exodus event, where scholars like Scolnic (2005:87) tell us that “The historicity of the exodus as it is described in the Bible is questioned on all fronts.” This is the first question that we need to look at before we go any further with any other question. The reason for asking this question is so that there can be a basis for the rest of the events that are recorded in the exodus narrative, and even the rest of the Hebrew Bible, especially the Decalogue, and why Israel should honour and keep the covenant.¹ Kitchen (1992:701) gives, as a biblical allusion to the exodus, that Israel should honour the covenant because God delivered them from bondage and slavery. So if this event never happened, then what basis does the nation have to honour the covenant? Scolnic (2005:87) argues on the point of anachronism,² begging the question of whether the biblical narrative

¹ See Exodus 6:6-8. Covenant here referring to the Mosaic Covenant that God had with the nation Israel as God’s people, and Him their God. This included the Decalogue as a means by which Israel would be governed and would live out her covenant with God.

² McKenzie (2008:120) also argues the point of anachronism, but with the whole of the Pentateuch, that they point to a late and even artificial composition of stories. He (2008:121) then also points to anachronism for the exodus narrative.

of the Exodus is anachronistic.³ This concept will play a huge role in this study as the why factor comes into play, that is, the reason of the event's placement where it has been placed, what purposes did it intend to fulfil.

Free (1992:89) on the other hand presents a case for the historicity of the exodus. He supports this assertion by saying that the present knowledge on topography, and that there are pieces of evidence for the substantial historicity of the exodus and the wanderings in the regions of Sinai, Midian, and Kodesh. Not only this, we find scholars that both agree and disagree with the exodus narrative, if that is at all possible. Propp (2006:741) suggests a solution that agrees with both theories if this is at all possible, which is that the exodus from Egypt did happen, but it happened with a much smaller group, and the bigger group just picked up on it when the smaller group settled among them.⁴ Meaning that a tribal story became a national story, not that a large group of about six hundred thousand men, excluding women and children and the mixed multitudes (Exodus 12:37-38) exited Egypt. These are two theories that scholars hold to, and we will explore both these schools of thought to some degree, as they form the basis for this dissertation.

We will then move on to the Decalogue itself, as found in Exodus 20:1-17, acknowledging the presence of the Deuteronomy 5:6-21 Decalogue. This former passage is often discussed by scholars as they ask whether it happened when it happened or perhaps it was a later addition to the Hebrew Bible. Nicholson (1973:36) argues that if indeed the nation Israel was who they say they were, sons and

³ By anachronism here we are referring to the misplacement of an event(s), that is, a narrative that is said to have occurred at a time in which it did not, in our case a later writing projected backwards.

⁴ Dozeman (2009:29-30), Collins (:2004:109) and Carr (2010:43) agree with this point, and Carr adds that the rest of Israel did not come into Canaan as a result of the conquest and gradual settlement.

daughters of the same man, that is, Abraham, it begs the question of why they needed a covenant to bind them together. It seems as though what is being argued for here is the giving of the ethical laws, why God would give “cousins”, so to speak, ethical guidance on how to conduct themselves. This, therefore, questions the necessity of the Decalogue at the formation of Israel as a nation. One might argue at this point that the Decalogue did not just serve to unify Israel, but it also served to govern them as well and guide them towards being a nation set apart by God to be His people.

Enns (2000:412) argues that the law is connected to God’s grace, that of saving Israel from Egypt, and that it serves as a pointer to what a redeemed life looks like. Clements (1972:122) presents to us two of the views held by scholars about the dating of the Decalogue. He says that some argue that the Decalogue is as old as Moses, that is, the thirteenth century B.C, others have placed it much later to the time of the monarchy, that is, the eighth or seventh centuries B.C. Clements (1972:122) continues to acknowledge though that the Decalogue has been subjected to editing, hence the justification of the Sabbath in verse 11. For the purposes of this dissertation, we will not look at the whole Decalogue, but the first four, which speak to their worship of YHWH. The question still remains as to why the Decalogue, irrespective of its dating, was necessary and has been so important for the Israelite nation and this will become another avenue we shall explore in this dissertation.

1.1 Research Problem

As we have seen above, there are many arguments and posited theories about the exodus narrative and the Decalogue itself. But the biggest question yet is whether the Decalogue is relevant. The tendency in the twenty-first century is to see or

understand Old Testament times as no longer applicable to us today, obviously because of the change in time and 'religion'. Trueman (2012:135) says that there are three ways in which we can approach the Decalogue, and that is the nature of law within the created realm as it stands in connection with the nature of God, as this establishes the general theological context for understanding the Decalogue. Second is the nature of the Decalogue as a revelation by God. Third, he says, is the application of the Decalogue, especially the Second Commandment and its relevance to Christian worship, and the Fourth Commandment and its relevance to Christian Sabbatarianism. During the course of this study, we will endeavour to find how these were relevant and applicable to ancient Israel, and how we can be relevant for us today. We will, therefore, take a closer look at these four Commandments and their relevance for the 'then and now'.

Achtemeier (1989:105) says that it is clear that the Decalogue was directed to ancient Israel, and that their context of life was different to ours today, and therefore it is impractical to transplant their laws on us today. She says that the New Testament has made it quite clear that the Lord Jesus fulfilled the law so that we could not be bound by it. This is where the motivation of this dissertation comes into effect, where the question 'should we tear out certain pages of the Bible out since they are now irrelevant?' is asked. Continuing, Achtemeier says that our Lord affirmed that the Decalogue is still relevant, together with two great commandments for our life, but most of Israel's cultic and societal laws do not apply. This is an obvious observation, that there are those laws that will not apply if we look at the larger scheme of things, especially outside of the Decalogue. Brueggemann (1994:840) says this as the conclusion of his overview to the Decalogue "Thus the Decalogue stands a critical principle of protest against every kind of exploitative social relation and as a social vision of possibility that every social relation can be transformed and made into a liberating relation." This is a good summation of the

Decalogue, and motivation for our study. This study will seek to help understand how, as the Decalogue was liberating to Israel, can be liberating to us today, however, this may be. It will look to see how the Decalogue, as Meyers (2005:166) puts it, can be our 'community charter'. How the Decalogue can be applied today so it has a similar kind of effect on us that it did for ancient Israel.

1.2 Aims and Objectives

What we intend to do in this dissertation is look at the Decalogue, not in its totality, but rather the first four Commandments. In looking at these, part of it will be to look at what necessitated them and therefore what makes them relevant to us. As alluded to above, there is a great objection to the Decalogue and it being imputed, that is, handed down to us, as it were. We will see if it is really being imputed, meaning we are expected to live by something that we should not be living by, or it is equally relevant to us as it was relevant then.

The following questions will be answered:

- i. The dating of the Decalogue.⁵ As mentioned above, there have been arguments on the point of anachronism,⁶ where later writing are projected backwards, so the question of the dating of the Decalogue will seek to find whether the Decalogue itself is not a later writing cast into the past, and more specifically at the formation of the Israelite nation. This point will also attempt to discover the reason for the placing of the Decalogue by redactors where it is now found today.
- ii. The historicity of the exodus from Egypt as narrated in Scripture. The historicity of the exodus event is argued a lot by scholars, as we have seen,⁷

⁵ See Clement and his argument above.

⁶ See Scolnic in the introduction and the supporting argument.

⁷ See Free and Propp above and their arguments.

and it will be very crucial in our argument for the relevance of the Decalogue, and both contexts, that is, for ancient Israel and the contemporary church. The presupposition of the current writer is that the Decalogue and its relevance are highly dependent on the exodus event because it provides the basis for Israel's faithfulness to God and His commands.⁸

- iii. Why the Decalogue was necessary for Israel as God's nation.⁹ The exodus narrative shows a nation being formed and being set apart for God, and we see the Decalogue given. There is something that should have necessitated this, and this dissertation will attempt to find the reason why the Decalogue is given at this point of Israel's formation as a nation, instead of, for instance, before they left Egypt or after they arrived in Canaan. Monotheism and henotheism will be looked at as possible arguments for worship.
- iv. What the First Four Commandments of the Decalogue meant for Israel. There is a clear separation with the Decalogue, where there are those that speak of the relationship between God and Israel and the ones that speak of Israel's interrelations. This dissertation will look at the former and what it meant for ancient Israel as a nation set apart by YHWH for Himself. The attempt here will be to see why God had to place these guidelines for ancient Israel's relationship with, and worship of Him.
- v. If these can be applied today, how they can be applied. The final function will be an attempt to build a bridge between the then and now for the first four commandments. Once there is an understanding of their function then, the contextualizing to today will be an easier task to do. I will start from a presupposition that they are relevant today and that only one God, that is, YHWH should be worshipped. The real task is how this is done or achieved today.

⁸ Kitchen argues this point above.

⁹ See Nicholson above and the supporting arguments.

1.3 Hypothesis

There are two things that the current writer is convinced of, and that is that the exodus from Egypt did occur, as the Bible narrates it to have occurred. In making this statement, I am fully aware that I mean that I hold to the figure of the number of people that left Egypt in the exodus exceeded six hundred thousand people or maybe even double that number. Dillard and Longman (1994:59) begin by telling us that Numbers 1:46 tells us that males above the age of twenty numbered 603 550, meaning that the total population was in the millions. They then mention questions raised about the biblical narrative of the exodus, starting with the population. They say others have argued that the Hebrew word translated “1000” is actually a group measurement smaller than one thousand. During the course of this dissertation, historical and redactional criticism will be looking at, so as to make a valid argument and case for the exodus. This will help us to discover relevance.

The second conviction I hold to is that the Decalogue is fully relevant to us in the 21st century and that we need to observe it to the fullest. I will attempt to argue for the Decalogue, and that the Decalogue functioned to guide Israel in their relation to God and as well as each other. Yes, I do agree with the fact we cannot follow all of the laws that were intended for Israel, such as animal sacrifice because Christ came to fulfil such laws and therefore other things concerning ancient Israel become irrelevant. But as for the Decalogue, it remains fully relevant. Barton (2014:6) says “We do not generally study past systems of thought if we think they can have nothing whatever to say to us, and I believe there are insights in the Hebrew Bible that still ‘speak’ today, even if in a strange voice.” Fully agreeing with this statement, I propose that the first four of the Ten Commandments, which are the ones we will be focusing on, still speak today, even in a strange voice. This is not to say the six are not, but those are more ethical than relational, firstly, and secondly they deal with

human day to day living as opposed to a relationship with God. Also, the last six are more common moral law, while the first four are not.

1.4 Method

To successfully and effectively write this dissertation, we will employ redaction criticism. This method was pioneered, according to Barton (1992:645), by scholars like von Rad and Noth, who called this method a ‘traditio-historical’ method, which has now become a method used to determine other facets of Scripture. We also read in Barton (1992:645) that it is because of redaction that we have Scripture as we know it today. Boorer (2010:98-99) tells us that redaction criticism focuses on each stage of the editing or redactional process, where written sources were combined, reshaped, and/or supplemented to form a new text or level of the text, and this is done until the eventual formation of its final form. Employing this method, therefore, means that we will look at the growth of the text and the possibility of the narrative being edited and why this could have been done. Stone (2009:752-753) says redaction criticism could be understood as an integrative method describing the kinds, levels, and mechanisms of conceptual unity at work in documents thought to have compositional diversity. He says redaction criticism begins by using, analytical methods like source- and form-criticism, to understand the source materials behind a text. Also, the redaction critic, he explains, explores how the material was reshaped and organized, assessing both the possible intentionality at work as well as the literary effect of the final text.¹⁰ Stone’s understanding clearly shows us that the order of the narrative could have been moved around, that is a later writing put before others. We will also look at this and ask the question of why this was done, as challenging as this may be. Because as Barton (1992:645) says that a lot of the

¹⁰ Barton (1992:647) agrees with the point of arrangement, but adds an aspect of the redactor adding new materials to the text.

redaction process is speculative as we do not have external controls, as is the case with a book like Chronicles. Finally, Stone (2009:753) says that the redaction critic also looks into the historical, cultural, and social contexts for such compositional processes. Redaction criticism thus potentially integrates synchronic and diachronic concerns in a single method.

Collins (2005:5-6) thinks that an understanding of the ancient context of a text needs sympathetic analogy between ancient and modern situations. He continues to say that one of the assumptions of historical criticism is that texts are human products, therefore we can assess what is plausible in an ancient situation because we know what human beings are capable of. Klingbeil (2003:401) tells us that historical criticism is a term used to describe differing methods of approaching ancient texts. Continuing, Klingbeil argues that historical criticism is made up of two facets, the first being a basic approach to the text, asking critical questions as opposed to accepting Scripture as divinely inspired with humans as agents.¹¹ The second dimension, according to Klingbeil (2003:401), is that this approach is for a modern era attempting to find the meaning of a text in its original context, thereby finding the historical meaning and circumstances of the text. Having said this, this approach will be used to take the text into consideration, as we seek to determine the historicity of the Exodus and of the Decalogue and its intended purpose by the original authors. Added to that, the context and circumstances need to be taken into consideration, being sensitive to the miraculous in this narrative, as this narrative is littered with it. In the process of doing this, we will inevitably touch on dating and authorship of the Decalogue. We will not end there, but after we have looked at all of this we will then build a bridge between the then and now, finding the present days

¹¹ On this point, Collins (2005:6) acknowledges that historical criticism gave rise to problems especially when it came to miraculous aspects, while providing a way of bringing the text to life by analogy with modern experiences.

relevance of the Decalogue, or its part thereof, and what it means to the contemporary church if it means anything at all.

1.5 Overview of Study

Chapter 1 - This chapter will serve as an introduction to the dissertation, where the reason and purpose of the dissertation will be stated. Also, the introduction gives the stance of the writer, as to what presupposition he holds towards the research. The introduction will also outline of the questions that will be answered and the kind of method that will be employed to give an answer to the questions and research problem.

Chapter 2 – This chapter looks at some historical issues, starting with the exodus event. The reason we look at this event is to find a basis of the motivation of the Commandments, which is that God took Israel out of Egypt. Not only is this statement made at the beginning of the Decalogue, but it is made throughout the Hebrew Bible, therefore it should have a basis. Also along with the historical issues is the Decalogue and the historical context in which it is found. This section of the chapter will look at the surroundings of Ancient Israel and what may have necessitated the giving of the Decalogue by the God of Israel, specifically the first four of the commandments. The redaction-critical method will help in the last section of this chapter, which is the development of the text. This section looks at the growth of the text, that is, the work of the editors to give us the Scripture as we have them today and as accepted by the majority of the church.

Chapter 3 – In this chapter the text is engaged with, looking at what was meant to the original audience of the Decalogue. The chapter will look at what the first four commandments meant to Israel as a nation, and what God meant to communicate with His chosen people through them. Also, here we look at each of the commands

and attempting to understand what they meant. In so doing, the original meaning of the text can be translated to today.

Chapter 4 – Now the dissertation will turn towards a contextual interpretation of the text, and the commands themselves. Here the bridge between the then and now is built, as the relevance for today is very key in understanding Scripture for the church today. The chapter will show whether the Decalogue is indeed relevant, or it is just another ancient text that had meaning then, but not today.

Chapter 5 – This chapter will then conclude the dissertation by drawing the important points of each chapter and making final remarks on them and what has been discovered during the course of the study. This chapter will then conclude on whether the initial presuppositions have been maintained, or they have been educated and perhaps changed.

1.6 Terminology

There are certain terms that are used in this proposal that need explaining. They are:

- Theophany- Hiebert (1992:505) describes this as “the self-disclosure of God”. This is the physical manifestation of God or a god to humanity.
- Anachronism- the Oxford English Dictionary (2010:48) defines it as something that is placed, for example, a book or a play, in the wrong period of history.
- Redaction criticism- Carr (2010:269) defines this as “the attempt to identify the ways in which the author or redactors of the present biblical books created those wholes through arrangement, transformation, and extension of earlier source materials.”
- Historical criticism- Sherman (2007:830) defines historical criticism as “An approach to the study of biblical literature that foregrounds questions

concerning the 'historicity' of the biblical text, and strives to place the biblical literature within the historical context(s) of its production.

Chapter 2

The Book of Exodus

2.1 Introduction

The book of Exodus is a book that has been debated a lot, but before we get to all of the scholarly arguments on the book and its content, we need to introduce the book and look at some of its background. Exodus carries a story of one of the most action-packed narratives of the Old Testament, where God acts on behalf of His people Israel. Not only that, but the book of Exodus also gives a narrative of wilderness wanderings and the Sinai Theophany. In this narrative we see the hand of Pharaoh being forced to let Israel go, setting them free from slavery. This chapter will look at the historical issues, including the historicity of the exodus narrative, and inevitably touch on the dating of the book (even though dating will not be the focus), as well as the history around, and of the Decalogue. We have certainly seen in our introduction that there are a number of questions asked around whether the exodus actually did happen, in whatever form or magnitude, or whether it was a tale told or invented at a later stage.

What this chapter seeks to do therefore is employ a historical-critical approach to the book of Exodus and look at the events it records. Also at certain points, we will look at source criticism that pertains to the book of Exodus. The current author acknowledges that the Old Testament went through a redactions process, and these redactors embedded their own feel and ideas into the text. This means that Exodus at different times may switch between P to non-P authorship. In this chapter, we will look at some historical issues, which includes the history of the origins of the nation Israel, where we will attempt to follow the Patriarchs and where they came from. The reason we look at the Patriarchs is because the biblical narrative of the history of

Israel includes the Patriarchs, so we need to consider them. The second reason for looking at the Patriarchs is because we need a certain basis in terms of history from which to depart when being historically critical of the narrative. The second avenue to follow under historical issues is that of the historicity of the exodus event, where we will hear scholars argue in favour of the historicity of the events described in the book of exodus. We will also hear the voice of scholars who counter argue the credibility of the narration, even though with these scholars, some of them do argue for a historical kernel to the story. The chapter then moves on to look at the Sinai pericope, where the starting point will be looking at Sinai as a geographical location and what role the location may have played in the life and religion of Israel. From there, the chapter looks at the events which took place at Sinai, such as the laws that were given there, including the Decalogue, and the covenant(s) which was made there. The chapter will then narrow in on the Decalogue, looking at its historical context, beginning with the looking at where the Israel came from in terms of religion. This journey will begin with the patriarchs and the religious inclination they may have had, it then moves on to the time they spent in Egypt and all they may have been exposed to in that place in terms of religion. The final aspect it looks at in respect to religion is attempting to look forward to Canaan where they were going and what they were going to encounter there in terms of religion, and perhaps as this is what warranted the giving of the Decalogue and other laws. The final section the chapter looks at is the origins of YHWH and His worship. The chapter will attempt to find where YHWH originated from, that is a physical location, which will inevitably lead us to finding the first YHWH worshippers were before Israel “adopted” Him as their God.

Johnstone (2007:371) argues that the book of Exodus narrates a story of the origins of the nation of Israel through the power of YHWH their God after hearing their cry for salvation in Egypt where they had been enslaved by Pharaoh. In hearing

their cry, Johnstone continues, God sends Moses to free Israel from captivity by the Egyptians, and He then revealed His law to them and stayed faithful to them as their God despite their apostasy, and He dwelt among them. In the same light, Harrison (1982:222) says

The book is extremely valuable in preserving the link between the historical material of the Genesis narrative and the later history of Israel. The sequence of events is of prime importance to the Hebrew concept of history, and exodus is of fundamental significance for the manner in which it depicts the historical basis for the existence of Israel as the chosen people of God.

What these scholars are presenting is that Exodus as a book is pivotal to the history of the Israelite nation and how they as a nation came to be, where one could maybe rightly assume that without this book, there would be a missing link in the history of the formation of the Israelite nation. Rylaarsdam (1952:833) presents this book rather a bit differently in saying that the title of the book does not do justice to its central theme in that less than half of the book is a record of the escape of Israel from Egypt. He says that the majority of the book is concerned with the life of Israel as a nation of God and that it is God, not Moses, the leader, or Israel, the redeemed, who stands at the centre of the book. This shows that as one approaches this book, there needs to be clarity that a majority of the content to be dealt with is not the exodus or Moses, or even Israel as a nation, but it will be the activity of God as He acts to form the nation of Israel. Exodus is a Theocentric book, and perhaps the most theocentric, because it shows God starting to fulfil the promises made in the book of Genesis.

We then need to move on and discover the place which the book of Exodus holds in the larger scheme of things, that is, the Pentateuch. Sarna (1992:690)¹²

¹² Harrison (1982:222) also presents a similar argument to that of Sarna.

thinks that the Exodus as a book stands as part of a larger literary context, therefore it has to have a connection with both the preceding and the succeeding books. Sarna says it firstly does this by citing sections of Genesis to connect it to the preceding book ¹³ and connects it with the succeeding book by closing with the construction and dedication of the tabernacle, which provides the background for the main theme for the books of Leviticus and Numbers.¹⁴ Thus for Sarna there is, in fact,, a clear chronological connection between the first five books of the Old Testament, that is, the Pentateuch.

Brueggemann (1994:677) on the other hand argues that the connection between the books of Genesis and that of Exodus is “important but uneasy.” He argues that on critical grounds, it is clear that the Exodus community has no direct historical connection to the Genesis ancestors, even though the text gives the theologically crucial connection. Brueggemann makes the argument that the text insists that the old promises of Genesis, that is the one made at creation and the one of land made to the ancestors, are still operative in Exodus, and are in fact the driving force for God’s activity in the book of Exodus. This argument brings doubt in the connection between the first and second book of the Pentateuch because the implication here is the reason this connection exists is for theological reasons,¹⁵ instead of perhaps a more chronological reason. What this may be implying then is that there is a forced connection between Genesis and Exodus, and this forced connection may have been because those who put the Pentateuch together were

¹³ Verse 1 cites Genesis 46:1; verse 5 depends on Genesis 46:26-27; Exodus 1:2-4 draws from Genesis 35:23-26; Exodus 1:7 affirms that the blessing of fertility has been realized and promise of land is about to be realized; Exodus 1:5-6 assumes the knowledge of the identity and activity of Joseph in Genesis.

¹⁴ This is the ordering of the cultic institutions and religious life of Israel.

¹⁵ Theological in the sense that it show the continued work of YHWH in the life of His chosen people.

looking to find a long and deep history between Israel and God. This implication is evidenced by what Brueggemann (1994:678) argues, that “Insofar as these later books are the extended proclamation of the Torah, they simply continue the work of Moses at Sinai. They belong completely within the orbit of Moses’ authorizing work and in fact, constitute no new theme.” This means that the connection of the book of Exodus to the succeeding books of the Pentateuch has a smoother transition than that between the books of Genesis and Exodus, and this is because they continue an already running theme.

Rylaarsdam (1952:835) argues that Exodus is not a history of early Israel in any strict sense of the term, but it is rather an exposition of the meaning of the history of Israel, an interpretation of Israel’s faith. Johnstone (2007:372) says that the expectation may be that the account in Exodus is unitary and uniform, which would be the expectation if the narrative was a narration of events, with Moses as its author. These authors argue that if Moses was the author of the exodus events, then maybe the narrative would be a presentation of history, but as it stands, with Moses not being the author, the Exodus narrative presents a picture of the formation of Israelite faith. Rylaarsdam (1952:836) says:

This interpretation of the great initial “act of God” was not produced all at once when J or later documents were composed. Exodus takes up into itself the entire tradition of the faith from the first. Exodus is not only, as is sometimes assumed, a one-sided attempt to impute to Moses and the nomads he led the ideas-religious, cultic, historical, and ethical- of the ninth, eighth, or sixth centuries. It is also a significant exposition of a remembered history and of the faith that culminated in the ideas it contains. In Exodus, the event of revelation in its initial meaning, and all subsequent interpretations of it down to the sixth century are woven together into a single literary fabric.

What this argument by Rylaarsdam presents is that what we read in the book of Exodus is a product of a work that combines the tradition of Israel's faith together with a remembered history of Israel, which was probably originally an oral tradition. He implies here that all that was known about Israel's history and faith, through to the sixth century, is summarised in the book of Exodus.

2.2 Themes of the Book of Exodus

Fretheim (2003:250) thinks that the book of Exodus plays an integral part in the Pentateuch, even though it also has an integrity of its own as a book. He says that the book moves from Israel serving Pharaoh as slaves to serving YHWH, and the key to this transition is the saving act of God at the Red Sea, thus the book moves from slavery to worship through salvation. The book moves from forceful construction of buildings for Pharaoh to the wilful and glad offering towards the building of a worship place for God. Fretheim also notes the journey of God as well, where His presence moves from the distance, at the top of the mountain, to becoming an intense presence in the midst of His chosen people, Israel. What we see marked here is the cementing of a covenant relationship between God and His chosen people, the nation of Israel, where God had seemed to have forgotten them. He saves them, where He was previously detached, He moves in and becomes part of the people. By the end of the Exodus narrative, Israel is God's people, and God is Israel's God, but more than that, YHWH now tabernacles among them.

Another aspect we can visit under the introduction to the book of Exodus is the themes found in the book. It is true that every book has something it hinges on, which is the theme or themes of that particular book, and Exodus is no different. The first theme is that of oppression and liberation, where Fretheim (2003:254) says that even though the theme of liberation is one of the more central themes, it is not the final

objective of God's work, as the narrative moves beyond that to new vistas of life and well-being. This means that the setting free of the slaves is not the final work, but looks beyond that, hence Brueggemann (1994:678) says that the liberation narrative is concerned with the transformation of a social standing from being oppressed to being free. This means that the theme of oppression only exists so it justifies liberation, and liberation happens as a means to new avenues of living for the liberated.

Another theme we can look at is that of covenant and law. Brueggemann (1994:679) says that the proclamation of the law was a means to the making of the covenant, which bound Israel to YHWH as His people, and Him their God, and they would be intimately, profoundly and non-negotiably bound to each other. Fretheim (2003:255) on the other hand argues that even before the liberation, God already had a covenant with Israel, because He had a covenant with Abraham. This means that the covenant made with Israel was not to begin the relationship, but it was to continue the relationship between God and His people Israel. The giving of the law for Israel was, according to Brueggemann (1994:679), the announcement of God's will for all aspects of Israel's personal and public life, because God did not want to be a God who is only limited to the religious aspect of their lives. God wanted to permeate through all walls and barriers in the lives of Israel and be involved in their everyday lives.

The last theme we will look at is concerned with God. In the book of Exodus, Fretheim (2003:253) tells us, the question of who God is, is asked by Pharaoh because He wanted to know what deity wanted to usurp authority over him as a deity in his own right. Fretheim then continues to say that God portrayed Himself, as a response to Pharaoh's question, through the plagues suffered by Egypt during this power struggle. YHWH the God of Israel made Himself known or portrayed Himself

to Pharaoh so he could know who He was. In Brueggemann (2003:679) we find the theme of the presence of God among the people of Israel. He says that the constant problem faced by Israel is finding a suitable way to host this Holy presence, wherein they come up with a structure that makes possible the glory to both as an abiding presence and a travelling assurance. The theme of presence we see carried throughout the history of the nation, even into the time of the kingdom, where King Solomon built a temple for God's presence to dwell. These themes put together made Israel unique in that they became a nation that was liberated by their covenant God, not only that, but this covenant God was concerned with their daily living to the extent that He wanted to come and dwell among them, and be ever present with them.

2.3 Historical Issues

Moving on to the historical issues in the interpretation of the book of Exodus, there are two schools of thought, one being that the exodus is a historical event that did happen as recorded in Scripture, and the other claiming that it did not happen, or at least not in the way that the Bible says it happened, most probably on a much smaller scale. Fretheim (2003:252) rightly says that the Book of Exodus was not written as a history narrative but as a theological and kerygmatic book. Enns (2000:25) argues that the book of Exodus was written as a theological book, and not necessarily a historical record and that any and every approach to the book must depart from this stance. Now I agree that both these scholars are ambiguous because it may mean that what is recorded in these pages is either fictional or factual. Kitchen (1992:701) argues that modern Bible scholars, that is, from the 19th century, tend to reject the overall scheme of the historicity of the exodus event as found in the Bible, even though Kitchen is conservative in his views. In the same vein, Dozeman (2009:27), as one of the more critical Old Testament scholars, argues that the specific dates

and careful numbering of the people that left Egypt seeks to encourage the historicity of the exodus event, but this is betrayed by the dates, vague references to geography and the unrealistic population. Propp (2006:736) argues that the Torah discredits itself by talking too much and contradicts itself. He argues that the exodus story would be more credible if it was scattered and had short allusions to the exodus. Dozeman and Propp stand on the same side and see the exodus event as mostly “fictional”, meaning that they believe that the event happened but probably on a smaller scale than recorded in Scripture. It will, therefore, be important to reconcile these two spectrums of the argument and come to a conclusion on which is more viable. In the process of doing this, the current author does acknowledge that there have been, and still are, a lot of discussions around this topic, and that this dissertation cannot provide a definite answer to this question.

2.3.1 History of Israel

But before we get into the details of the Exodus narrative, it is important what we briefly touch on the history of the nation of Israel and how they got to be in Egypt, as this is also a somewhat debated issue. The Hebrew Bible tells us that only seventy (70) people went into Egypt, that is, Jacob and his family. The reason for their entry in Egypt was a famine which had plagued their land and forced them to find an alternative food source, which was Egypt. Meanwhile, in Egypt, one of Jacob’s sons, Joseph had come into power and was in charge of the sales of grain. Seeing his brothers, he revealed himself to them and asks them to go and bring back their father. On hearing this, Jacob, whose name had been changed by God to Israel, did not believe them because he thought Joseph was dead. Upon coming to Egypt, Jacob, and his family settle in Egypt in the land of Goshen, where Jacob spends his

last days.¹⁶ Scholars beg to differ with this line of events and we will look at their opinions in regards to the settlement.

We will look at two approaches to the settlement of Israel, starting with Meyers (2005:8), who tells us that during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Dynasties in Egypt, there was a lot of movements by Asiatics into Egypt, which parallels the descent, sojourn and departures of Israel from Egypt. Meyers (2005:9) continues to say that during this time, a lot of Asiatics were sent to Egypt as a tribute from a vassal, while others went in for commercial ventures. Others still entered Egypt escaping from hardships in their own territories and settled east of the Nile Delta in search of economic security. This last group sounds a lot like Israel and how they got to Egypt, through hardship, and especially the mention that they went to Egypt to “find relief for themselves and their flocks” (Meyers, 2005:9). Meyers here speaks of people that descended to Egypt for various reasons from Asia. Maybe they became slaves, or maybe they left Egypt on their own accord, but we know they went there.

We find another suggestion on the settlement in The New Interpreters Dictionary, which records that from as far back as the flood, we read that this story is similar to tales of Atrahasis and Gilgamesh (McKenzie, 2008:120). And this is true, because if one reads the Epic of Gilgamesh, one is amazed by the level of similarity between the two.¹⁷ From there we read of the Patriarchs, where McKenzie (2008:120) tells us that the story of the rescuing of Lot seems to have been invented because the name of the kings were made up. He continues to say that the Jacob story may reflect a postexilic period, reflected by the lengthy Canaan exile and that the animosity between Jacob and Esau may be a result of Edom’s cooperation in Judah’s decimation in 586 BC (McKenzie, 2008:120). This is a very vague approach

¹⁶ We can follow this narrative from Genesis 42-50.

¹⁷ That is between the biblical narrative of the flood and the Gilgamesh Epic.

to the Egypt settlement, but if one follows the argument, we come to the question of the veracity of the going down to Egypt by Jacob and his sons, or may this be just an invention of later Israel. Perhaps it is a way of strengthening their history by saying they have, as a nation, been through hard times.

2.3.2 Arguments of the Historicity of the Exodus Narrative

We now get into the historicity of the exodus narrative, where Adamo (2012:69) quotes Miller who argues that history is the mode of inquiry used by those in the present to frame the distinctiveness of lives in the past. Using this definition, the aim is to attempt to find the distinctiveness of those lives and events, and how that might affect us today. This starting point, though disputed by many scholars and seen as a challenge to the veracity of the exodus event, is very important. The first objection to the exodus by scholars is one that Houtman (1993:172) raises, that of evidence. He tells us that the challenge of reconstructing Israel's history is that the Bible cannot be the only source of history, because, for one, it excludes the Pharaoh's name.¹⁸ It is understandable how this could be a problem, because, without these names, it is hard to place the event in history using Egyptian history and the reign of their leaders. It is the argument of some scholars, such as Enns (2000:24), though that the Bible did not and cannot serve as a history book because it was not written to be one, instead it was written as theological history to teach lessons about God and who He is, how He is like and what it means for His people to live with that knowledge. What Enns is arguing for here is that it would be, and is, unfair to approach the Pentateuch using a method with which its writers did not have in mind when they wrote the book. But also, on the other hand, there is absolutely no way in which the history of Israel

¹⁸ Fretheim (2003:252) agrees with this point and adds that the sea crossing and wilderness stops are not mentioned.

can be determined if we do not use the Bible, because it is, after all, the only source we have.

2.3.2.1 Argument against the Historicity of the Exodus Event

Collins (2004:108) begins his argument on the historicity of the exodus as some scholars do, by stating the lack of substantial evidence for the exodus in extra-biblical recordings to corroborate the biblical narrative. For instance, Rylaarsdam (1952:836) mentions that the remembered history of Israel as found in Exodus has little sustaining corroboration in records of the ANE. We do acknowledge this fact, that there is a lack of extra-biblical evidence to support the exodus narrative, but there are counter-arguments to that, which we will look at later. Johnstone (1990:20) in his work seems to somewhat treat the Bible as a history book and parallels what is recorded there with what is recorded in Egyptian history. Johnstone continues to say that what the Old Testament records is typical of the interactions between Egypt and her Semitic neighbours. With this, he continues to say that it also describes common events within historical processes, such as military invasions, colonization, imperialism, decline of the empire and, as far as herdsmen are concerned, transhumance, the annual interchange of pastures. Therefore what is recorded as the Israelite exodus, and history, is a simplified version of these events, written in Israel's point of view. This implies that both the settlement and exodus narratives we read about in the book of Exodus were not a rare site or a miracle, but it was what happened annually as a norm. Johnstone is arguing here that the exodus event did not happen the way it has been recorded. What the Hebrew Bible records was an annual movement, nothing out of the ordinary. Implying that it was common for people to travel to and from Egypt, and maybe sometimes as groups. One may note here that the consistency that is found between the Hebrew Bible and what Johnstone says is that Israel did get to Egypt as a part of transhumance activity, and

the difference is the exit from Egypt. But even with regard to how Israel left Egypt, the implication here is that it was nothing out of the ordinary, but it was normal Semitic migration, but the way the Hebrew Bible expresses it is in the Israelite point of view.

Maybe the Egypt settlement is not much of a debate, as we have seen above that this was part of Egypt's interaction with her Semitic neighbours,¹⁹ than the exit. So what still remains as a debate is the way in which the Hebrew Bible records it, mostly the figures. Following what we said above on the question of evidence, Meyers (2005:5) talks about how generations of archaeologists have dedicated their lives to finding evidence of the Biblical version of exodus event, where such a large number of people lived in,²⁰ and eventually left Egypt and wandered in the wilderness for such a long time. This does present us with a challenge of showing the veracity of the exodus event, because the Israelites should have, in some way, left marks of their presence, either in Egypt or in the wilderness. Dozeman (2009:30), in the same light, says that there is no indication that Israelites fled Egypt, or that they toiled the wilderness for a generation before their children conquered Canaan. This statement by Dozeman echoes Meyers' one on whether we can be certain of an exodus, based on the lack of evidence.

McKenzie (2008:120) takes his argument a step further while tracing the history of Israel, by looking at all the major stories the Torah tells. For instance, he sees the story of Abraham going to Egypt as anachronistic, patterned after the exodus narrative. He then also, when he gets to the exodus narrative, argues the case of

¹⁹ This speaks to the kernel that there may have been a group that left Egypt, but not the number mentioned by the Hebrew Bible.

²⁰ Johnstone (2007:372) also speaks on the absence of evidence after two centuries of archaeological research.

evidence. McKenzie (2008:120) points out that it is improbable that a large number of people, as those spoken about in the exodus event, would go unnoticed and unrecorded in Egyptian history, especially added to the cataclysmic plagues that hit the country during this time of their exit.²¹ He also argues that in all of Egyptian literature, there is no recording of a Joseph, Moses or any other person. This does become a cause for concern as to the existence of such characters, especially because of the prominence they had in the nation of Egypt. First, Joseph saved Egypt during a time of famine, and came with a solution to the problem, he should have been recorded in Egyptian literature as “saviour”. Second, Moses grew up in the palace as an adopted son of a princess, he too should appear somewhere as a member of the royal family, turned “saviour” of the Israelites. If these characters are not recorded, and their existence questionable, we do therefore ask whether the exodus event did, in fact, take place. According to McKenzie (2008:121), the Merneptah Stele, which is the earliest record of the existence of Israel, places Israel in Canaan in Merneptah’s fifth year, about 1208, which does not agree with the Bible’s chronology and does not allow for the wilderness wanderings. Now we get to a point where we do find extra-biblical evidence for the existence of Ancient Israel, but it also does not align with biblical chronology. The question, therefore, remains, whether the exodus did happen at the time and the way in which the Bible say it happened, or it happened differently, and what we see on the pages of the Bible is a tribal story made into a national story by redactors.

²¹ Adamo (2012:71) raises this point and adds lack of records for the drowning of and Egyptian army.

2.3.2.2 *Argument for the Historicity of the Exodus Event*

As expected, there are scholars who advocate for the historicity of the exodus event, even if they are not many. We will hear their arguments and follow their reasoning. Most scholars, like Enns (2000:24), begin their defence by stating that the Bible is a theological book and not so much a history book.²² He continues to say that it is written to teach lessons, the biggest one of them all being teaching of how God is like and what it means to be His children. It is evident that this kind of argument does not really hold water because it may mean that these records are false or inaccurate, but it is a start. Secondly, even those who may be seen to be arguing against the historicity of the exodus event argue this point. Johnstone (2007:372) says this, “There can be no doubt that what Exodus relates does reflect actual events in the history of the Ancient Near East.” This statement is strong one, as it reflects the possibility of the credibility of the Exodus narrative and historicity of what the Bible actually records, regardless of the magnitude or scale. Johnstone (2007:372) continues to say that historians do record that from the 12th century BCE there was a decline in the power and grip of Egypt as a superpower, allowing for nations like Israel to rise. This means that during this time, the pharaoh of Egypt was not as assertive and strong as his predecessors, which means that the exodus might have happened during this time. Propp (2006:738) presents a strong advocacy for the case of Israel. He mentions that the objections to the dating of the exodus because of the name of the city of Raamses, the mention of the Philistines in Exodus 13:17, 15:14, 23:31, as they entered Canaan later than the exodus event dating do not have an effect on the veracity of the event. He says this may be a case of anachronism.²³ This argument means that the exodus might have happened, but was not recorded

²² McKenzie (2008:118) also argues this point.

²³ Anachronism here means that the information recorded was composed at a later time when the place names were available to use.

when it happened, but was recorded at a later date when name places had a changed and there had been a movement of people. But this still does not explain why the names of the Pharaoh of the oppression and of the exodus are not mentioned.

Adamo (2012:74) says that the absence of records in Egypt of the exodus event does not mean that the event did not happen. He says the Egyptian leaders would not record such an event of humiliation on their monuments because of their pride in admitting defeat. But the lack of evidence is not only an issue in Egypt only but in Canaan as well, where there seems to be no evidence the city was conquered. Propp (2006:739) answers this concern by pointing out that there have been in history peoples who are known to have settled in a certain location but are archeologically invisible, such as the Celtic, Vandals, Slavs, and Tutsis, to name a few. This tells us that the lack of evidence does not mean something did not happen, but it may mean that some things happen, but are not recorded. Adamo (2012:74) continues to say that it is more plausible that the exodus event happened, as opposed to it not happening. He says this narrative contains the memory of historical events that have been woven into a larger whole and interpreted according to Israelite tradition. He concludes by saying that it is the past interpreted as people remembered and perceived it, coloured by subjective concepts, hopes, and fears. What this potentially means is that even those who agree that the exodus event did take place, agree that there might be some “over-colouring” of narration and that it might not have happened the way in which the Bible puts it.

Brenner (2012:158) begins her argument of the historicity with names that bear Egyptian origin, such as Moses, Miriam, and Phinehas. Continuing, she says that when people invent an ancestry, it is usually from gods, heroes and nobles, and not slaves. With this line of argument, even the scholar who disagrees with the historicity

of the exodus event agrees with the fact that some of the prominent people do bear Egyptian names. Also, that scholars agree with the fact that people would rather descend from greats as opposed to slaves. The answer they give therefore for this argument is that firstly, there are people that left Egypt headed for Canaan, who then joined up with those who had already settled in the land, and therefore a clan story became a national story. Secondly, in as much as every person wants to descend from a hero, having a past of struggle and overcome has a glory to it, which is, the nation from which one comes has been through hardships but managed to survive. It builds national strength and national identity and it makes the nation come together in unity. This is not all Brenner speaks about, as she continues to give much stronger reasons of the exodus event. She (2008:159) further argues that another source was a hieroglyphic inscription at a shrine in El-Arish that says that there was a great affliction in the land, evil fell upon the earth, with a great upheaval in Pharaoh's residence, where nobody could leave for nine days. She says there is also a reference to a pharaoh pursuing fleeing slaves as far as Pi-ha-hirot where he was plunged into a whirlpool. This is an interesting point she raises, but is unfortunately not in reference to the exodus event, as she says (2008:159). This argument leaves us with nothing but names, events and a reference to places and no real evidence of the exodus event. What Brenner has been able to achieve is let us know that events similar to those explained in the Bible have happened in Egypt before. Also one may find grounds to ask the question of whether it may be that what is recorded happened during the exodus, but it was dated before the event.

Raiter (2008:64) says that even though scholars differ on their interpretation of Exodus as a book, they agree to the fact that the exodus event, and all that surrounds it, are pivotal in understanding the people of God. The liberation and freedom from Egypt was a necessary event that brought firstly the nation together, and secondly necessitated their allegiance to the God of their salvation, for without the exodus

event, the nation has no reason to worship YHWH. Malamat (2001:57) says that the exodus features most prominently in the biblical tradition as one of the foundations of the Israelite faith, and it appears more than any other Israelite event. This may not form part of secular history, but we need to acknowledge that it forms part of Israel's remembered history. The exodus event formed the basis of the nation's formation, and as we see, it is mentioned more than any other event throughout the Old Testament, because it was a defining event for the nation. Hill and Walton (2009:110) think that there are three basic components of Exodus, and that is the judgement of oppressor Egypt, the deliverance of Israel from slavery and finally the establishment of Israel as God's special possession among all peoples. The exodus was necessary, so that the nation of God can receive the confirmation of its importance to God, and that God had indeed chosen them from among the nations. Hill and Walton (2009:110) continue to say that the Exodus narrative forms the bridge between the patriarchal stories with the later history of the theocratic nation that will later take control of Canaan. All that we have seen concerning the exodus is mostly that God was seeking to establish His nation, and in doing that, He remembered His promise, showed His supremacy and established a people for Himself, who would always acknowledge what He did for them.

In terms of the historicity of the exodus event, it is difficult to know what is true and what is not. What we do know though is what is recorded, that Israel was under Egyptian bondage, from which they sought freedom, which happened. This is where we are unsure about the details. On the one hand, conservative scholars believe that the exodus event happened as the Hebrew Bible describes it, without a shadow of a doubt. On the other hand, we have liberal scholars who do not believe that the exodus event took place the way it is recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures, though they do believe there is a historical kernel to the exodus story. So as to sum up the historicity, we can say that the exodus event, no matter how big it may have been,

was an important and pivotal event in the life of Israel as a nation. This event was a defining moment, where YHWH was on the way to fulfilling the promise He made to the patriarchs, He was taking them to the Promised Land. But before they got there, they had to receive instructions on how to live as a nation chosen by God to be His very own possession. This is recorded to have happened at Sinai, the mountain of God.

2.4 Sinai Pericope

Having escaped Egypt, Israel comes to Mount Sinai, where they meet with God and make a covenant with Him and are given the law. It is important though that the starting point should be to look at Sinai as a geographical place before we look at its significance. Harrison and Hoffmeir (1988:525) say that Sinai is the name of a sacred mountain where Israel had encamped, and where God binds Himself to Israel in covenant.²⁴ Wright (1962:376) argues that in the Elohist and Deuteronomistic writings, Sinai is also called Horeb. Davies (1992:47) adds that this place is also known as the place where Yahweh dwells or from which He comes, or it is called the mountain of Yahweh. This history tells us that this mountain played a big role in the life of Israel as a nation because that is where they met with the God of their salvation. Wright (1962:376) further argues that Elijah is said to have visited Horeb for enlightenment, which seems to be a pilgrimage that was taken by many in the life of Israel. This further emphasizes how important this place was in the life, even more so, their religious life. Traditionally, Mount Sinai has been placed at the peaks of the Sinai Peninsula and is also closely related to the name Jebel Musa.²⁵ But as usual, scholars have suggested other locations for the Mount Sinai, Wright (1962:377)

²⁴ Wright (1962:376) also defines it this way, but adds that it is the Yahwistic and Priestly strata that we find Sinai.

²⁵ See Davie (1992:48), Wright (1962:376) and Harrison and Hoffmeier (1988:526).

gives us three alternative locations for Mount Sinai, which are Jebel Serbal, North West of Arabia and one of the mountains in the neighbourhood of Kadesh-Barnea. Even these suggested locations might not be the right location for the actual Mount Sinai of the Old Testament. This is after the understanding that people in early Israel visited this sacred mountain on pilgrimages, but it still cannot be located. Collins (2004:125) says that the Sinai narrative is not an eyewitness account of events, but rather it is a narrative of how humanity needs to behave in the presence of the Divine, construed from cultic experience.

Brueggemann (2003:61) argues that the chapters covering the Sinai pericope include the preparation for the meeting with YHWH, the proclamation of the Ten Commandments, the acceptance of Moses as a mediator of the Torah and a concluding narrative, where Israel takes an oath of allegiance to YHWH. This gives us the understanding that the Decalogue happened within a bigger scope of things, which is the Sinai event, where the nation is gathered at the mountain of God. The attempt here will be to understand this time in Israel's life, and what significance it had for the nation. At this point, God makes a covenant with, and gives the law to the nation of Israel. Collins (2004:121) says that the liberation from Egypt has its fulfilment in the giving of the law, and the motivation for keeping the law is in the memory of the exodus. What this means is that the two events are interdependent, and the one feeds on the other. Collins (2004:121) continues to say that the combination of law and history is necessary for the Sinai Covenant, because unlike the Abrahamic covenant which only required faith from Abraham, the Sinai covenant is conditional, and blessings come by obedience. This means that whatever the outcome of their lives may be, it all relied on how Israel acted under the covenant they had with God. So we need to understand what the covenant was and what it meant.

Brueggemann (2003:65) summarises the concept of covenant by saying that what is found in Exodus 19-24 is crucial material that concerns itself with covenant, where God signs on as the God of Israel, and Israel submits to obeying the commands of YHWH. He says this commitment and obedience is relived and reiterated in the statement “I will be your God, and you shall be my people”.

Ceresko (1992:80) argues that the covenant was an instrument that served to unify and preserve a community of individuals brought together by their common allegiance to YHWH. What he seems to be suggesting here is that the people getting into the covenant are people from different places, who had the experience of liberation from oppression, but not necessarily from Egypt. On the other hand, Eissfeld (1965:144) says that narratives have shown us that they are usually a collection of smaller narratives put together to create a bigger narrative, therefore he asks whether this might be a similar case. He asks whether we might need to assume that there were smaller pieces, literary intermediate stages between laws and judicial utterances, while on the other hand, we are to picture the redactors putting together these laws using individual laws and judicial utterances they compiled as appropriate to them. This then links us to the argument by Ceresko (1992:78-79) on whether the recipients of these laws or covenant were a single nation, or were a group of people with similar experiences deciding to form a nation.

Ceresko (1992:80-81) continues with his argument for covenant and says that the nation was faced with two sets of circumstances, the first being they had just been liberated, and in the wilderness, therefore needed a coping mechanism or else perish. The second was that they had escaped their oppressors and therefore did not want to repeat the mistakes of their oppressors, they had the flexibility and freedom to build upon what they rejected. This means that the groups which had been recently liberated now came together and decided how they would go about

living together in harmony, and in mentioning all that was wrong, they decided to do the opposite, coming up with the covenant. Whether one believes these people came up with these or they were given to them by God, we can be certain these people were religious, therefore believed a higher power had liberated them, and had the right to dictate how they lived, which is why we come to a point where Israel receives the law from their liberator God, YHWH.

The understanding is that Sinai was where God met with Israel, for the purposes of making a covenant with them to be their God, and them to be His people. Here at Sinai, is where God was to covenant with His people. Andersen (2009:527) tells us that this covenant was not done directly, but God used Moses as the covenant mediator and that this covenant has been remembered throughout Israelite history. One may add here that it is not only Israel who knows about this covenant, but the whole world has come to know about it too through the records of the Hebrew Bible. This means that the central theme of the Sinai event is covenant renewal, because God is renewing a covenant that He had with the Patriarchs, that of a great nation and of land. Davies (1992:49) writes saying that the presupposition of the Sinai tradition is a God of majesty and holiness who demands not only exclusivity of worship, but justice regulated living. It was going to be difficult for Israel to keep their end of the bargain, so God went a step further and gave regulations, in the Ten Commandments, with the covenant he made with Israel. Payne (2009:1060) thinks that the covenant had now been extended from being a family affair to a national affair. He says God was now not only making a covenant with a man and his family, but with a whole nation of a population now ranging in the two million. It was this covenant that Israel had to live with as they went into the Promised Land. Brueggemann (2003:61) makes the argument that the reason the Sinai event is so complicated is because the commands extended the reign and will of the God of Israel to every aspect of life, that is, personal and public, civil and cultic. Where God

was formerly a personal God, He was now about to take the position of a national God, who's rule permeated every front of life.

To further understand what happened at Sinai, Collins (2004:124) suggests that Sinai was associated with theophany before it became a mountain of the law, and the Exodus 19 narrative exploits this old tradition of YHWH appearing on a mountain in fire, and uses this for the giving of the law. This argument suggests that even before Israel could attach legal significance to Mount Sinai, it already carried the significance of the Theophany, and the legal narrative of the book of Exodus built on something that was already existing. Davies (1992:48) says that there are several arguments that confirm that there was a special relationship between YHWH and Mount Sinai that existed before the exodus from Egypt. This tells us then that the nation of Israel encamped at a place they knew was a dwelling place for YHWH, they settled where they expecting YHWH to show up and be in their midst, and He did not disappoint. Davies (1992:48) says that it is at this place that YHWH reveals His name for the first time, and that the previous sacredness of Sinai is implied by Exodus 3:5 and 19:12-13. We learn therefore that it is not the first Theophany that happens at this mountain, there have been others before this one. This might be the right place to refer to Childs who asks the question a lot of scholars have been asking. Childs (1974:337) thinks that scholars have been asking the question of how the exodus and Sinai traditions came together. So as to answer the question, Childs (1974:337-338) references von Rad who says that when one reads the Old Testament, one can see that the two are different traditions transmitted from different cultic functions, and were joined together relatively late in Israel's history. This means that the Sinai event and the exodus event were two different traditions, possibly from two different times, that had nothing to do with each other, but maybe through redaction, they were combined.

So looking forward to the results of the Sinai event, we find, among other things, the Decalogue, which we can understand as part of the law. Here Fretheim (2003:255) says the law was a gift to a redeemed people and was not an establishment of a relationship between God and Israel, but Israel's obedience to the law was a service of the vocation to which it has been called. This means that when God gave the law, He was not establishing a nation but, He was cementing a nation that He had already formed and called to be His own possession. The nation was being given a guideline on how to live as a set apart people, with the Decalogue as its guide.

To sum up this section, there needs to be an understanding of what Sinai was and what it meant. We need to recognize that Sinai was more than just a mountain, a geographical location, it was the place where God met with His nation through the generations. Not only that, but it is where they received instruction on how to live as a nation of God and where the relationship between God and Israel was solidified by the giving of the law in the form of the Decalogue. Balentine (1999:177) argues that it was at this very mountain that God commissioned Israel to become both a covenant and a worshipping community. This commission carried with it the instruction to leave Sinai, where the covenantal agreement stood no test, and to travel to Canaan where obstacles to God's design awaited. This tells us that there is a challenge that waited for Israel when they got to Canaan. The challenge was so big, Balentine (1999:177) asks the question of whether Israel will stand strong as the nation set apart for YHWH or will they crumble under the pressure and conform to what they will find in Canaan. So Mount Sinai as a location was probably one of the most important places for Israel and in terms of events, one of the most pivotal in the existence and worship of the nation Israel. This was a defining event indeed.

2.5 The Origins of YHWH Worship

In the prologue of the Decalogue, YHWH introduces Himself, using the phrase יהוה אלהים which is used, to show that the God who is speaking here is not just any, but rather the God of the salvation of Israel. The question then among scholar is who this YHWH is, and where He came or originated from. But the answer to this question is a two-prong answer, with the first being that it seeks to know whether Israel was the first nation to worship YHWH or not. The second part of the question is how Israel came into contact with YHWH. We will here attempt to look at, and perhaps come to an understanding of how YHWH came to be worshipped by the nation and maybe even become exclusive to them as a nation.

Manley and Bruce (1962:421) argue that YHWH was the God of the Patriarchs as we read that He was YHWH the God of Abram, then of Isaac, then of Jacob, where He then says that this is His name forever. The question of whether the name YHWH was known to the Patriarchs before Moses' time comes into play or was it the work of a redactor, who used the name for a time in which the name was not yet known or revealed to Israel's ancestors. Oesterley and Robinson (1930:136) say that there are clear indications that YHWH was known and worshipped before Israel as a nation came into contact with Him and began to worship Him as their God. They add that there are no details about the earlier cult that worshipped YHWH as the only records of the picture formed about YHWH we have are from Israel.

Albertz (1994:49) offers a different argument by saying that it does not mean that before Israel came into contact with YHWH they did not have a religion, even though we have no knowledge of this religion. Thus, there are scholars who have the understanding or conviction that YHWH the God of Israel was worshipped before Israel adopted Him as their Deity, and we will look at this later. This view though

goes against the view, opinion and conviction of conservative scholars and Christians.

What the conservative group believes in is that the name YHWH is the proper name of God who has always been there in history, ensuring that He guides history towards the fulfilment of His purposes and He became the God of the forefathers of the nation of Israel, bringing to fruition what He willed to do, choosing for Himself a nation that He could call His own.²⁶ Henry (1975:670) says that the name YHWH is “the name par excellence of the God of Israel”, and that during the journey of Israel, from delivery from bondage to becoming adopted as a nation, guidance into the Promised Land, God has been known by the name YHWH. This means that Israel came to know God by the name YHWH at the point of their delivery from bondage, as attested to by Exodus, chapter 3 when Moses ask who he will say sent him to free Israel. In chapter 6, God reveals to Moses that to the Patriarchs He was not known by His name YHWH, but Israel will now know Him by His name YHWH.²⁷ This tells us that the God that was known to the forefathers of Israel by a different name, is the very God that is taking them out of slavery into the Promised Land.²⁸

Looking at more critical scholarship, Dearman (1992:16) makes reference to Alt who talks about the ancestors of Israel, that even though they were not a monotheistic people, they depended on a single deity, that of their forefathers, to guide them and protect them. This again speaks to the religious stance held by the

²⁶ For the sake of objectivity, it is important to hear the conservative voice.

²⁷ Comfort and Elwell (2001:541-542) speak to that YHWH was known by another name prior to revealing His proper name to Israel. This is an argument for P authorship, where the name of God changes from Elohim to El Shaddai then to YHWH through the generations, but stays consistent as YHWH in non-P authorship from the beginning.

²⁸ This is in support of the P narrative than it is for non-P.

patriarchs of Israel, which has been spoken about above. This comment introduces, or suggests, to us patriarchs that were henotheistic in the beliefs. Albertz (1994:49) posits that tradition indicates that that Exodus group came into initial contact with YHWH through Moses during their liberation. This means that prior to Moses setting this group free, they had no knowledge whatsoever of YHWH. Dearman (1992:16) continues to say that Alt proposed that the “God of the fathers” was first identified with the manifestations of ‘El who was known at Canaanite sanctuaries and then subsequently this ‘El was identified with YHWH the God of the Exodus. This comment by Alt, on the other hand, suggests that Israel adopted a god that was already worshipped in Canaan before they made him their national God. Albertz (1994:52) suggests that it was important for YHWH to be outside of the Egyptian pantheon because that put him in a prime position to break up the political stability which was a resultant of the religious system. He says that as a “stateless” deity of the wild, worship by freedom-loving nomadic tribes, YHWH was the perfect symbol for liberation. The argument put forward here is that the reason YHWH became who and what he became in the lives of the Egyptian slaves was because he came from the outside of the religious system they knew. This religious system had oppressed them, thereby meaning that He represented a potential religion that stood for independence and freedom, but more importantly, a new beginning. Albertz (1994:77) goes on to argue that the god El worshipped in Canaan was worshipped by all, both the peasants and those that lived in the city states. So when the peasants broke away from the city states, they needed a liberation deity, a position El could not have taken because he was limited in terms of function as a symbol of liberation from the rest of the states. He then adds that it was at this point where YHWH, who came with the exodus group, came in as a liberator God. This is to say that YHWH was accepted and substituted El because YHWH was in full support of liberation and did not perform functions for both the captor and the captive, or the oppressor and

the oppressed. So in Canaan too, just like in Egypt, YHWH became a symbol of liberation and of new beginnings.

The question of where YHWH came from still remains unanswered. Where did YHWH come from before he became the God of Israel? Gerstenberger (2002:139) attempts to locate the origins of YHWH by saying that it is generally agreed by scholars that from the textual indications found in Hebrew writing, YHWH worship originated from a southern group, namely Midianites²⁹ or Kenites.³⁰ He says looking for the origins of YHWH worship outside of Israel is more plausible than within. In the same light, Albertz (1994:51-52) argues that when Moses fled Egypt, he went to Midian and married a Midianite woman, whose father was a Midianite Priest. He continues to say that in as much as it is not said in so many words that Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, was a priest of YHWH, but it raises the question when he invites and leads Israel in a sacrificial meal for YHWH on the mountain of God. These arguments affirm, to some degree, what the previous scholar said, that the worship of YHWH could not have found its origins in Israel, but outside. McLaughlin (2000:1402) agrees with Gerstenberger that YHWH is of southern origin among the Midianites. He goes on to say that Moses encountered Him through his father-in-law who was a Midianite priest, then He was brought to Canaan by Moses and his escaped slaves. What we are therefore finding here is that there is a fair amount of consensus between these more critical scholars that Israel is not the originator of YHWH worship, but they adopted Him from the another nation.

Dearman (1992:21-22) says that for the extra-biblical references to the origins of YHWH, the most crucial is from two Egyptian topographical lists, where the place

²⁹ Gerstenberger cites Exodus 18, but maybe one would also cite Exodus 3, where YHWH appears to him while he is in the South.

³⁰ Albertz (1994:51) posits that the Kenites could be regarded as a Midianite sub-group.

name is supposed to be translated “YHWH in Shasu land”. He says that this should mean that He was associated with the Shasu tribes South-East of Palestine, and may even potentially locate Mount Sinai. This though does not bring any contradiction with what the other scholars have put forward, because Dearman (1992:22) does not end there, but he then continues to say that if this translation and location are correct, they are a possible connection between that Shasu and Midianites and Kenites, or even early Israel itself. Albertz (1994:51) agrees with this by stating that the deity which Israel got to know through Moses was from an area that was outside Israel, which gets rid of the tie of the origins of YHWH worship from Israel, rather implying he was already worshipped before Israel encountered him. What we have heard from these scholars is a consensus that YHWH did not originate in Israel, but came from another nation that knew and worshipped him before Israel did, thereby meaning that YHWH worship is older than Israel.

With Israel, YHWH is seen as a national God, but is that all He was, a national God? That cannot be the case because the truth is that if anything is to work, in any society, it needs to work from the grassroots level, and that includes religion. Briefly, it is important that we look at religion from the grassroots level, which is either family or clan. Waltke (1982:927) presents Alt’s view that the deity worshiped by the Patriarchs is named after each of the patriarchs, namely “the Fear of Isaac” (Gen 31:42, 53), or “the Mighty One of Jacob” (Gen 49:42), or “the God of Abraham” (Gen 31:42), which makes them a personal deity to each one of them. This led him to the supposition that each of these was a separate deity and were artificially brought together by giving the Patriarchs a common genealogy. This suggests that each of Israel’s forefathers had a god they worshipped who was concerned for them and welfare of their individual families.

Albertz (2008:147) agrees with this thinking by saying that the Israelite families chose for themselves a god from their region as a personal family, and expected that he protects, helps, supports and bless each of their members, and alongside him, they also worshipped a family goddess. Albertz introduces us to a new dynamic, that no god was worshipped alone, but had to be accompanied by a goddess, which is why YHWH, even as a national God, is believed to have been worshipped along with Asherah.

Albertz and Schmitt (2012:357) say that YHWH in a few instances was predicated by other gods who may have been family gods, and they give examples of יהואב or יהואב, which means YHWH is divine father and יהואח, which mean YHWH is a divine brother. They argue that these names expressed a certain character and identity which expressed his adoption into families. Also, these names showed that YHWH characteristics in sympathy with family gods, and thus expected to act as father or brother by being responsible for the well-being of the family. This comes in to say that YHWH was not only a national God for Israel but was also involved in the daily lives of the families, hence the titles he gained. Gerstenberger (2002:223) argues that it was under the new communities of the exilic and post-exilic periods that YHWH took on very personal features, because here, YHWH was encountered personally. This means that YHWH was not just a deity that the nation knew as God, but He was their God, individually. And this, according to Albertz (2008:147), was late in the time of the kings, and YHWH became the favourite family deity, where previously each person placed their trust in a family god with whom a relationship was formed at birth. From these arguments, one comes to the understanding that there may have been a time when YHWH, the national God was worshipped with other “smaller” family gods, but with time became both the family and national God.

Fretheim (2007:607), who tends to assume a more literary approach, argues that the history of the name YHWH is very complex and that there are no clear historical lines can be drawn to perhaps try and trace it. This means that Fretheim does not really agree with the argument just presented as a consensus. He thinks that it would be very difficult to draw up a history of the name YHWH and its origins or beginnings, or even YHWH Himself. Fretheim (2007:607) continues to argue that efforts to find the name of YHWH a home among the Midianites have proved unsuccessful,³¹ even though some suggestions have been eliminated.³² This then presents us with a challenge of where the name originated from, because if one could perhaps find the origins of the name, then one can find the origins of the Deity, implying that the linguistic origin of the name has an effect on the location of where YHWH was first worshipped. Richards (1985:250) who answers the meaning of the name YHWH by saying that He is the God who is ever-present, a God who is not simply afar off or in the past, or one they will encounter in the future, but He is a God who acts at every point of the history of, and is present with His people. This statement by Richards is theological in its nature, and when one looks at it, it becomes apparent that YHWH is a God that has always been there and active in the life of His chosen people, and we understand those to be the Patriarchs, and maybe even as far back as Enoch. “The name YHWH was invoked already in Genesis 4:26, and by non-Israelites in a setting that has all of mankind in view, may reflect a belief that YHWH is universally worshipped (though other names may be used). YHWH is a God of all people and may be prayed to and worshipped by all” (Fretheim, 2007:607). Fretheim here argues that the name YHWH was used well before the

³¹ Fretheim mainly cites that the name was already invoked as early as Genesis 2:4. This is mainly a non-P argument, or what was previously called J.

³² He cites Exodus 3:1; 18:10-12.

time of Moses, by a non-Israelite, therefore, He was a God of all people, and not a specific people.³³

From the *Heilsgeschichte* (Salvation History) we see and follow from the beginning of mankind that it brings us to the point where the God of creation reveals Himself to the Patriarchs as Elohim and to Moses as YHWH, the ever present God. What we do see is that YHWH chose for Himself a Patriarch in Abram from which He would form a nation for Himself. Abram could have, and probably did, come from a polytheistic nation, with YHWH as one of the deities they worshipped, and YHWH then chose him to be the father of a nation that will move from polytheism to henotheism and eventually monotheism, and how long this process took, we cannot know with any level of certainty whatsoever. He is the same God, revealing Himself by two names that speak to His function in the lives of those He reveals Himself to, first as a God of promise, then as a God of fulfilled promise. At the same time, we cannot ignore what we hear scholars say, that Israel may have encountered YHWH for the first time through Moses who encountered Him through the Midianite group he lived among. There is more evidence for the latter than there is for the former, and this evidence cannot be merely ignored.

To try and sum up the chapter, we can say that a lot has been said, and a lot has been uncovered in the chapter. For starters, we do realize that the origins of the nation of Israel are not as clear as one may assume them to be, because as we saw some scholars do not believe that the Patriarchs existed. We have a group of scholars who subscribe to the thinking that Israelites were actually Canaanites who after moving to a hill country formed their own identity, and Israel was born. This, therefore, speaks to the credibility of the exodus event narrative, because if Israel

³³ Some may even argue that this is further evidence that YHWH was worship before Israel began to worship Him, and maybe even worshipped as a deity among many.

did not leave Egypt, but simply moved away from the city to start their own nation, then the story is fictional. What scholars say in this regard is that the numbers as recorded in Scripture cannot be accurate, but they do say that there should be a historical kernel to the story, and a small group did leave Egypt. This small group came to Canaan and encountered those who had migrated to the hill country with a moving story of their liberation by God, YHWH, who had set them free, then this story became a story for the larger group. This leads to the next argument, that of religion.

The smaller group which came into Canaan with their liberator God whose name was YHWH, but we are not sure where and when YHWH began being worshipped, and by whom. Many of the arguments in this chapter point towards Midian, that YHWH was a Midianite deity whom the smaller group adopted and began to worship, and eventually introduced to the larger group they came into contact with in Canaan. This God is claimed to have also given this group “a set of rules” to live by in the form of a Decalogue, and other laws, but also the dating and when exactly these became relevant comes into question, and we will look at this in the next chapter.

Chapter 3

The Decalogue

3.1 Historical context(s) of the Decalogue

If we are to attempt to understand the Decalogue and what it meant to its original audience, that is its first recipients, we first have to look at the nation to which it was given. It is in this section of the dissertation, that we will attempt to begin zoning in on the crux of the matter, that is, the first four of the commandments. Here the attempt will be to look at where Israel came from, where they were and where they were going. This coupled with an attempt to find the history of the giving of the Decalogue will help give a better picture of the reason behind the giving of the Decalogue to the nation of Israel.³⁴ The worst mistake we can make in this dissertation is to be naïve and assume that Israel was a nation that only knew YHWH and no other deity. This stems from the fact that the first instructions the nation receives are in respect to their religion and their relationship with God. The second point is the current author hold to that religion and Israel's relationship with YHWH is pivotal for the whole of the Decalogue, hence we start with religion.

Admittedly, to be able to understand the religion of ancient Israel you do not need to necessarily begin from scripture, but it is important that one understands what is recorded in the Hebrew Bible. The reason this might be key is that biblical scholars base their works on what is found in the Hebrew Bible, as they compare

³⁴ Some of the sources used in this section will be old and maybe outdated, but the reason we use these scholars is so that we perhaps appreciate the progress of scholarship in regards the Decalogue and what surrounds it. Some of these arguments will be irrelevant, but they reflect an era from which some of today's thinking finds its roots.

what is recorded in both secular history and the supposed history recorded in the Bible. The aim of this section will be to look at the religion and not so much on the theology of it all, but to get to the one, you need to go through the other. The starting point will be the first patriarch³⁵ of the nation Israel, who came from among a people who had their own set of faith and beliefs. Vriezen (1967:31) says “It has become increasingly clear that, discounting the religion of the nomads from among whom the progenitors of Israel had come, all the religions with which Israel had to do while she was developing into a national community were religions of husbandry, of the soil”. This means that the Patriarchs, or at least the first one, knew another religion and faith besides God. What we are seeing here is that Israel, or her forefathers at least, did some sort of religious rite for them to be able to keep animals, and successfully so. This could have been the observance of, prayers to, or even sacrifices to a god of husbandry. Vriezen (1967:31) continues to say that it is important that we keep sight of these, because previous generations have failed to realize this aspect of Israel’s religious consciousness. We do not want to be ignorant to this fact, and we do not want to be naïve and think religion was first established with the covenant between God and Abram. The point made here is a valid one, faith was not new to Abram when he had an encounter with God, religion already existed, and it was just in reverence to other god(s), not YHWH. Pfeiffer (1961:17) says that the Hebrews were exposed to totemism, which is the belief in ritual animals or plants. He says the adduced evidence for Hebrew totemism consists of tribe names, clans, individuals, and towns and the worship of the brazen serpent. This carries truth to some degree, that the Hebrews knew extra religions and gods besides the true God. Why else

³⁵ Even though it is very hard to find the Patriarchs and follow from where they came, the Hebrew Scriptures mention them so we will acknowledge that.

would they deflect to the golden calf in the wilderness? Something was embedded in them, and it was probably something beyond Egypt.

We now move to Egypt, where the nation apparently spends over four hundred years of their lives.³⁶ Because if this is the case, it is inevitable that Israel would have been influenced by the Egyptian religion, therefore it is important we consider this avenue.³⁷ Stein (2011:195-196) in his article talks about how Israel kept the ideas of Jacob and the relationship with God. He says they understood Him as their God even though their folklore accepted inferior gods. So this tells us that Israel still knew the God who had spoken to their forefathers. Vriezen (1967:45) says there are a few features to the Egyptian religion, such as the pantheon, which had a single head and the belief in a dying and rising god. He continues to say that one thinks of the care bestowed on the dead, with the aim of ensuring the continuance of life in the hereafter. He goes on to speak about graves of kings, the pyramids, inscriptions of the dead and wall paintings. We see here that in Egyptian religion, the dead were held in high regard, and chances are this aspect was passed on to the nation of Israel. Vriezen (1967:45) continues to say that other important aspects of Egyptian religion were the divinity of the pharaoh and the strong emphasis on animal worship, together with the animal form taken by many gods. This answers the question we posed above, as to why Israel defected to a golden calf in the wilderness, they were taught by Egyptian religion that a deity must take a certain form, and this was the shape of an animal. Stein (2011:196) continues to say that by the time Israel had to leave Egypt, the Israelites ask Moses what God's name was, probably because they had come to believe that the God of their forefathers was inferior compared to the deities of their oppression. He even says that they might have had idols in their

³⁶ Even though this cannot be proven with utmost certainty, conservative scholarship still hold to it and it is part of biblical chronology as the record of the history of Israel.

³⁷ This is according to Bible chronology and biblical theology.

homes. This tells us that Israel walked out of Egypt with religious concepts and convictions that God had to deal with before they arrived in the Promised Land, and we see this aspect addressed in the Decalogue with the second commandment.

We now jump ahead to look at what awaited Israel in Canaan when they conquered and dwelt in it.³⁸ We realize also that the land of Canaan had its own religiosity, and its own convictions, some of which were deep-seated and rooted, and had, to some degree, become the culture of the people. Pfeiffer (1961:65) says that it was inevitable that the Israelite religion would go through change after their settlement in Canaan, and that this would not have been so if the Israelite religion claimed exclusivity. This means that had Israel come into Canaan saying that their religion was the only one, the change would have been avoided, and Israel would have been able to stand strong in their faith. But as Pfeiffer (1961:65) continues to say, the Israel religion was merely nationalistic and not exclusive or universal. Simply put, we can understand this by saying that Israel was saying to the Canaanites that they should keep their religion(s), and we will keep theirs. It became apparent that the influence of the external religions became too strong for the nation that they ended up giving in. Ringgren (1976:131) tells us that the most prominent Canaanite god was Baal, which means “lord” or “master” in the Hebrew. This we can agree with, because throughout the Old Testament we hear a lot of mention of Baal, especially it seems to have been prominent in the time of Prophet Elijah. We see the testimony of Canaanite religious influence on Israel as a nation. Pfeiffer (1961:67) says the problem lied in the fact that Jehovah was a national Deity, so the nation of Israel called upon Him during times of war, while Baal worship was more concerned with their daily lives, providing fruitfulness in the fields. Again, the nation of God was susceptible to being influenced by the Canaanites added to what they had seen and

³⁸ This is also according to biblical theology and Bible chronology.

learnt in Egypt about the function of gods. And because they had not seen God as a God of produce, but one of war, they turned to a foreign god for the other, very important aspect of their lives.

Having looked at all the stages that Israel went through, and all the potential influences, one sees that there was a lot to take in and a lot to deal with. This, therefore, necessitated that YHWH gives “guidelines”, through His servant Moses whom God had used to free Israel, or a smaller sect of the larger group. These were there to help Israel live and worship YHWH in a better way in the land which He had promised to the Patriarchs and had given to their offspring. The Decalogue became central in the life and worship of Israel, so it is key that we explore how it came about.³⁹

On the more critical side of the history of the Decalogue, we find scholars like Marshall (2003:172) who expresses a doubt in the Decalogue being authored by Moses based on a historical-critical analysis of the text.⁴⁰ He says from a literary point of view, the Exodus version of the Decalogue was introduced into an earlier narrative, even though the Decalogue itself has nothing to oppose Mosaic authorship. In the same light, Dozeman (2009:469) argues that the Exodus Decalogue as it stands bears indications of composition, where individual laws appear to have undergone expansion, especially the one on the Sabbath. This means that scholarship thinks that the Decalogue may have been edited, or even composed, to fit the Exodus narrative at a later stage in Israelite history. As Collins (1992:383) puts it, the development process of the Decalogue was related to the

³⁹ Up to this point, we have been looking at conservative scholarship in regards to the history of the Decalogue. From this point on we will look at some critical thinking.

⁴⁰ Collins (1992:383) points out this by saying that scholarship does not even prescribe it to the Mosaic era.

institutional life of the nation, their identity, social structures, teachings and worship. This means the development was fashioned in a way that suited what Israel had become as a nation. The Exodus Decalogue, according to Miller (2009:519), seems to be the antecedent to Deuteronomy version, even though it is difficult to tell if the current Exodus version as it stands reflects a reworking by the Priestly stratum, or it represents what the Priestly writers drew from to elaborate the place of Sabbath in creation. This then means that the Exodus Decalogue, according to this statement at least, may be the older of the two, meaning that the redactor of the Deuteronomy passage might have drawn from here too.⁴¹

Collins (1992:384) thinks that the Decalogue's social ethic is under the influence of eighth-century prophets and the First Commandment was unthinkable before Prophet Hosea, an idea we will explore later. He continues to present to us the argument of Mowinckel who said that even though the version may be late, but the origins are ancient and are to be associated with Israelite worship. This leaves us with an understanding that the Decalogue was composed later in the history of Israel, but had originated much earlier in the life of the nation and its ideas and concepts much older. We will explore this and other suggestions later in the chapter.

There is yet another suggestion of other forms from which the Decalogue came from, with the most prominent being the Hittite Suzerain-Vassal treaty. This kind of treaty form is defined by that a greater power, in this case, God, made an agreement with a lesser person, in this case, Israel. Pfeiffer (1975:810) tells us that in the suzerainty treaty, the greater claims authority over the lesser, and in this case Yahweh declares His right to absolute loyalty from all earthly rulers and people. This implies that the rule of Yahweh was not just limited to Israel, but it extended to all

⁴¹ Dozeman (2009:470-471) mentions this point or allusion, but also presents scholars who present both supporting and counter arguments.

peoples. Marshall (2003:173) tells us that this form of treaty was first used in the Late Bronze Age by the Hittites. This means that the Decalogue took a form that the Israelites potentially already knew and understood. Or it could mean that this form was one that better suited what the redactor wanted to communicate to the nation of Israel. Collins (1992:384) compares the suzerainty treaty to the Decalogue and finds that they bear similarities. The preamble, the prologue, the covenant stipulations, provisions for the preservation and reading of the treaty and we see the blessing and curses that go with the treaties.⁴² The Decalogue does seem to follow the pattern seen in this form of a treaty, which means the composers used the structure and form of a treaty that was already known and understood by the people, making the Decalogue easier to understand for the people. Mackay (2001:340) says in using this covenant model to present His relationship to His people, the Lord drew on patterns prevalent in their days for treaties between kings and their subjects. This made the reception of the Decalogue easier to the people as they were already familiar with what it meant. Marshall (2003:174) adds that certain parts of the suzerain-vassal treaty do not feature in the Decalogue itself, but are described in other parts of the Old Testament, where keeping the covenant is subject. This may mean that the suzerainty treaty form and its specifications are spread out in the Old Testament because this singular event affected the nation Israel and her neighbours throughout the generations. But at the same time, it could mean that as the text grew, certain parts that belong with the Decalogue were recorded and elaborated on at a later stage.

Miller (2009:4) highlights the tension in the Decalogue that exists between its simplicity and complexity. He says the Commandments may be short and simple, easy to memorize, but at the same time are complex in that they affect all of life. The

⁴² Marshall (2003:173) agrees with Collins.

issue of complexity is one of the main tensions because the Decalogue is not just a list of regulations, but it supersedes that and speaks to relationship. It seems that some scholars do not envision how such regulations could belong to the time of ancient Israel, the question is how can they not? Relationships, both vertical and horizontal, mattered all through the ages. Childs (1974:393) talks about the dating of the Decalogue, that it has been a frustration, something we will explore later. He says that this meant working from a prior concept of Israel's religious development, such as the assumption that an ethical consciousness did not exist before the prophets. But more recently, he says, it has stemmed from extra-biblical evidence or form-critical observations. According to Child's dating, the implication may be that the "second tablet" belongs to a later period, since this is the tablet that deals with the ethics section of the Decalogue. Childs (1974:391) also then puts it to us that there have been suggestions by scholars that the Decalogue as it stands today is a result of historical development, where Commandments were either contracted or expanded.⁴³ Collins (1992:383) is of the opinion that this complex process of development was a process related to the institutional life of Israel, her identity, social structures, teachings and worship. It can be seen here that the Decalogue did not just become what it is, it took a while for it to get to this stage. Marshall (2003:172) argues that source and redaction critics have argued on the placing of the Decalogue,⁴⁴ that it disrupts the flow of the text between Exodus 19 and 20:18, where Moses is to set boundaries around the mountain. This we can maybe attribute to redactors who worked on the text through the ages.

Perhaps also something that came about because of the growing of the text, was the different ways in which the Decalogue is divided. This will help in the next

⁴³ On the question of expansion, Collins (1992:383) attributes this to the oral tradition that may have reflected on, motivated and explained some of the Commandments.

⁴⁴ Collins (1992:384) also argues this point on the placing of the Decalogue.

section when we begin engaging with the text. Mackay (2001:341) tells us that there are different traditions on how the Decalogue is divided. He says Jewish tradition takes verse 2 as a commandment and verses 3-6 as the second commandment, while others take verses 2-6 as a single commandment, then see verse 17 as two commandments. He then says the reformed⁴⁵ have found verse 2 as an introduction to the commandments, verse 3 the first commandment and verse 17 as one commandment. This means that in the Jewish tradition the command on coveting is broken into two, with coveting your neighbour's house as a command and coveting your neighbour's wife, servants, and livestock a separate command. Within the reformed tradition, everything that has to do with coveting is seen as a single command. Also arguing for the division, Miller (2009:518) elaborates on the reasoning behind the division. He says that with the first two Commandments about idols, there is the plural "them" which refers us back to the first Commandment, and therefore making them a single Command. With the Commandment on coveting, Miller says the conjunction "and" or "neither" that is used to separate the Commandments, is used here, thus giving the reason to separate the Command into two. Dozeman (2009:478) adds this on the divisions of the commandments, that the weakness in the division of the laws is the fact the first command on exclusive worship and the one on idols are not separated by a *soph pasuq* which is used to mark the end of a verse in the Hebrew Bible. Despite the redaction that may have happened and altered the Decalogue, or even the confusion in the numbering of the Decalogue, there are still scholars such as Miller (2009:5-6) who hold to that the Decalogue encompasses the whole Torah, as the laws found in the Torah are an elaboration of what the Ten Commandments in a compressed form. This means that the whole of the Torah is an expansion of the Decalogue, and perhaps this expansion

⁴⁵ By reformed, reference is being made to the Christian church as we know it today.

of the Torah by the rest of the Hebrew Scripture is a reflection on the history of the development of the Decalogue and Ancient Israel law.

Miller (2009:518) argues that the differences we see in the sources suggests freedom and variability in the history of the formation of Decalogue. This means that a number of hands and influences may have been involved in the shaping and formation of the Decalogue as we know it today, but this has not altered or changed what the Decalogue means. Collins (1992:384-385) argues:

While these various studies illustrate the complexity of the issues involved in any attempt to understand how the present Decalogue came into being, they also point to the central position of the Ten Commandments within the biblical tradition. They are presented as the direct address of God, identified as a complete entity, given a special name, are reflected in the Prophets (Hosea 4:1; Jeremiah 7:9) and the Psalms (Psalms 50; 81) and provide a framework for the revision of law found in Deuteronomy 12-26. This attests to their influence upon Israel's faith and ethos.

Collins is here highlighting the centrality and importance of the Decalogue to the nation Israel, where it influenced the way they lived and the way they worshipped through the ages. Miller (2009:6) therefore suggests that if we are to fully understand and act on the instruction of the Commandments, we should understand its trajectory, that is, that they started with Israel as a nation and continue through Scripture, to the church's teaching down to the present. The Commandments given to Israel in ancient times have been carried out through the history of Israel, and they were inherited by the church, and this is every Commandment recorded. If, as Collins says, the Commandments have made it to the present, then they should be seen, understood, revered and have the same effect today as they did when they were received then by their original audience Israel. To achieve this, we must understand what they meant to Israel and therefore what they should mean today.

3.2 Engaging with the text

There is a lot that can be said about the Decalogue and particularly its history as a writing. We now come to a point where we look at the Decalogue itself, that is, Exodus 20:1-17. These verses contain the Ten Commandments or the Decalogue. This dissertation though will only look at the first four of the ten, that is, verses 2-11 which deal with the relationship between God and man. Gerstenberger (2002:263) argues, rightly so, that the dominant features of the first half are the exclusivity command and the prohibition against the depiction of God. This means that these two arguments represent a large amount of this chapter. Another aspect we need to note is that this dissertation is based on the Exodus version of the Decalogue, but will not disregard the Deuteronomy version, which will be touched on at times, where relevant. Also, we need to note that a lot of the arguments that will be brought forward here are in line with, and follow the chronology of the Bible and how it presents Israelite history. Some of the debates around the Decalogue are its authorship, and its dating, but that has been covered already, so the purpose of this chapter is to engage with the text itself, to see what the Decalogue meant to national Israel, as we see in the scriptures. Here an attempt will be made to create the foundation for the bridge between the then and now, or rather create a basis for the introduction of the contemporary relevance of the Decalogue. In engaging with the text, the attempt will be to look at each of the Commandments and engage with each one of them, so as to find the relevance for each one of them before we can find their collective relevance. There is another aspect that we need to keep in mind as we go through the Decalogue, and that is the aspect of the numbering of the Decalogue. We have seen in the previous chapter that different traditions group the Decalogue in different ways and this affects the way in which they are understood in the different traditions.

3.2.1 Text

3.2.1.1 Exodus 20:2-11 (English)

- 2. I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.**
- 3. "You shall have no other gods before me.**
- 4. "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.**
- 5. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me,**
- 6. but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.**
- 7. "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.**
- 8. "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.**
- 9. Six days you shall labour, and do all your work,**
- 10. but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates.**
- 11. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.**

3.2.1.2 Exodus 20:1-11 (Hebrew)

1 וידבר אלהים את כל הדברים האלה לאמר:

2 אנכי יהוה אלהיך אשר הוצאתיך מארץ מצרים מבית עבדים:

3 לא יהיה-לך אלהים אחרים על-פני:

4 לא תעשה-לך פסל וכלתמונה אשר בשמים ממעל ואשר בארץ מתחת ואשר במים מתחת לארץ:

5 לא-תשתחוה להם ולא תעבדם כי אנכי יהוה אלהיך אל קנא פקד עון אבת על-בנים על-שלשים ועל-רבעים לשנאי:

6 ועשה חסד לאלפים לאהבי ולשמרי מצותי:

7 לא תשא את-שם-יהוה אלהיך לשוא כי לא ינקה יהוה את אשר-ישא את-שמו לשוא:

8 זכור את-יום השבת לקדשו:

9 ששת ימים תעבד ועשית כל-מלאכתך:

10 ויום השביעי שבת ליהוה אלהיך לא-תעשה כל-מלאכה אתה ובנד-זובתך עבדך ואמתך ובהמתך וגרך אשר בשעריך:

11 כי ששת-ימים עשה יהוה את-השמים ואת-הארץ ואת-כל-אשר-בם וינח ביום השביעי על-כן ברך יהוה את-יום השבת ויקדשהו:

3.2.2 Prologue

Verse 2: *I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.*

2 אנכי יהוה אלהיך אשר הוצאתיך מארץ מצרים מבית עבדים:

MacKay (2001:341) says that the Jewish tradition considers the prologue to the Commandments as the first one of the Ten Commandments, where all other traditions do not. MacKay (2001:342) then continues to argue that the history of the world⁴⁶ is encapsulated in the prologue to the Decalogue, and it is God's sovereign

⁴⁶ This reference to the "world" may be understood to be the Israel as a nation, that is, their world as a nation.

claim over Israel. This means that God can make a claim over Israel because He has consistently been with her through her history and has been her God. And perhaps in addition to that, one may say that Israel and her religion did have an impact, somewhat, on their neighbours, as did the religions of their neighbours. MacKay (2001:342) continues to say that God had graciously given His covenant promise to Israel's forefathers, but now He has beyond that and set Israel free from slavery in Egypt. God has shown up for Israel, and "with an outstretched arm" (Exodus 6:6) set them free, and therefore He is now laying claim over them. Dozeman (2009:479) begins the section on the prologue by saying that the opening words are a self-introductory form that was common in the Ancient Near East. He says the self-introductory shows that the entire Decalogue is a revelation of the Divine Name YHWH. This means that the entire Decalogue finds its base in the prologue, so that, whatever follows supports and promotes the initial assertion. Also in the prologue when YHWH introduces Himself, the phrase יהוה אלהים is used, showing that the God who is speaking here is not just any, but rather the God of the salvation of Israel. Miller (2009:519) also speaks on the point of basis, highlighting that the reason the Jewish tradition puts an emphasis on the prologue is because the first word is foundational in the most literal sense. He says the first word grounds the commandments that follow, meaning that, as we have said, the following words build upon the first words. This tells us that the even though the prologue may not have a commandment in it, it is still very important to the understanding of the Decalogue.

Abrami (2010:33) thinks that these words coming from the Lord are an affirmative declaration of the dominion of the Almighty over the universe and His authority as the Lawgiver. This means that God uses these words to lay claim to Israel, citing all that He has done for them as the Lord God. Childs (1974:401) argues that the prologue to the Ten Commandments gives a summary of the chapters that

have been covered, where God reveals Himself and then intervenes on behalf of Israel to free her from Egypt. He continues to say that Israel, in knowing God's name, would come to understand the power of His redemption and the purposes He has for His people. Again, this confirms that the prologue plays a bigger role in the purpose and meaning of the Decalogue as a whole. The prologue acts as a bridge between what has been covered and what is to come.

3.2.3 *First Commandment: You shall have no other gods before me.*

לֹא יִהְיֶה לְךָ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים עִלְּפָנַי:

As we have seen in the previous chapter and have alluded to above, this commandment is seen as part of the second commandment in the Jewish tradition. We will touch on the reasoning in the next commandment. “The demand of the Hebrew canon to the members of the community not to worship other gods is simply an appeal to remain true to their own tradition and identity” (Gerstenberger, 2002:266). This first commandment talks about Israel prioritizing God, where she is called have no other deities other than the God who brought them out of the house of slavery. The word in the Hebrew that is used here is the word אֱלֹהִים which is a general term used for a deity. Brown, Driver, and Briggs (1906:43) argue that this word could mean gods, other gods, deity of some sort, rulers, judges, either as divine representations at sacred places or as reflecting divine majesty and power. It could also mean superhuman beings including gods and angels. Clines (2009:19) adds that this Hebrew word could also mean images of other gods. Looking at these different possible meanings, we can understand that God is discarding allegiance to anything or anyone who may take away from Him and who He is as the God of Israel.

Snyder and Ramirez (2010:99) in their article on the Ten Commandments say that this commandment is understood by some as an insistence on monotheism. This might be a valid observation, but still, there is a henotheistic aspect to the

command, as God here is saying that He is the only one to be worshipped by Israel, regardless of the existence of other gods. Collins (1992:385) thinks that this commandment eliminates the allegiance to other deities by Israel, therefore banning any worship of foreign gods. This then introduces a new dynamic to our thinking, that in the midst of the existence of other gods that were worshipped in Egypt, where they are coming from, gods worshipped in Canaan, where they are going, they should worship YHWH alone. Dozeman (2009:480) on the other hand does not beat around the bush but starts off his commentary on verse 3 by saying that the worldview of this commandment is not at all monotheistic, but rather henotheistic. Our understanding of henotheism is that one believes in and worships a single deity while accepting the existence of other deities that could be worshipped. Dozeman (2009:480) continues to say that this commandment does not presuppose or advocate the belief that YHWH is the only God, but rather presupposes that the world is populated by other gods, hence it demands monolatry. Thus, there is an acknowledgement here that other gods do exist, but in their existence, the God who set Israel free from bondage is the only one that the nation must worship.

Monolatry according to Wilson (2009:138) can be defined as the worship of a single deity without denying the existence of other deities.⁴⁷ In this case, one can say that Israel is being instructed that in the midst of the recognition of many gods, but they should be consistent in the worship of YHWH. Wilson (2009:138) continues to say that monolatry is usually seen as a midway point between polytheism and monotheism. He says that in ancient Israel, YHWH was seen as the chief God, while the existence of other gods is not denied, and only in the postexilic period did monolatry graduate to monotheism. This argument presents a possible suggestion

⁴⁷ According to the definitions above, monolatry and henotheism are two words communicating the same concept or idea. From this point on these words may be used interchangeably.

that Israel was previously polytheistic, then they moved on to monolatry and finally monotheism.

When one treats the Hebrew text as a history book, which it is not, as we saw in chapters one and two, we can see that Israel did not just emerge from nowhere. We see that they grew out of a nation that had a set of beliefs, they sojourned among a nation, Canaan, that had its own set of beliefs, and they went into Egypt which is a nation that also had its own set of beliefs. This was a nation that went through a lot and experienced a lot for them to be where they find themselves when this command is given.⁴⁸ It is therefore not a stretch to say that Israel was a polytheistic nation to some degree, and at some point of their journey to their formation as a nation, they may have known about the God who had made a promise to their forefathers, but they also knew and maybe even believed in the gods of the surrounding nations, such as the Pharaoh of Egypt, being a deity. Second is the question of whether this Commandment promotes monotheism, I would have to say it does not. The reason for this is that the commandment clearly rejects the worship of other gods, but it acknowledges the existence of these deities. If the command was about monotheism, then one can argue that it would read something like this; “*There is no other God besides me*”. The Commandment can be seen as a “bridge” from polytheism, through monolatry, towards monotheism.

Marshall (2003:175) brings to our attention that Israel’s absolute loyalty to God is in response to God’s election of Israel, which means that Israel could only repay God’s election by being loyal and faithful to Him as their God. MacKay (2001:342-343) argues that the first commandment is in line with the prohibition of idol worship, as the phrase “other gods” in the rest of the Old Testament is in reference to idols of

⁴⁸ We are here merely following the biblical chronology, but not disregarding other surrounding arguments.

wood or stone, not divine beings. What we see here is that in as much as this commandment is not specific on the kind or form of gods it is referring to, we can, knowing what follows, deduce it means idols. Dozeman (2009:480) has suggested that the Hebrew syntax in this commandment has prompted interpreters to conclude that this verse 3 is not a command in itself, but it is an introduction to the commandment against images. He says the use of the phrase “other gods” confirms the broad perspective of the law in that it usually refers to rival deities. This means that when God gave the command to Moses, He was preparing the nation for what was to follow, that is, the second commandment.

Miller (2009:520) thinks that the phrase “before me” in the Hebrew is ambiguous in that it may have multiple meanings. He says it may mean “in front of me” or “before me” meaning that no deity can be given priority of worship besides YHWH. Or it could mean “in addition to me”, meaning YHWH needs no assistance, or it could mean “in preference to me”, meaning YHWH is the only one to be worshipped. He then ends by saying it could also mean “over against me”, which suggests a hostile encounter or conflict with YHWH. MacKay (2001:343) also speaks on the meaning of the phrase “before me”, and he says it means “in my presence”, that is, no other gods can be brought into the presence of YHWH. In the Hebrew, the combination *על-פני* means in the presence of, or in the face of (Brown et al, 1906:816), meaning YHWH was banning any form of idol from being brought into His presence, or the sanctuary in which He dwelt. Koehler and Baumgartner (1998:704) add an interesting idea to this, where they say it means “in defiance of me”. This adds a new dynamic to the meaning of the phrase, because it means that Israel would be well aware of what they were doing, but do it anyway.

Brueggemann (1994:841) says that the phrase “before me” may also be read before my face, meaning sanctuary because that is what it means in reference to

God. One could, therefore, argue that the narrative about Dagon in 1 Samuel 5 is an example of what is meant here, that no other god must stand in the presence of YHWH, even though the Ark of the Covenant had been placed Dagon's temple, still he could not stand. MacKay (2001:343) continues to argue that the exclusive claims of this commandment were unparalleled in ancient religions, but were paralleled in politics. The God of Israel wanted absolute allegiance from His nation and did not want to compete with any other god for the attention of His people. Childs (1974:403) thinks that as this commandment is being interpreted, it is important to also look at what it is not saying, and that is the suggestion that YHWH alone exists, which is something that is not contained in this commandment. He says that what is contained in the first commandment is a prescription of God's relationship with His people, categorically getting rid of other gods as far as Israel is concerned.

The question that should be asked at this juncture is the question of whether there could be any evidence⁴⁹ for the worship of other gods by the ancestors of Israel, that is, the Patriarchs.⁵⁰ Waltke (1982:926) says that Old Testament scholarship agrees that there is a vast gap between the time of the patriarchs and the time of the recording of the material, and in this time, the material was transmitted orally and may have transformed to meet the needs of the time. He says that the claim by the P and non-P, specifically E material, that YHWH is the same as the God of the patriarchs betrays the gap between the god of the fathers and YHWH. This line of argument means that there is a distinction between YHWH, the God that set Israel free from slavery, and the deity that was worshipped by the patriarchs. This can be especially true if one views YHWH as a different deity to the one worshipped by the patriarchs. Garber (1982:797) argues that one of the contentions is that much

⁴⁹ By evidence here we mean a recording in the Hebrew Bible of such a case.

⁵⁰ The reason for this question is to do justice to biblical chronology, and perhaps to find the worship of other gods that is engrained in the lives of Israel from their forefathers.

of the material in the patriarchal narrative is secondary. He then says that the conclusion, therefore, from this presupposition is that each patriarch worshipped distinct numina, which were later identified with YHWH. This point raised here is that the patriarchs have different, independent gods that were later “made” into a single deity, which was YHWH.

Waltke (1982:926-927) cites Alt’s argument who agrees with what Garber says, that there are two epithets for the gods of the patriarchs. He says the first is characterized by an “*el*” element followed by a substantival form like “*Elyon*”. Alt saw the first as “god” and the second as a proper name and thought that these were local deities worshipped in Palestinian shrines. Waltke continues to say that the second group Alt sees is identified by the name of the patriarch, that is, “the Fear of Isaac”, “the Mighty one of Jacob”, “the God of Abraham”. The conclusion to this is that these deities were separate but artificially linked into a single genealogy as the history of Israel developed, and this was done at the same time as they were associated to YHWH. Alt here sees YHWH, the God who frees Israel, separate from the deities that were worshipped by the patriarchs, therefore meaning that there is an inconsistency in the recording of Scripture. This then leads one to ask the question whether these “separate deities” were not YHWH showing himself in different forms and in different situations to the patriarchs as he guided them towards the fulfilment of covenant he held with each of them (Gen 12:1-3; 26:1-5; 28:13-15), as well as all of them collectively.⁵¹

Anderson (1994:273) says that after God revealed His name to Moses,⁵² the name “*EI*” began to function as a noun meaning “a/the god” instead of a title for a

⁵¹ The promise of land and countless offspring is constant with all three of the patriarchs, therefore we can regard this as a collective promise.

⁵² One has to assume that this is in reference to the Exodus 3 encounter.

deity, and this name revelation was a turning point for Israel religion. He continues to say that most scholars would contend that the “El” that is referred to in the patriarchal narratives is, in fact, the Canaanite El, the head of the Canaanite pantheon. This suggests that the God whom the patriarchs worshipped was not the same God that made a covenant with Israel at Sinai, YHWH, the God of Sinai was a different one. The question that comes to the forefront at this point is where the promise to Abraham came from, and why it was fulfilled by a deity that did not promise it. Albertz (2008:147) argues that “El” was a family god, just like Baal, and it was not until the time of the monarchy that YHWH became the favourite family god. This argument, therefore, introduces a new line of argument on who El and YHWH were, as here they are both presented as family gods, with YHWH taking prominence as a family god, which means He was not a national God. But Albertz (2008:146) begins by telling us that YHWH was originally a mountain god of the Midianites, whose attributes were that of a weather god, and Moses met YHWH through his father-in-law who was a Midianite priest. He then supports this argument by saying the proof is in the Red Sea crossing and Sinai theophany. These were events that involved some form of altering of nature, and YHWH appearing to Israel on a mountain with clouds forming over that mountain and a lot of the time, even throughout the history of Israel, YHWH is seen to be found in this way. This then does give one food for thought, but at the same time, one has to question whether this line of argument actually does have some kind of historical kernel to it, and if so, how accurate it is.

3.2.4 *Second commandment: You shall not make for yourself any images*

4 לא תעשה-לך פסל וכל-תמונה אשר בשמים ממעל ואשר בארץ מתחת ואשר במים מתחת לארץ:

This is the second of the laws that God gives to Moses while he is up on the mountain, and it is divided into three. This commandment, as we have seen, is

thought to be a part of the first commandment and that the first commandment is actually in reference to the second commandment. The first part of this commandment is where Israel is warned against having images, in the second part they are told not to bow down to them and the third part they are warned about YHWH's jealousy. We shall here look at each of these parts and what they mean.

Marshall (2003:175) argues that this commandment is a prohibition of the use of images in worship. The operative words in this statement are "images" and "worship", and they form the crux of the first two parts of the commandment, and when put together, they summarize the commandment. Further, Marshall (2003:175) says that this prohibition serves two purposes, first, it sets Israel apart and second idols are never just a representation. For the first aspect, Marshall thinks it sets Israel apart in that their neighbours in the Ancient Near East (ANE) used idols in their religious practices. But since these were representations of the deity, it was impossible for Israel to know what God looks like, therefore could not make a representation of someone they have never seen. Further, than that, Marshall says idols are static, none responsive and none feeling, unlike the God they would be representing. If one follows this reasoning, it makes sense because if Israel was to a chosen nation, a peculiar people, then they were not supposed to be found doing what everyone else was doing. Second, one cannot make an object to represent something they have never seen, because it is going to be inaccurate.

Snyder and Ramirez (2010:100) argue that something from God's created order cannot be used as an accurate representation of its creator. This statement has more value when one understands *פסל*,⁵³ and what it means. Brown, Driver, and Briggs (1906:820) define it as an image or idol which is made in the likeness of a

⁵³ Because of the different meanings ascribed to this word, image and idol will be used interchangeably during the dissertation.

man or an animal. Koehler and Baumgartner (1998:770) define this as an idol or image of a god that is shaped from clay, cut from stone, carved from wood or molten from metal. Clines (2009:361) defines it as a deity made of wood. Laughlin (2008:8) defines the word saying it means carved out, probably in reference to wood, stone or metal and he says that this word occurs over thirty times in the Old Testament. This number of occurrences is a sign of how much the authors of the Old Testament addressed the issue of idols, bearing in mind that this is not the only word used for images in the Old Testament. Three of the eight words cited by Laughlin (2008:8-9) to mean images appear a combined total of over sixty-five times, and this is excluding “*pesel*”. The issue of images and idols was prominent in the Old Testament and was addressed all the way through. Reed (1952:471) writes on graven images, saying that these were widely used in the ANE to represent the various deities. Marshall (2003:176) argues that the second purpose of the commandment is that images were never just visual representations in the ANE, but become objects of true veneration, that are bathed, clothed and sometimes fed as though they were the god and not a representation. So the prohibition, Marshall continues, was to prevent objects becoming hallowed as holy. God was not about to allow Israel to bring in anything that might threaten His authority and take from Him the allegiance He should receive from His people.

Childs (1974:404) says that it is a generally agreed upon that the prohibition of the making and use of idols refers to images made of wood or stone and later included ones made of metal.⁵⁴ Idol worship had been the life of the Ancient Near East for generations when this commandment was given, so Israel was being warned and prohibited from joining this form of worship. To this old understanding of an idol, MacKay (2001:344) adds that the idol made of wood or stone could be

⁵⁴ Collins (1992:385) also makes this argument.

overlaid with gold or silver or cast in a mould which is meant to represent the deity or a part of the god or goddess. So from all this, we get that the prohibition was against the worship of any and every form of idol. Dozeman (2009:482) adds to this that there is an expansive description of what is forbidden, that being idols and representations. This broadens the spectrum on the prohibition, in that it may be prohibiting any person from attempting to duplicate God in any way, even though Dozeman (2009:482) argues that the prohibition is none specific on whether it is images of YHWH or other gods that are prohibited or maybe even both.

Childs (1974:405) highlights that there is a further specification that it attached to the first prohibition, and that is the aspect of representation. So as we have mentioned above, the issue of representation comes into play as to how to represent something you have not seen. MacKay (2001:344) adds that it seems unlikely that the idols mentioned here are pagan gods, but rather images of YHWH himself. He says this commandment guarded against the demotion of God into the physical realm, where the worshipper is misled into placing the divine on the same level as the world of ordinary experience. What is being said by MacKay is that when humankind uses an idol to represent God, they are removing the aspect of being above all from God, and are now making Him ordinary and at their level. MacKay (2001:345) then further says that the closest representation or likeness we have of God in this world is humankind who is created in God's image. One can add to this statement, that even the image of humankind cannot be used to adequately represent God because man falls short of the splendour and glory of YHWH. "Ultimately, the prohibition of idolatry arises not just from the God-given nature of humankind in general, but from the unique revelation of him who is the image of God" (MacKay, 2001:345). The prohibition of images does not stem from any other place, it stems from God keeping His distance in terms of form and shape, but Him

appealing to humankind, more specifically Israel, to worship Him for the holy, mighty and unseen God that He is.

Anderson (1962:419) writes on the hiddenness of God and that His hiddenness is an aspect of His transcendence, that God is prior to and exalted above humankind's world and the universe. He says God is invisible to humankind and this conviction is confirmed in the Mosaic prohibition against making of Him and by the ancient belief that no one can see God and live. This speaks to God's apartness from, but being present with His creation, because He stays invisible and unseen to them but is active in the lives and activity of His creation, therefore an image is a downgrade and total misrepresentation of who God is.

Waltke (1982:930-931) thinks that in addition to Israel being a nation against idol worship, the prohibition against images expressed the fact that God is a spiritual being dissimilar to any and every material form. This statement emphasizes what we have already looked at, that nothing in the created order can adequately represent the God who created it all. But it is also important that we understand what an idol is, and Gray (1952:673) describes it saying "Specifically the term denotes the image of a god when such is the object of worship, but any material symbol of the supernatural which is the object of worship may be so termed." Garber (1982:794) defines an idol as a material object representing a deity to which religious worship is directed. These definitions of what an idol is, tells us that it may not only be an image that has been fashioned out of something, but it can also be an object that has been given supernatural status, and this could have been anything.

Anderson (1962:423) argues that the religion of Israel was one that sought to keep and maintaining its faith by neither removing God from the world into the heavenly sphere or by limiting His deity by making Him too close and part of the world. He says the latter was the greatest challenge for Israel as they were

surrounded by nations that practiced this, and Egypt, where they had come from, boldly portrayed deities in human and animal forms. Israel had seen deities represented as images of either human beings or of animals, and they were at this point also thinking of a way in which they can represent their own God. We need to bear in mind a point raised by Laughlin (2008:9) that some of these were non-images but served cultic purposes for denoting the presence of a deity, and these were standing stones. It is worth noting therefore that the Hebrew Bible does have it recorded that the patriarchs used stones to symbolize where God had either appeared or spoke to them and made a covenant with them, with one example being Bethel (Genesis 28:18-19), where God appeared to Jacob in a dream.

Gray (1952:673) argues that other images that Israel was probably familiar with from the patriarchal narrative were תרפים, and these were probably anthropomorphic. Laughlin (2008:8) describes these as household gods which seemed to be small figurines and were only condemned later in Israelite history. This says that the patriarchs knew and kept images of household gods. What these images represented, is uncertain, but we are told they had them none the less. On the other hand, Garber (1982:795) argues that the familiarity of Israel with the forms of foreign gods was not just their proximity with nations other nations, but it was rather the pagan background from which they emerged as a nation. He also mentions that Israel was in close proximity and close political, social and economic contact with Canaan, Syria, Phoenicia and Philistia, and these had an influence on them as a nation. Israel was in the thick of things, so to speak, when it came to idol worship, she was surrounded, from her conception, by nations that openly and boldly worshipped images, and it was inevitable that they would be influenced by them.

Gray (1952:674) says that apart from the bulls which were a conspicuous feature of the cult sponsored by Jeroboam I at Bethel and Dan, it seems Israel was

familiar with idols from Canaanite deities Baal, Asherah and Astarte from the time of King Solomon who, with his liberal proclivities, allowed for the worship of foreign gods. Solomon had gone against what Israel knew as a nation and had married foreign wives and allowed them to bring their own deities and built shrines for them, exposing and allowing Israel to partake in the worship of foreign gods. This was the first time in the “history” of Israel that other gods were worshipped openly.⁵⁵ But also in the same light, we need to consider the words of Joshua when speaking to Israel after they crossed the Jordan, and said that they needed to choose whom they will serve, either YHWH or “...whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River...” (Joshua 24:15). What these words meant exactly, one cannot be sure, but can assume he meant either the golden calf of the desert or other deities Israel may have encountered as she grew, including the gods worshipped by nations they may have married into.⁵⁶ Circling back to Jeroboam I, Garber (1982:795) argues that when Jeroboam introduced the golden calves, which were probably carved out of wood and covered with gold, he was not advocating for Israel to walk away from God, but they had idolatrous connotations. The reason they had such connotations was because the surrounding nations had gods that were represented with a bull, including the head of the Canaanite pantheon “El”. These calves that are introduced by Jeroboam here are a flashback on the past to something that was done by Aaron in the wilderness and is recorded in Exodus 32. Images had been forbidden in the nation of Israel, more especially those that were a representation of YHWH, because nothing that is created can be used to accurately represent the creator, and the worship of these images was an abomination. But we do see under the leadership

⁵⁵ This is per the OT narrative.

⁵⁶ Jacob’s wife for instance, or the gods worshipped by Abram before God called him out.

of King Solomon, Jeroboam I and King Ahab that images and foreign gods are given a platform and a place in the life and worship of Israel.

There is the second part of the commandment, and that is the aspect of bowing down. The word used for “bow down” in this verse is תשתחוה. Brown, Driver, and Briggs (1906:1005) say that this word means to bow down, prostrate oneself in homage or to bow down before God in worship, but it is here used to mean to bow down before other gods, and Clines (2009:455) adds that it is bowing down in reverence or worship. As we will see here, the debate among scholars is around the word “them”, and who the “them” are. Childs (1974:405) says that added to the problem we have seen above in terms of images, a bigger issue is the use of the plural suffix “them” when what it supposedly refers to, that is “image”, is in the singular. It is worth noting that this is used in the context of bowing down and worshipping. Childs continues to say, in the same paragraph, that Zimmerli notes that verse 5 not only refers syntactically to verse 3’s “other gods”, but also carries the motivation clause of not worshipping other gods, meaning the command of verse 4 has been incorporated within the framework of the first commandment. This statement then points back to the first commandment and why other scholars consider the first and second commandments to be a single commandment.⁵⁷

MacKay (2001:345) starts this section at hand by looking at how the religious life of Israel turned out, that they would later be bombarded by the pressure to conform to the use of images and pictorial representations by surrounding nations, and that the elaboration in the second commandment was a warning against this. He continues to say that the elaboration was to show Israel that there was no need for these in the true worship of the YHWH. This then means that because God knew where Israel was going and that she would encounter such forms of worship, He was

⁵⁷ Dozeman (2009:484) makes this observation on the two being related as one.

now, before entering Canaan, prescribing that they stay away from such. MacKay then ends off by saying that “bow down” points to the posture taken in the act of worship, while “worship” or “serve” is more general and addresses sacrifices made and veneration given to idols, which inevitably extends to envelope one’s lifestyle. The people of God were not expected to give allegiance to any idols or representations, let alone build their whole lives and lifestyles around these objects because God was a God who did not require this from them. This then speaks to the lives Israel lived before YHWH, and Gerstenberger (2002:263) says this is a beneficial question to ask because one then looks at the catechetical answers which are worked out from the tradition.⁵⁸ He says that the nation needs the guidelines of the Torah if it will be able to identify itself, constitute itself and keep its head above the water. This means that the way Israel lives before YHWH and how she carries herself as a nation is what sets her apart from the rest of the ANE, and she finds instruction about this from the Torah.

Dozeman (2009:484) argues that the combination of “bow down” and “to worship” that we see in this verse is usually aimed at worshipping other gods, with the exception of Deuteronomy 4:19 where it refers to heavenly bodies. In addressing the plural “them” he says this could possibly be a reference to the idol and the representation together, which accounts for the use of plural. This conclusion can only make full sense if the idol and representation were of two different deities, that is, one was of YHWH and the other was of a foreign god. But again, one could argue the contrary, that even if the idol and representation were both of YHWH, the use of the plural “them” could still apply because they are both being used in the act of worship. This still leaves us in the dilemma we are trying to solve. What we can

⁵⁸ In the context of ethics, in which the author writes, part of this tradition is Deuteronomy 6:4, which speaks to the fact that Israel has one God and has to uphold the laws and constitutes of one God, and that is YHWH.

conclude though in this section is that whether the idol or representation stood for YHWH or not, Israel was not to have them.

There is then the third part of the commandment that talks about YHWH being a jealous God. MacKay (2001:345) starts off by pointing out that the phrase “the LORD your God” is taking Israel to the prologue in verse 2. The God who set Israel free from the house of bondage declares that He is jealous and will not tolerate competition. We are told by MacKay (2001:346) that what will threaten Israel’s relationship with God will not be external forces, but it will be the disposition of the heart of the people of Israel. If Israel will bow down to idols and representations, they will invoke God’s jealousy and wrath, and they will have themselves to blame for it. Dozeman (2009:485) highlights that the word in the Hebrew translated as “jealousy” has the connotation of fiery passions, conveying the passion of an offended lover, where he has committed adultery. He continues to say that the idea of love’s passion becomes a theological motif that describes the relationship between YHWH and His people Israel. This is a concept we find in Hosea, whom we will look at later. This communicates the level of commitment that God expects from Israel, and the level of commitment He intends to give to Israel. The last part about the jealousy of God is that of punishing those who neglect and favouring those who adhere to this command. MacKay (2001:346) raises that the aspect of punishing children of those who neglect this command may often be viewed as being unfair on the innocent children. He then tells that the answer lies in the fact that children inherit what their parents do, therefore if this command is not followed, the children will be children that do not know God because the fear and commitment to God will not be passed from generation to generation. This is recorded in the beginning of the book of Judges, where the generation that came after Joshua and his generation did not know about God and what He did for the nation of Israel. It then comes to show the

importance of the role played by parents in upholding the commitment to God and who He is, so they preserve and instil the love of the Lord in their children.

3.2.5 Third commandment: You shall not take the name of the Lord in vain

לֹא תִשָּׂא אֶת־שֵׁם־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשׁוּא כִּי לֹא יִנְקָה יְהוָה אֶת אֲשֶׁר־יִשָּׂא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ לְשׁוּא:

The third commandment is concerned about how Israel uses the name of the Lord, and it here warns them against misusing or abusing it. Marshall (2003:176) says that the command focuses on verbal representations of God. This means that the command is concerned about how God is spoken about and portrayed in words. He says that the word used here in the Hebrew could mean false swearing, false speech, and that which brings disaster, meaning that the misuse spoken of here pertains to associating the name of YHWH with false or disastrous purposes. Brown, Driver, and Briggs (1906:670) say the word נשא can also mean lift up, raise, carry and lift up in prayer. Clines (2009:284) defines it as lift up or take up or raise.

Abrami (2010:34) argues that this commandment is meant to appeal to humankind to show the utmost respect and reverence to God and for the name of God as well. He says that we must not show reverence only in our worship, but in our language as well because our verbal expression is the true reflection of what we believe. This means that Israel was expected to guard the way she spoke about God, and the things she said about Him, using His name. Also, this challenges the understanding that actions speak louder than words, because when it comes to God, actions can be faked, but words cannot. MacKay (2001:348) comments that this commandment is more than profanity, but it is about the way the name of the Lord is used. He says it about bearing or lifting up the name of the Lord in falsehood or emptiness. MacKay adds that “name” in this command refers to all that God has revealed of Himself, that is His power, love, and justice, so lifting His name up in falsehood would then mean someone presenting themselves as loyal to YHWH, but

in fact attempting to pervert and the revelation of who God is and manipulate God.⁵⁹ The meaning of it becomes intense. Israel was being warned that they need to be careful about the name of their liberator God, whose name He has revealed to them freely. They needed to be cautious not to take advantage of what they had been given, but use it carefully.

The name of the Lord was an important aspect of the YHWH cult, and it was imperative that Israel used it well. Collins (1992:385) thinks that this command prohibits the abuse of the sacred Tetragrammaton because the ancient world considered the name as expressing the very being of that person. So when Israel misused the name of YHWH, they were, according to Collins, misusing the very person of God. Marshall (2003:176) adds to this that the command was connected to the significance attached to personal names, that is, names revealed the true character of an individual and Dozeman (2009:486-487) says that the name of one penetrates to the person's very identity. This means that when God revealed His name to Israel, He was not just revealing His name, He was revealing who He was, what He represented and what He stood for. Childs (1974:412) remarks that it seems the earliest prohibitions on the misuse of the name of YHWH came from an attempt to protect the divine name, which was identified with God's being itself, from abuse within and without the cult. The giving of this command was a means by which the divine name of the God of Israel was protected, from both those inside and outside the cult. Dozeman (2009:487) thinks that the third commandment is a caution for Israel not to use the name of the Lord in destructive ways. He also makes the observation that the tone changes, from first to the third person to create distance between YHWH and Israel, thus emphasizing the intensity and importance of the

⁵⁹ Collins (1994:385) raises the point of manipulating God by the use of His name.

commandment. This warning was a stern warning against Israel because knowing the name and using the name of YHWH had consequences, whether good or bad.

On this commandment, therefore, one can conclude that the name of YHWH is a powerful name that was understood to have the capability of doing great things. First it set Israel free from slavery and bondage, then destroyed Pharaoh, and continued to do wonders in the wilderness, so if one misuses it to do evil, the results would be catastrophic, the purpose of this commandment was to raise awareness and caution against misrepresenting God by misusing His name to achieve one's own agendas. Israel was to keep the name of the Lord her God, YHWH sacred at all times.

3.2.6 Fourth Commandment: Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy

8 זכור את־יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְשׁוֹ:

We now come to the fourth of the Ten Commandments, which is about the Sabbath. Childs (1974:413) points out that this commandment is the longest in the whole of the Decalogue, which is a sign of a history of growth and expansion. Durham (1987:288) suggests that the probable reason for this expansion is Israel's difficulty in keeping it. As a result of the history of growth and expansion, the commandment is probably one of the more complicated ones to explain, and this is because in the Deuteronomy rendition of the Decalogue, the motivation for keeping the Sabbath is different. Dozeman (2009:488) highlights that the fourth commandment is divided into three parts, that firstly being a positive command to sanctify the Sabbath, secondly guidelines for fulfilling the commandment and lastly the motivation for keeping the command.⁶⁰ But the first question we need to ask in terms of the commandment is what the Sabbath is, and from the commandment itself, we get the

⁶⁰ Brueggemann (1994:845) raises the point of division.

understanding that it is a day that must be remembered. Snyder and Ramirez (2010:101) say that the Sabbath was a high Jewish ceremonial day that marked the Passover. This then means that the Sabbath was a specific day that had to carry certain importance and value for Israel and her life.

The next question we ask is what it meant for the Sabbath to be remembered. זכר means to remember, recall or call to mind (Brown et al, 1906:270 and Koehler and Baumgartner, 1998:256). To this definition, Clines (2009:100) adds “to recall experiences” much like the motivation in Deuteronomy 5, where they are called to remember the Sabbath because of the Egypt experience. MacKay (2001:348) says that the word “remember” shows an on-going obligation for Israel to structure her time in a manner that was reflective of the divine use of time, which included setting apart time especially for God. What this meant was this commandment was an instruction to Israel to keep God within their schedules of life. This follows on to “keeping” the day “holy”, where MacKay (2001:348) says it meant the day was marked as an out of the ordinary day and was totally dedicated to the divine. Israel was not only continually obliged to structure her time around the divine use of time, but was also required to set a whole day apart with the sole aim of making the set apart time holy. Dozeman (2009:488) introduces us to one of the differences between the Exodus Decalogue, and Deuteronomy Decalogue. What he raises is that in Exodus the wording is “remember”, while the Deuteronomy version says “observe”, and he then reasons that it shows the difference in the theological perspective in the P History and Deuteronomy. Dozeman continues to say that the Deuteronomy rendition makes the difference between “remember” and “observe” clear by saying that Israel was to remember their past slavery and therefore observe the Sabbath. This statement then gives the impression that the two words are not synonymous, but rather complementary. The word for the phrase “keep it holy” is לַקְדֹּשׁ, may mean to separate, withdraw, holy, apartness, sacredness, holiness, be

set apart and consecrated by purification (Brown et al, 1906:871). Koehler and Baumgartner (1998:824) define it as holy, withheld from the profane, to be treated with special care. Clines (2009:389) says it is holiness, sacredness, and consecration, through dedication to the deity.

We then look at the meaning of the word “Sabbath”. Marshall (2003:176) says that the best way to understand this commandment is to understand the root word for Sabbath, which simply means to rest. In the same vein, Childs (1974:413) suggests that a way in which Sabbath can be understood is that in the Hebrew, the term “Sabbath” is probably derived from a verbal form that means to “rest” or to “cease from work”. This tells us then that YHWH was instructing Israel to take a day of rest and of ceasing from all work and busyness. Dozeman (2009:490) raises the point that the Sabbath command is not one that calls for a day of worship rituals, but it is a day that calls for the ceasing of any form of work. Brueggemann (1994:845) adds to this point that the cessation of any work or activity is the very way in which Israel is to keep the day holy. Contrary to contemporary understanding, what we see here is that for Israel, the Sabbath rest was not about worship per se, but it was about setting a day aside for rest from all kind of activity. Dozeman (2009:490) also points out that this commandment forecasts the situation of the Promised Land and not Israel’s current situation of the wilderness. The reality of this commandment, like all the ones we have looked at, is that Israel is expected to take these laws that YHWH is giving them and keep them from the wilderness, where possible, but more importantly in Canaan where they were going to inherit the land. YHWH expects Israel to rest and cease from working, keeping the seventh day holy. The last question pertaining to this commandment that should be asked is why Israel needs to keep it, that is, what should motivate them to keep this law?

Miller (2009:520) says that what has been made holy by YHWH needs to be made holy by man, therefore since the Lord rested on the seventh day, after creating the world in six days, Israel must also rest on the seventh day. Thus humanity needs to respect the day and imitate God in this respect. Marshall (2003:176) agrees with Miller, but puts it in a different way, where he says that divine rest is the theological framework of the commandment, where the day serves to remind Israel that in life's cycle, there should be a time of rest and refreshment, and to remember the creator of the world. The Sabbath was an instrument by which Israel would slow down and remember YHWH by doing what He did. To this, Dozeman (2009:490-491) adds that this was the ideal rhythm of work and rest showcased in creation. God had set a standard, and He expected it to be kept; six days of work, one of rest. But again, as we mention in the beginning, the Deuteronomy version of this commandment is different, and the major difference lies in the motivation for keeping the commandment. Deuteronomy does not give God resting, but rather being set free from slavery.

Marshall (2003:176) makes a connection between the two versions by saying that when Israel remembers their Creator, they remember that the very same God delivered them from captivity, and when they remember that deliverance, they remember the covenant. Marshall ties all of these together, and that all these rise and fall on Israel remembering and keeping the Sabbath holy as YHWH instructs them to. Dozeman (2009:491) tells us that the Deuteronomy motivation is a continuation of the humanitarian argument from the conclusion of the previous section on the law that stated the guidelines for the Sabbath. In Collins (1992:385), we see that the formulation of the Sabbath command may be considered as the centre of the Deuteronomic redaction of the Decalogue, and also that it is more than just the humanitarian aspect, but it is also the social purpose of the precept. This

means that the Sabbath command was more than just a command, it spoke, as we mentioned above, to the life of the nation and daily living of the nation.

Childs (1974:416-417) shows that the difference does not only lie in substituting the creation motif with that of the Exodus, but the whole structure of the command changes. He says that the instruction to observe the Sabbath and keep it holy is added to the clause “as YHWH your God commanded you”, and the same applies to the conclusion that repeats the words “therefore YHWH commanded you to keep the Sabbath”. This changes the way we understand the command because it shifts from a commemoration and honouring of an event, to a command from the Lord. Childs (1974:417) continues to say that the Deuteronomist writer incorporates into his writing that no work must be done on the Sabbath “in order that your servant may rest as well as you”, which commentators see as part of the humanitarian concern of the Deuteronomist. Brueggemann (1994:845) adds to this point that the phrase “as you” makes the Sabbath a day of equalization, where all social distinctions are overcome. This shows that the instruction of YHWH did not end with His chosen nation Israel, but it extended to foreigners that dwelt among Israelites, even if they were servants, they too deserved a Sabbath rest. We conclude this commandment by saying “The Deuteronomist’s concern is not primarily humanitarian, but theological. He is basically concerned that “all Israel” participate in the Sabbath. This is only a reality when slaves also share in the observance” (Childs, 1974:417).

We have heard the voices of many scholars regarding the commandments and what they mean. We have also heard scholars like Snyder and Ramirez (2010:99) who argued that the first command, for instance, was an insistence on monotheism, but we asked the question of whether it really meant monotheism or it meant henotheism, and according to Wilson (2009:138), this is a mid-way point between polytheism and monotheism. If the case may have been that the nation was a

henotheistic nation, it begs the question of when the nation eventually became monotheistic. We hinted above that monotheism was unheard of before the time of the prophet Hosea (Collins 1992:384), so next we will attempt to explore whether it was during this time that Israel became monotheistic. In the next part, we will look at some historical context.

3.3 The Book of Hosea

The book of Hosea is an interesting book because of the imagery we find in this book, which is of a man married to a promiscuous woman. We get to understand that this image is a depiction of the relationship between YHWH and His chosen nation Israel. This speaks to the question asked by Balentine (1999:177) in the previous chapter, whether Israel would stay faithful to YHWH or they would conform to the pressures of Canaan. The connotation here is that Israel, who was previously faithful to YHWH had gone away committed adultery with other gods. Again we here find polytheistic practices in the nation of Israel, something which came up earlier in the dissertation, and an acknowledgment that was made early that they did know, and worship other gods besides or before YHWH. With the book of Hosea, we look at the potential role that the prophet might have played in shaping the religion of the nation of Israel. We see what role the prophet Hosea may have played in building the bridge from polytheism to monolatry and maybe an inspiration for monotheism.

Before we get to the theology of the book, we first need to understand who Hosea was and his ministry. Birch (2007:894) says that Hosea was the only prophet who had a book named after him who ministered in the part of Israel that he was born in. This means that most prophets ministered in regions in which they were not born or raised. This might present a challenge in terms of relevance, but with Hosea, he knew exactly how his people were and what they did. Smart (1962:648) argues

that Micaiah and Elijah had left behind a great prophetic tradition, but this was soon forgotten. Hosea on the other hand, Smart thinks, was to accuse both prophets and priests of the same shortfall, which was a lack of understanding of the true nature of God, hence leading the people astray into false practice instead of pure faith. Smart does not tell us why the ministries of the other prophets were soon forgotten, but one can assume that it was partly because of relevance, both of the message and of the prophet. We see here that Hosea saw both prophets and priests as equally responsible for the spiritual lives of the nation of Israel, hence they are equally guilty of leading them astray, and this he maybe saw as he grew up in the Northern Kingdom. Anderson and Freedman (1980:44) say that the mission and message of Hosea are an integral part of the corpus of eighth-century prophecy. This, one may assume, may be because of the emphasis he had on monotheism, even though they were a henotheistic community, and commitment to worshipping YHWH alone. Not only that, but Hosea was also a prophet of hope. As Limburg (1988:1) puts it, this book is a perfect entrance to the book of the twelve as it tells of God's unrelenting love that will not let His chosen nation go. In the book of Hosea God speaks of His dissatisfaction concerning Israel and says that Israel will be punished for her transgression, but also in the same light YHWH shows that He will not stop loving Israel. Hosea, which is the first book of the twelve speaks on the love God has for His nation, and the rest of the prophets build up on this when talking about the injustices that were happening during that time.

Mauchline (1956:554) argues that Israel had been conformed to her cultural environment and they had disregarded what the Lord required of them in terms of ethics and service to Him. Israel served the local Baals and during the appropriate seasons, they brought sacrifices to the fertility gods of the fields and flock, and this worsened as the nation became wealthier. Mauchline continues to say that some believed that they were making these sacrifices to YHWH, but Hosea regarded these

as occasions of sin. What is being highlighted here is that worship of other gods become such a norm in Israel that they saw no wrong in it and actually thought of it as normal and as sincere worship of YHWH. Yee (1996:200) says that in Canaanite mythology, Baal was a storm god responsible for rains, which was a much needed commodity in an arid land such as Israel. This goes back to the argument of the function of YHWH in the life of Israel, and that Israel felt the need to employ the “services” of other gods to ensure their survival. Coupled with this is an argument of how much Israel has seen and also trusts the provision of God in their lives.

Seow (1992:294) sheds a little bit more light on the matter in saying that YHWH worship was less dominant in the Northern Kingdom as compared to Judah. He says that Israel flirted with all sorts of Canaanite religion, as evidenced by the dramatic difference in the discovery of personal name seals discovered in the North bearing theophoric elements as opposed to seals discovered in the South. This means that there was a difference of allegiance in the two “districts” of Israel; the South was more dedicated to the worship of YHWH in comparison to the North, and the North is where most of the preaching for the restoration of YHWH worship happened.

In the beginning of the book, Hosea receives an instruction from YHWH, and “Obeying the Lord’s command, Hosea marries a woman of known promiscuous nature” (Limburg, 1988:2). This command and action of marrying an unfaithful wife works as a basis and core for Hosea’s message of Israel’s unfaithfulness to YHWH. Also to add onto this point, even though Hosea knew that his wife’s actions, he was jealous about his promiscuous wife. So even though Israel’s unfaithfulness was fully known by YHWH, it did not stop Him from being jealous about His people. But Anderson and Freedman (1980:49) raise an interesting point that it is not always clear whether the criticising of Hosea was towards a false, adulterous worship of YHWH or it was to an apostate worship of Baal, or even that the two are seen under

one light and a single cult, Baal used and the title for YHWH. This then implies that the possibility is that YHWH was rightly worshipped by Israel, using Baal as His title. There is also the possibility that one deity was seen as the lesser of the two, as Anderson and Freedman (1980:49) continue to say, citing the Kuntillat 'Ajrud inscription, that there was a flourishing cult of YHWH at the end of the ninth century which saw Baal as either an alternative name of YHWH or a co-god with a consort called Asherah. So the worship of Baal by Israel was not wrong because to them they were either worshipping YHWH using a different name or they were worshipping His co-god. Either way, they may not have seen anything wrong with it. If this was the case, then what did Hosea highlight to make this kind of worship wrong?

We can say all we can say about the book of Hosea and its events, that YHWH loved Israel unconditionally, just like Hosea loved Gomer, and that YHWH would accept Israel if she repented and came back to Him, but the question still remains; what influence did the ministry of Hosea have on monotheism in the worship of Israel? As an answer, we hear Birch (2007:898) say that the message of Hosea operates out of the understanding that God has willingly entered into a covenant relationship with Israel, which for Hosea seems to be founded and rooted in the Sinai tradition and draws from the Decalogue.⁶¹ This might have even worked the other way around, that the relationship and jealousy of Hosea informed the jealousy of YHWH. Birch (2007:898) continues to say that the justification for the punishment found in 8:1 is founded here, that they have broken the Sinai covenant. So they may have worshipped Baal as a “pseudonym” for YHWH, but in YHWH’s eyes, and in Hosea’s ministry, they had transgressed and broken the covenant they had with YHWH. The message of Hosea seems to be that Israel may know no other way of worshipping YHWH, but the only way they know is, and has been wrong and they

⁶¹ Hosea 4:1-2.

need to change it. Hosea reminded the nation of Israel that they have a covenant with God and they need to honour that covenant. Limburg (1988:3) says

Hosea 9:10-17 looks back at Israel's past, charging that the people have carried on a flirtation with Baalism since early in their history. The sayings in chapter 10 reflect the last years of the nation's life, providing further evidence for the charge of faithlessness and lack of love and knowledge of God (10:7, 15). Finally, chapter 11 also looks back, recalling God's nurturing love in Israel's past; "When Israel was a child, I loved him..." (11:1). This parental love becomes the basis for the announcement of a hopeful future for God's children (vv. 10-11).

Israel had sinned against God for a long time and they had normalised the worship of Baal in their communities. They had continued to flirt and be unfaithful to God, but God still loved her, and wanted her to remain faithful. Even though He may punish her for what she has done, God still has a good and hopeful future for Israel. The ministry of Hosea was to remind Israel that even though they had sinned against God and had become a nation of polytheism or maybe even henotheism, He was still faithful to her wanted her to come back to Him as their only and true God.

Thus looking at the ministry of prophet Hosea, one almost hears for the first time, since the first commandment, any mention of Israel only worshipping YHWH their God. We heard Collins earlier say that the idea of the worship of a single deity was unheard of before the time of Hosea, and we have heard Hosea make his case. Hosea struggles with an unfaithful wife, who is seen as an image of Israel, and his wife was promiscuous. This image looks at Israel as having more than on husband, who is YHWH and other gods, but YHWH staying faithful to her. Hosea never once speaks of the existence of only one man, which is the man Gomer is married to, but he pleads with her to stay faithful to one man. So if Hosea was the first to teach on the worship of a single deity, disregarding others, then it means the concept of having

one God belongs to the eighth century, during the ministry of Hosea. Hosea introduced the concept of monolatry in the religious life of Israel, which later gave birth to monotheism.

3.4 The Reforms of Josiah

Coming from the book of the prophet Hosea, where we saw the prophet speak to the polytheistic practice of Israel, we still do not see Israel repent from what she was doing. This then presents the problem of when exactly YHWH started being worshipped as the only God in Israel. To attempt to find the answer to this question, we look at one potential answer, which is the reforms of Josiah, where some of the worship patterns in Israel changed. Kim (2008:413) tells us that Josiah, whose name means “may YHWH support”, was the king of Judah from 640-609 BCE and he was the son and successor of King Amon. Josiah was eight years old when he was made a king, and he implemented these reforms in the eighth year of his reign.

Having seen who the person Josiah was, Collins (2007:184) says that the central element of these reforms Josiah put into action was the centralization of the YHWH cult, and according to Kim (2008:414) part of this centralisation of public worship was the reinstatement of the Passover. The word reinstatement used by Kim implies that the Passover had been sidelined and almost forgotten in Hebrew worship. Ogunkunle (2012:5) points out that the Passover had not been celebrated in Israel for about sixty (60) years, from the time of Hezekiah, and by reinstating the Passover, Josiah elevated the sacred art of the covenant to its rightful place in the Temple.⁶² Yet again, by these reforms, the Passover became important in the life and worship of Israel as they remembered what YHWH did for them in Egypt. Kim (2008:414) also says what began the reforms was that king Josiah had ordered the

⁶² Ogunkunle makes reference the 2 Chronicles 35:7-8.

renovation of the Jerusalem temple (2 Kings 22:3-7), wherein the High Priest Hilkiah discovered the “book of the law”.

Collins (2007:184) argues that the “book of the law” found in the temple corresponds to some form of the Book of Deuteronomy, especially Deuteronomy 12. Having discovered and read the book, he was shocked by what he found in it and he had it confirmed by the prophetess Huldah (2 Kings 22:11-20). By this statement, one therefore assumes that even the kings of Judah had forgotten the law of the Lord given to Moses,⁶³ or even that it was lost. Na’aman (2011:47) presents an argument by W.M.L de Wette that the “discovered” scroll was composed not long before its “discovery”. What this argument presents is that the “book of the law” that was allegedly discovered by King Josiah in the temple was not an old scroll that has been lost, but a new composition.

Handy (1994:49) provides an argument that disagrees with this line of thought, in that he argues that the composition of the Kings narrative must have been recorded after the time of King Josiah. He supports this argument by saying that Josiah had every reason to consult the gods of the pantheon who made up the only religious world he had ever known or heard of, having been raised by Amon. This argument hold water in that scripture records that Amon was a wicked king and did was wrong in the eyes of the Lord, which included worshipping other gods apart from YHWH. Handy (1994:49) then concludes by saying that the author lived well after the time of Josiah and was influenced by traditions of the exile and saw consultations with other gods as evil, and circumvented the narrative by using Huldah the prophetess to access YHWH.

⁶³ This is if we follow Bible chronology of the writing of the law.

The question we ask here is whether a prophet like Jeremiah would be in support of such reforms had they not been from YHWH, or purposed at the worship of YHWH. Sweeny (1996:572) says that the analysis of the structure of Jeremiah 30-31 shows that it calls for the restoration of the former northern kingdom of Israel to Judah and the Davidic rule, and this in and of itself shows that Jeremiah was in support of the reforms of Josiah. We now know that one of the Major Prophets active during the time of Josiah was in support of the reforms. From this point on, we know that Israel became a monotheistic nation because of the influence of the reforms instituted by Josiah in Israelite worship and lifestyle.

Kim (2008:414) argues that this discovery led to the convening of the people of Judah by the king for a covenant renewal ceremony in Jerusalem, the purging of the Jerusalem temple of all foreign influences and the destruction of high places in Judah, Bethel, and Samaria. This meant that no sacrifices to YHWH were to be made outside of the Jerusalem temple, which tells us that sacrifices to YHWH were also made outside of the temple, maybe at shrines and altars set up for other gods, besides YHWH.

Hagedorn (2011:473) on the other hand argues that during this reform it was not all foreign influences that were removed, but the removal of several Assyrian statues since King Josiah believed Assyrian dominance to be waning. This introduces a new dynamic to the meaning of the Reforms of Josiah because this carries the implication that the reforms were mainly about getting rid of Assyrian influence, and not necessarily all foreign religious influences. Collins (2007:184) says that the worship of Canaanite deities, such as Baal and Asherah, was suppressed, and places where human sacrifices were offered, were destroyed. Together with the suppression of the deities, one may also assume that the images, if any, used in the worship of these gods were also destroyed. This comment

introduces yet another nation whose deities Josiah got rid of in Israel, but unlike Hagedorn, Collins does not give the implication that these are the only deities that Israel rid of themselves. As Kim (2008:414) puts it:

Deuteronomy's demand for exclusive allegiance to one God through one sanctuary was implemented most passionately by Josiah, and the fact that the Deuteronomistic History considered Josiah Israel's greatest king supports the theory that the Deuteronomistic History took its shape first during Josiah's time in support of his reforms.

Here the implication is to the effect that Israel knew what to do, but for one reason or another, they did not do it, until the time of Josiah who ensured that the nation does what it is supposed to do. Na'aman (2011:47) on the other hand tells us of a late⁶⁴ composition theory and says that the late composition of Deuteronomy has been accepted by a group of scholars that believe that the so-called discovery of the scroll was a manipulation to push forward the execution of the reform of Josiah.⁶⁵ This comment stands in sheer contrast to the understanding that Israel knew these laws that Josiah enforced from the time of Moses who "supposedly" recorded these.

One then needs to ask the question of why these reforms were important and what they sought to achieve. We have seen that these reforms meant that the worship of YHWH became central in the life of the Israelite nation and that some of the ceremonies were restored, made important again, and that Josiah abolished certain ceremonies. Collins (2007:184) argues that if sacrifices could only be offered in Jerusalem, then that meant that those who lived at a distance could only offer sacrifices on special occasions. This meant also meant that the function of the Temple Priest and High Priest became prominent and key to the religious life of Israel

⁶⁴ By late composition, one understands that the scroll was written either before the reign of Josiah or during his reign.

⁶⁵ Note comment by Handy (1994:49) on authorship date above.

because they were the only ones who could make sacrifices for the nation. In the aspect of ceremonies, the Passover is the one ceremony that is believed to have been “affected” the most in that it now became a pilgrimage festival. Kim (2008:414) argues that the Passover was previously a family or tribal ritual that ensured unity at the levels at which it was implemented, but the reforms meant that all people, including peasants, had to travel to Jerusalem for the event. This meant that the smaller units that existed and made the whole unit of Israel were affected because they now had little to unite them as communities. And in the same light, the Passover was meant to unite more than just the smaller units, but it was meant to bring together the nation in solidarity as they worshipped YHWH and remember what he did for them as a nation.

To introduce a totally contrary thought, we turn to Na’aman (2011:58) who argues that all Ancient Near Eastern kings who introduced cult reforms needed some form of justification to give to the nobles and elite of the nation, and this needed legitimation. He says the legitimation had to present two levels, the first being it had to be divine and by way of an oracle, and the second had to be through the production of a literary composition, and cites other examples of kings who did the same.⁶⁶ According to these cultic reform requirements, the reforms of Josiah passed both authentication levels because first the “book of the law” was discovered in the temple and second, prophetess Huldah confirmed its authenticity. So this tells us that the reforms of King Josiah were authentic and had everything they needed to be seen as legitimate.

To sum up the section on the reforms of King Josiah, Collins (2007:184-185) says that the reforms of Josiah played a crucial role in the life of the nation of Israel because it gave them the ability to cope during and after Babylonian exile, where the

⁶⁶ See pages 59 and 60 of the same publication.

“book of the law” ensured that the nation is able to grow independent of a geographical location because they had the law written down for them to have a reference point. Kim (2008:415) argues that the reforms provided crucial data for tracing the development of religion and history of ancient Israel. He says that Josiah served as a symbol of righteous Davidic kingship and the sign of the Messiah that would come and restore political and religious Israel. The reforms and religious dedication of Josiah echoed beyond his life, and in the short life he lived, he affected and changed the worship life of future generations as well, Israelite worship was left changed forever. At this point a question that arises is whether these reforms are the only thing that changed the worship pattern of Israel towards henotheism, and away from images.

From the ministry of Hosea and the reforms of Josiah, we see a progression of events, where it seems Hosea introduced the concept of monolatry in the image of monogamy, and Josiah introduces imageless worship. Each of these introductions seems to be informed by an aspect of the Decalogue, where each ministry deals with one commandment out of the scope of our dissertation. Josiah’s reforms seem to have been triggered by the Second Commandment, that there should be no images worshipped, or used to represent YHWH, hence he destroys images and altars were destroyed. Before this time and the institution of these reforms, it seems idol-less worship was unheard of in Israel, the nation knew that YHWH was represented by images, perhaps even as far back as the desert with the bronze serpent⁶⁷ destroyed by Hezekiah in Judah. What then becomes interesting here is that 2 Kings 23:4 records that vessels used in the worship of Baal and Asherah were kept in the temple of the Lord, which implies that some sort of syncretism or polytheism existed in Israel. Before the time of Josiah, it does not seem as though

⁶⁷ This is a desert experience if we follow Bible chronology.

Israel knew any form of worship beside this one, and had forgotten the second commandment or Josiah invented this command and instituted it in the nation of Israel. In the case of the latter option, then the commandment comes about much later and is projected back into time in the Decalogue.

The ministry of Hosea, on the other hand, seems to have been influenced by the First Commandment which demands that there should be no other deity placed before YHWH or even worshipped alongside YHWH. The first commandment may be understood to be a command towards monotheism, when it is, in fact, a command towards henotheism. The relationship between Hosea and his wife was an imagery we understand as depicting the relationship between YHWH and His chosen nation Israel, but we ask when this imagery became applicable. If Israel had just come out of Egypt and had seen YHWH defeat Egypt and all its might, why would they then become unfaithful to their saviour? Unless they were already “unfaithful” even before the marriage. This means that Israel already had other gods they worshipped before they met YHWH, and YHWH wanted Israel to “leave the other men in her life” and stay faithful to Him. This leads us to argue that there is a possibility that all along until the time of Hosea, Israel was polytheistic in nature and worship different gods, including YHWH, and Hosea is now appealing that among the other gods, they should choose YHWH and stay faithful to Him alone. YHWH chose a polytheistic nation and made strides with them, through Hosea, towards being a henotheistic nation with the prospects of monotheism. This means that the concept of YHWH being the only deity to be worshipped potentially only became a reality in the time of Hosea, when he made his appeal to Israel to be faithful to YHWH. This means the command could have been very old, but neglected, or it was a new concept altogether, it is hard to determine.

We also seem to find the concept of YHWH being a jealous God⁶⁸ in the narrative of Hosea's marriage to Gomer. This is a human expression of feelings and emotions, and YHWH is here being personified. This means that with God knowing about Israel's promiscuous ways, He desires to have her full and undivided attention. Even though YHWH knew they had other "men" they loved, He still demanded full allegiance. One may argue that YHWH is jealous because He does not like to compete or be pitted against other gods for attention, and frankly should not. Also, this jealousy of God, has it always been there and unexpressed or was it a later development? The answer we cannot know. Chances are it has always been there, but only truly expressed for the first time in the ministry of prophet Hosea. Israel's God is and always has been a jealous God.

⁶⁸ Exodus 20:5.

Chapter 4

Contemporary Relevance of the Decalogue

4.1 Introduction

Having looked at some of the arguments surrounding the Decalogue, this dissertation needs to get to the point where it argues for the contemporary relevance of the Decalogue, or its lack thereof. With all the arguments that have been presented, it is very difficult to determine the relevance of the commandments, because firstly, the determinant is what the relevance is based on. This means one needs to then answer the question of when exactly the commandments became important in the life of Israel. Some could argue that maybe it was during the time of prophet Hosea, whose ministry centred on the unfaithfulness of Israel to her “husband” YHWH, and worshipping other gods along with YHWH. Secondly, one could maybe argue that it was during the time of King Josiah who emphasized that YHWH should be worshipped without any images. More than that, it was during this time that the law might have been centralized in Israel’s life. A third argument could potentially be that the Decalogue became relevant at Sinai where and when it was given, but the nation chose to disregard it, hence YHWH was able to use it throughout Israelite history to judge and correct His chosen people, even though this concept is rejected by most critical scholars, it is still alive in conservative minds. In either case, the biggest question that one may ask at this juncture is how such an ancient text is relevant in the present age and to the present generation. This then is the point where a bridge should be built to connect the then and the now.

Ryken (2003:41) argues that the human race has a problem distinguishing between right and wrong, the Ten Commandments notwithstanding, and also that the reason this happens is because we live in a fallen world, where our sinfulness

says what is right is wrong, and what is wrong is right. Even with this comment, we see that the relevance of the Ten Commandments is assumed by Ryken, but then he prescribes humanity as the problem. Ryken (2003:42) continues to argue that humankind assumed that these are easy, since there are only ten of them and they are also easy to memorise and recite, but in deeper study, they mean more than meets the eye.

Edwards (2002:47) writes:

The law is still vital for our Christian life because it helps us to see how holy God is, it helps us define sin, and it helps to keep us in check when we step out of line. For the Christian the law is not an enemy, but a friend whose direction we love; and it brings freedom, not slavery, because the royal law of love now controls us. Remember, the whole of the Old Testament is for our instruction.

Edwards argues here that the Old Testament and its law, that is the Decalogue, is relevant for us today, and it should actually be our friend instead of the enemy. The Ten Commandments are relevant for all even today, and that has not changed, and will probably never change. But the question still remains, how are they relevant? The rest of the chapter is an attempt to describe how certain scholar, who may even be described as preachers, have attempted to find relevance in the Decalogue and the idea is to bring their views into a discussion with the work of the previous two chapters which was more historical criticism. As evident in the chapter, they are not many who take this further step.

4.2 Modern Understanding of the Decalogue.

Before we perhaps get into the relevance and implication of the Decalogue today, it will be important to hear what modern writers⁶⁹ and preachers have to say about the Decalogue. Plunket-Brewton (2014:1) says the Sinai scene is a fulfilment of God's promise to Moses in his first encounter with God, where God said that when Israel has been freed from Egyptian slavery they will again worship God at that very mountain. She continues to say that the promise reaches its culmination in the theophany, where God gives the law to shape Israel into a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. The understanding here is that God commissions Moses into his calling and Israel into her separation as a people of God at the same mountain, again echoing what we have previously mentioned, that YHWH and His worship began at Sinai. Erickson (2008:1) suggests that the giving of the commandments can be understood as a point where the nation of Israel was given a sense of identity, purpose and a sense of security as well, because even though God had brought them out of Egypt and had done miracles for them, God had not told them His intentions for them. Israel knew they were set free by YHWH, but they did not know why He had done it, and at Sinai, He reveals all to them as a nation.

Strawn (2014:3) argues that even though much can be said about the Decalogue, the one thing that can also be said about it is that it is the locus of disobedience, because it is when one looks at the Decalogue, that one realizes that we dismally fail to live up to what it demands. This is very true, as we will see, that there are a lot of pitfalls in our worship, so we fail to keep the demands of the Ten Commandments. Despite this fact, that we cannot keep the commandments,

⁶⁹ We mean here people that may not necessarily be published scholars, but they have written articles on the Decalogue, perhaps in the context of church, in the last ten (10) years or so.

Fretheim (2015:1) says the Decalogue is a gift from a redeeming God and a gracious word of God. He says the Decalogue begins with a declaration of good news concerning what God has done for the community of faith. When the commandments begin, God makes Himself known, that He is the redeeming God and therefore His saving act is the reason why He must be respected and revered. Plunket-Brewton (2014:1) says that the two tablets of the Decalogue worked as a symbolic centre of the people's worship. The commandments worked as a guide for how Israel was to worship YHWH as their God, because it was here that God prescribed how He should be worshipped.

Webb (2012:2) says those that interpret the Decalogue see the passage as divided into two, the one regarding worship (vv1-11) and the other concerned with interpersonal relations (vv12-17), but she argues that these two better function as a unit. She says the commandments on worship are also about how people are formed through that worship to be a certain kind of people, and the laws about interpersonal relations reflect how God wants people to live and doing how He does. All ten of the commands are God communicating how He as the redeeming God expects His chosen nation to live, both in worship and in relationship. This then extends to today's context, in that our worship should influence our lifestyle, and our lives should reflect our worship. In Fretheim (2015:1), we find that the commandments are given to an already believing and worshipping community, and these are meant to shape the daily life of those already in relationship with God. The implication in this statement is that the nation Israel already had an existing relationship with God, hence they were able to receive the commandments from Him.

4.3 The Relevance of the Commandments Today.

One of the first things we need to take note of is most scholars⁷⁰ do not address the question of contemporary relevance. The possibility here is that they simply assume that the Ten Commandments are relevant and they then go into the implications of this relevance, or they do not see any reason to draw out relevance, and they leave it as an ancient text. Ryken (2003:42) argues that God gave ten short rules that apply to all people in all places. What this comment argues for is that the Decalogue carries a message for all of humankind, because some of these short rules, that is the interpersonal section of the Decalogue, resonate and ring true for many, if not all, cultures and peoples around the world. Nestingen (1985:93) expresses the view of some, which is that the commandments are set out to show the impossibility of keeping them, where grace then comes in as a remedy and makes it possible to live without them, and simply ignore them. This may be part of the reason why an application for the Decalogue is so hard to find, because we live in the New Testament period that talks of grace, thus ignoring the law and maybe even the legal texts. Still, this dissertation explores the first four of the Ten Commandments, and these are more resistant to application, as we will see below.

4.3.1 First Commandment

Having said that, we start with the first command, which prescribes that there should be no other deity to be worshipped besides YHWH. Kaiser (1983:85) argues that in the first of the ten, we find the highest duty of humankind and also the basis for all of morality. This means that for a person, there is no higher calling than to worship and have God as the first and only object of worship. Perhaps the reason we have not and cannot place God at the helm of our lives is because we have a construed

⁷⁰ This will be the more critical scholars, such as Dozeman, Collins, Propp, Gerstenberger, etc.

understanding of who God is. Humankind has lost an understanding of who God is and have therefore created their own wrong image of God and who He is. John (2000:282) says that God is not a God that is mysterious and unfathomable, but He is a God who has revealed Himself to us so that we may know that we can trust Him. With a better understanding of who God is, we can come to a point where we can place Him unsurpassed by and unparalleled to any other. Ryken (2003:57) gives an example of how parents raise their children and teach them that sharing is a good thing, but he then mentions that with God the opposite is true, God does not want to share us with another deity, He wants exclusivity. Ndjerareou (2006:110) adds on to this point by arguing that “According to the Lord, it is impossible to truly worship him and any other so-called gods at the same time.” In the First Commandment, God communicates that He does not want to be put in competition with another god, because He will not compete for our attention, allegiance and worship.

Henry (n.d.:358) argues that the sin against this command that we in most danger of is giving honour and glory to any other creature the God, to whom it is due. This argument gives us the understanding that it is easy to grant that which is due to God to another. Henry then goes on to argue some basic things that may compete with the glory of God. He argues that pride makes a god of self, covetousness makes a god of money, sensuality makes a god of the belly, and whatever else that is loved more than and placed above God is itself a god. What one may draw out from this argument is that no matter how small or how big anything may be, if one places it before or above God it becomes a god, and they have broken the First Commandment.

Ryken (2003: 62) makes reference to Solomon and how his life was and how it turned out. He highlights that when Solomon had an opportunity of a lifetime to ask from God whatever he wanted, and what he wanted was to serve God and his

people. Ryken continues to highlight that when God gave him everything else he had not asked for, his heart began to change towards other things and turned away from God, and he eventually worshipped other deities. Just like many today, they start right, with good intentions, but as they receive more money and more fame, just like Solomon their hearts turn away from doing it for the good of the many into greed. So even if we do not necessarily spiritualize it, people's intentions and motives may potentially change as things get better in their lives, as they move up they get promoted, it becomes less about the job and more about a salary increase, a better car, a better house, more respect, and more societal recognition. The same applies to God, the more God blesses people, they potentially start wanting more, and them wanting more puts that which they want above God.

Ryken (2003:66) prescribes two ways with which we can determine what we place before God. The first is the question of what we love, and he quotes Origen who observed that whatever each person honours before all else, what they admire and love, that for them becomes a deity. Ryken asks the question of a person desires, questions where the mind goes first when given the opportunity to roam freely, the question of how we spend our time and resources, because if the answer to any of these is anything but God, God has been made to take the backseat. I think this first question that tests where God ranks in our lives rings true for many today, because a lot has come before our worship and the God whom we worship, our jobs, our families, our hobbies, our possessions. The second question Ryken (2003:66) asks is what we trust. He asks the question of where one turns when all else fails, because Martin Luther argued that whatever the heart clings to and relies upon, that is a god, and Thomas Watson argued that to trust in anything other than God make your trust a god. With this question a lot of people trust in their money, their life or insurance policies, and maybe even family, but we see here that if it is not God, it has been placed above Him, it becomes a god. Fretheim (2015:1) in the same light

highlights that “other gods” could include any person, place or thing we hold more important or as important as God, and these may be sometimes even be the long-standing gods who have been worship for a long time, such as money, property, fame or power. This has been a constant issue throughout the ages, people have always wanted the best things in life, and these things thereby becoming gods that come before God. Henry (n.d.:358) argues that this is very provoking to God, as it is a sin that dares Him to His face that He cannot and will not overlook or connive at. God may tolerate this kind of sinning and displacement for a while, but we can be guaranteed that it will not be forever.

When one reads this section, it feels like there are a lot of repetitions, but the crux of the first commandment is that there is nothing that should be made more important than God, because if there is, then that thing becomes a god in the life of the individual. The command here, according to Fretheim (2015:1), is to be absolutely loyal to God, and is also a call to fear, love and trust God above all things. God here sets out build a foundation for the rest of the worship life of Israel, and also ours today, because just as the first recipients worshipped fertility gods when they thought YHWH could not ensure fertility, we trust in our own abilities to get things done instead of trusting God to intervene. We create idols of what we have and trust in. Scholars such as Ryken and Henry have attempted to identify contemporary idols modern-day believers place before God. It is also worth noting that Ryken is able to link the command to Solomon, but not to Hosea.

4.3.2 Second Commandment

The next commandment that we will look at is concerned with idols and the worship of idols. As we have argued, some scholars and traditions regard this command as part of the first, because it could be informed by the first (Childs, 1974:405). Fretheim (2015:1) argues that the first commandment introduces the commandments and also

gives shape to all others, and that when it was given, it had idolatry in focus. The most important aspect we need to acknowledge about this commandment is that it is from an era of time where images were used for worship, and where idols were a common thing. This is not necessarily true today in today's form of worship. Today's idols take a different form and shape. Ndjerareou (2006:110) argues that an image or idol represents something in nature that people begin to revere and worship a god. Coupled with that, it stands for something that its worshippers believe they can manipulate to suit them and what they want. If then an idol is something that the worshipper can manipulate for their benefit, it means they have created their own version of God, who seizes to be the true God but a god.

Kaiser (1983:85) argues that the second commandment deals with the mode of worship and ascribing worth to God as the first commandment described the object of worship and source of morality. This translates to the fact that there is a sense of continuity between the first and second commandments, because the first points us to who to worship, and the second points us to how we should worship. Henry (n.d.:359) adds on to this point when he says that the second commandment is concerned with the ordinances of worship or rather the way in which God should be worshipped. "The second commandment has to do with worshipping the right God in the right way" (Ryken, 2003:72). From these three scholars, we find a form of consensus, that this commandment is more about the way of worship than it is about anything else. God here prescribes how he wants to be worshipped by those who worship Him. Ryken (2003:75) adds that God reserves every right to prescribe how he wants to be worshipped, and that way is not to be turned into an idol. As we have seen above, idolatry means that deity which one worships can be manipulated by the worshipper, and God is not one to be controlled and manipulated by those who worship Him. Besides manipulation, Ndjerareou (2006:111) points out that the

personification of God by any representation of Him precedes false worship. God does not want to be worshipped falsely.

The generation of preachers we have today have unfortunately painted the picture of a God one can manipulate by actions. The God we hear of is a God that rewards people for doing certain things in a certain way, where Ryken (2003:81) says that people are always looking for a more user-friendly god, a god who can be adapted to suit their purposes, and say that if they do this, God will do that. Creating that image of God is as good as creating an image in our heads of who God is and how He operates. Today the images and idols that are worshipped are not of foreign gods, and they are not made of wood, stone, silver or gold, but they are in our heads, they are intangible, and we do not physically bow down to them. Instead the idols worshipped today live in our perceptions of who God is, what He is supposed to do and how He is supposed to do it. Henry (n.d.:359) says that the aspect of the jealousy of God shows the displeasure He has for idolaters and that He resents everything in His worship that looks like or leads to idolatry. We live in a generation that seems to worship God for certain attributes, but not others, and Ryken (2003:81), says this is a form of idolatry. Today we hear more sermons on the grace of God through Christ, and less on the justice of God. We hear more sermons on how God will make one prosper and less on how in the will of God you can either live with little or with much, and according to Ryken this idolatry.

I here repeat, the idols that are worshipped by this generation of worshippers are not physical idols, but they are intangible. The idols worshipped today are not of foreign gods but are a false image and false worship of the true God. The idolatry of today is perhaps the most dangerous idolatry because it takes more to get rid of because it is not physical, but embedded and engraved in the mind and heart of the worshipper. This kind of idolatry has somehow become a lifestyle.

4.3.3 *Third Commandment*

The third commandment is concerned with how the name of the Lord is used, where YHWH instructs that His name should not be used in vain. In the previous chapter, we saw that using the name in vain has to do with how the name is used, and perhaps for what purpose. Kaiser (1983:87) says that the term “in vain” meant to misuse the name or use it for no real purpose. God is here speaking against His name being used aimlessly and maybe even carelessly.

John (2000:227) makes reference to an example we can all relate to, an example of a household with children, that the word “mum” carries so much weight and authority when children are playing and one makes the other cry. He says that once the mother releases an order, the children listen and follow the order because someone whose name carries authority has spoken. Likewise, with God, His name carries a lot of weight and authority, so much so that if one does something and they claim to do it in the name of God, they are listened to. God does not want His name “dragged through the mud”, so to speak, and things done under the authority of His name when they are not of Him. We have said this before about the name of God, but we will repeat it here again, that the name of God is not merely a name, but Kaiser (1990:423) says that the name carries God’s nature, being and very person. Not only that, but the name represents God’s teaching and doctrine, together with His moral and ethical teaching. This tells us that if invoked, the name carries a lot of weight, and all that weight and meaning is misused when the name is used for no real purpose. Ndjerareou (2006:111) argues that the command is meant to target those who make false promises and seek to give them a stamp of approval and credibility by using an unimpeachable authority. This argument compliments what we argued above, that God does not want the invocation of His name and authority used to advance personal agendas.

Henry (n.d.:360) introduces a new dynamic to the issue of misusing the name of YHWH. He argues that someone who makes a promise using the name of God but then turns around and not keep those promises has used the name of the Lord in vain. He makes reference to someone who names the name of Christ but does not depart from their wrongdoing, that they too use the name of the Lord in vain. This gives the impression that even if someone was genuine in their promise, but slip up on it, they have broken the third commandment. Complementary to this, is what John (2000:236) say that if the lives we live do not match the words we speak, we are dishonouring God, and that as Christians we are called to live lives that worthy of the name of Jesus. So even the lives we live if we profess the name of Jesus must portray that we are followers if Christ, otherwise that in and of itself is bordering on breaking the third command, according to John. Even perhaps a bit more radical in terms of misuse is what Kaiser (1983:88) says, that even using the name of God to fill the gaps in our speeches or prayers is misusing the name of God, invoking the name as a table grace with no heart in it, is using the name in vain. This is outside of the realm of what one thinks of when thinking about misusing the name of YHWH, but even that moment we do something out of the norm and call the name of God, we have broken the third commandment.

I would like us to end with the general thinking when it comes to misusing the name of God. When someone hears this command, one thinks of what has become so prevalent in the times in which we live, that a lot of people use the name if God and Jesus carelessly, even in vulgar language. This command covers that as well, the name of God must not be used to swear, whatever kind. The name of the Lord needs to be held in high regard and high esteem because it is a powerful name, one that carries weight too. When using the name of the Lord, we, therefore, need to be careful how we use it if we want to keep this third commandment.

4.3.4 Fourth Commandment

The fourth commandment is the longest commandment in the Decalogue, and it is the only one that differs from the Deuteronomy version of the Decalogue. In this commandment, God instructs Israel to remember the Sabbath and keep it holy, set it apart for Him and His worship. This command is also one of the most debated today because of two reasons, the first is the actual Sabbath day, and the other is what the limits of this day are. As we apply this command to today, we will attempt to answer these for the contemporary context.

Ryken (2003:103) points out that with this command, God prescribes how the whole week is supposed to look like, he says God has said in this command that we shall work for six of the seven days. This means that God does not govern both our labour and our rest, but gives us six days to fulfil our earthly calling and duty. This tells us that God has apportioned for Himself just over fourteen percent (14.29%) of the week and has given us just under eighty-six percent (85.71%) to with it what we have been called to do. God sets all this out in this command, and it is clear that He has given humankind more time to fulfil their calling than He demands for Himself. Ndjerareou (2006:111) fits in the other piece of the puzzle concerning the Sabbath, saying that God in wisdom gave us this Sabbath day to allow us to spend sacred time with Him and deepen our relationship with Him. Not only that, we are on this day to rest and recuperate physically, mentally and emotionally. Even on the day reserved for the Lord, we get something out, which is rest, even though we need to understand though that this is not our day, it is God's day and we need to give God the honour, glory, and attention that He deserves on this day. Kaiser (1983:89) seems to disagree, to some extent, because he argues that the Sabbath is first a day of rest before it is of worship. This means that we worship in our rest, not that we rest in our worship, bringing the day's primary focus back onto people, taking

away from God. This, in my opinion, is not necessarily true because the fact that the day is to be kept holy means that the day ought to be a day of divine purpose and appointment because mankind does not have holiness in them but only God.

The Sabbath, according to the Jewish calendar falls on a Saturday, which then begs the question why a part of the Christian church uses the Sunday instead. Kaiser (1990:424) says “The Christian church is required to observe the morality of time by setting aside one day in seven to the Lord, but it has chosen to change that ceremonialization of that day from the seventh to the first.” This introduces us to the concept of why the day changed, which was moving away from the ceremonial mode of worship. But it still does not fully answer why it was changed. Ndjerareou (2006:111) answers this by saying that Christians moved the Sabbath to the first day because that is the day that Christ rose from the grave, and this is because Christ is the true rest of God. It needs to be said though that Christians do not “demonise” Saturday as a Sabbath, they just prefer to use the Sunday because it is the day that the saviour of the world resurrected to give those who believe in Him eternal life. Other than this reason, there is no other reason why Christians worship on a Sunday instead of a Saturday. Others then argue that this was a direct command from God, so what makes Christians not follow it if they truly love God. One may argue therefore that because Christ came into this world to fulfil the Law, it is in His resurrection that we find perfect rest.

With this command, one would perhaps suggest that there is no right or wrong in terms of the Sabbath day, it can either be a Saturday or a Sunday. What matters is that the day is set apart for the worship and reverence of God, where the worshipper also gets to rest. Childs (1974:416) says that the Sabbath day as a sign is a reminder to God and Israel of the eternal covenant relationship which purposed creation. This means that God created for a covenant relationship, and that is what

this command reminds and upholds. It is important therefore that we keep this day sacred and holy, set apart for God so we maintain the covenant relationship of the creation.

4.4 The Implications of the Relevance of the Commandments Today.

We come to the final section of the chapter, where we look at the implications of contemporary relevance of the Decalogue. Barclay (1973:17) says it is of paramount importance that mankind have the right conception of God because one will become like the deity they worship. This is because the way a person conducts themselves is highly reflective who or what an individual worships. This means that whatever we place above, or before God determines how we turn out, and this is especially true if we look at the gods worshipped in this generation, where people worship money so much, for instance, that it becomes their driving force and they neglect family because of it. The god they worship determined how their life turned out. But if one worships YHWH, the God of love and grace, they exude or exhibit those traits as well. Park (1952:980-981) says that if a god is really a god worth worshipping, then he cannot be dethroned by another god for a moment. The reason for this is that a true god will encompass all that the other god(s) offer. Park here argues that worship is all about the deity that one worships, and if the god one worships is not worth their full allegiance, then that deity might not be worth worshipping, to begin with because that god cannot satisfy the needs of the individual. This leaves us with a question then of whether or not, for some or another reason, we feel as though YHWH is not enough and cannot provide everything, hence placing other forms of deities before Him.

For us today we look at the potential gods that are worshipped, and this begs the question of whether people today understand who God is. To some degree,

people have the misconception of who God is and what He requires of people. People think God is this dictator who strikes you down when you do something wrong, so they simply stay away. Second people in our age know about the church and God's blessings, but only go to church when they are sick or need some kind of supernatural help. What this means is that God is first seen as a "service provider", who matters not after the service has been given. And in His faithfulness, God will give one their hearts desires when they invoke His name, sometimes regardless of their motives. This speaks to a construed image, something we probably all have, and understanding of who God is, and a dethroning of another god who cannot provide certain necessities.

The second Commandment, which is about idolatry and worship of idols. John (2000:243) quotes Chesterton when he said that when people stop believing, they actually do not stop believing, but they start believing in anything. What this agrees with is the concept of physics, that the world cannot take nor handle a void, once there is a void, something will fill it. People do not believe in God, but as we have seen above, they begin to believe in their own ability, or their money, or even friends and relatives. They allow something else to lord over their lives. Brueggemann (1994:844) argues that the Mosaic prohibition against idol worship has profound socio-political implications, because the issue of idol worship transcends theological or liturgical matters, but spills over into social, ideological and political practice. This takes us back to the first point, that a person is defined by the deity they worship. The social context of a community will be determined by the god the community worships. We think of a community of people whose lives revolve around making money and more money, their children are often raised by the television and they usually are ill-mannered because no one was there to teach them what is and what is not. In growing up, those children will probably grow up to be people whose lives are controlled by how much money they make, have in their bank accounts or can

make. They grow up knowing that is money, which is a god, is an answer to everything and gets them anything they desire. This is partly true, money can get one anything they want, but money also manages to destroy relationships, because the people that should matter the most come second to it.

The next word is that of vainly using or taking up the name of the Lord. Ryken (2003:88-89) says there are three ways that the name of God was misused in the ancient world, and these were in sorcery, in false prophecy and in swearing falsely in the scenario of court. All of these, if we seriously look at them are meant to prove to people that whoever is speaking is honest in what they are saying. God was speaking against this when He instructed His name not to be used. This is applicable to us today, where we use the name of God to make oaths that we break, and sometimes within minutes of making the oath. People use the Lord's name when they get married, they become unfaithful in marriages. People make oaths in the name and on the Word of God in courtrooms, then the moment they open their mouth to speak, they lie. Worse even, are the movies we watch today, where one finds the name of God either follows or is followed by a vulgar or derogatory word.

Brueggemann (1994:844) argues that the notion of ultimate human purpose is to glorify God, meaning that God is the end and not the means to an end. So using His name to selfishly achieve things is breaking the third command. He continues to say that this is a temptation we face because God can be easily used as an ideological tool. The challenge we find in the in the church today is the using of the name and Word of the Lord to make a living and get ahead, instead of it being a call. This is not to say that the church must not support its pastor, but it is to say that sometimes the name of God is used to coerce people into giving money. The name of God is used as a means to an end. Park (1952:983) says it seems as though the easiest way to shock someone into attention is to use a divine and authoritative

name, even though its effects wear off soon and what remains is boring blasphemy. What Park is actually saying here is that people are so hungry for attention that they simply use the divine name to command attention from others, and this, he says, borders on, if not blasphemy.

The last Commandment that this dissertation deals with is that of the Sabbath and that it must be kept holy. One of the most profound realizations on the Sabbath is one by Edwards (2002:119), when he says that when God rested on the seventh day, after saying it is very good was not just a statement that everything looked pretty, but God set a day to celebrate the fact that the world was in every way perfect. We need to take a moment and think about this statement. The problem with the world today is that we are too busy, even busier than what God intended for human beings. A person now works all seven days and never takes a day off to rest. But greater than this, we never take the time to appreciate what God has given us and what He has created, we take creation for granted, and maybe even the Creator. What we need to realize with the Sabbath is not that it is a Sunday or a Saturday, it is a day where a person takes time off to themselves and to God. according to Mosaic law and the Christian church the Sabbath falls on a Saturday and Sunday respectively, this means that on these days a person is challenged to sit back and look at all God has created and celebrate it, celebrate that God, through Christ, is perfecting the world. The debate on the Sabbath day we sometimes find ourselves in is in most cases unnecessary. The important thing regarding the day is that it be observed as a celebration of God, His handiwork and a day of rest and recuperation.

It might also be important to look at the meaning of the Decalogue as a collective, and how collectively, it may influence life. Individually, the laws of the Decalogue may mean something different to what the collective represents. Strawn (2014:3) presents such a case of looking at the Decalogue collectively and comes to

the conclusion the three factors⁷¹ about the Decalogue show how it is holy and is an ever-expanding guide for making life holy and that to hear the law properly is like meeting God face-to-face. The totality of the Decalogue, according to Strawn aids one's life to be holy, and this may be because they are laws that are given by a holy God and are given to a nation that is expected to uphold holiness. More than that, it is an encounter with God, where one gets to hear God's heart for His people. It is in the Ten Commandments that God outlines all that His heart and intentions are for the nation He has set apart for Himself.

McElroy (2009:1) argues that the scope of the commandments is one that can be understood as restricted to those who have experienced the grace and mercy of God. This means that the commandments are better applied to those who know and follow God, and those who have received His grace. One can almost say this is directed to believers today, those who live in the grace era, and that the words of the Decalogue, are still applicable to them. Long (2006:2) says the commandments in such a way that the first experience is freedom, then followed by a life ethically shaped around the experience of freedom. The obedience to the Decalogue is an expression of appreciation of the freedom that comes from God, and living by it is allowing God to ethically shape one's life. This happens first by obedience to God, and then by perfect worship, and eventually by living in harmony with those around you. Each of the commandments informs the next, and they are completely interdependent.

⁷¹ They take pole position in the legal material in which they appear, 2. They are repeated, and 3. They are the only words Israel receives directly from God's mouth, the rest are mediated.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

This dissertation has looked at a lot of concepts and thoughts by many scholars, both conservative and critical. It is thus important to try to synthesize all these thoughts and come out with a single stance. In this chapter, we will hear where the current author stands in terms of convictions concerning what has been discovered in the dissertation. How we will maybe approach it is by looking at each of the chapters and what they contained individually and collectively, how they tie together to speak to the Decalogue as a whole.

Firstly on the history of Israel as a nation, we find two approaches, which are both valid, and these are the biblical narrative of events and how they unfold, and one presented by more critical scholars. The former presents Israel as coming from a line of people through whom God worked and revealed Himself, with the first being Abraham, whom God called to start a nation that would be kept and guided by God. To this Patriarch, God made promises of land and a large people who would come through him, and God intended to fulfil in due time. God then made similar promises to both Abraham's son, Isaac and his grandson Jacob. Jacob and his children who went into Egypt because there was famine in the land they lived, while there was food in Egypt. The book of Exodus comes in after all this has happened and it now records the beginning of the fulfilment of these promises, where we first encounter Israel as growing in a foreign land and are now being oppressed by the leaders of Egypt. A few chapters later, we see God speaking to Moses and sending him to Egypt to liberate God's people and take them to the Promised Land, so the promise of land could be fulfilled. They are eventually liberated and the journey to a place

called Sinai where they meet with their liberating God who gives them the law and a guideline to living in the Promised Land in the form of the Decalogue.

The more critical scholars present this a bit differently. Firstly, they do not believe in the presence of the Patriarchs, they argue that these were an invention of the nation of Israel in an attempt to strengthen their history as a nation. This argument then discards more than half of the book of Genesis as a valid history for the nation of Israel. When it comes to the question of settlement, critical scholars argue that if there were those who entered Egypt it was because of normal transhumance activity or it was because of a vassal exchange or it was because of commercial ventures. With the exit, it is pegged as impossible that such a large crowd of people could have left Egypt, and there are various reasons for this argument. With the Decalogue itself, there also suggestions of when this document could have been written or became relevant, which is different from the time the Hebrew bible suggests.

First, we need to acknowledge how challenging it was dealing with this part of the Hebrew Bible because there are a lot of arguments that surround this section, which is quite valid because this is when the nation of Israel was formed or born. Perhaps we first need to recognise that the exodus event is highly contested, and rightly so, because there are a number of challenges in regards to it. The absence of evidence is probably the biggest challenge of them all because without evidence of the event it will be difficult to give it credibility. The fact that it is nowhere recorded in secular history that Israel left Egypt leaves us with a big problem and that the Hebrew Scriptures themselves do not tell us the names of the Pharaohs who both oppressed Israel and under whom the exodus event happened under. Next is the number of people who went out of Egypt, because the Bible records of six hundred thousand (600 000) men, which excluded women and children, and this number is

too large to go unrecorded in secular history. In defending this, conservative scholarship suggests that Egypt was embarrassed by the fact that slaves left their country and they, therefore, did not record it. This is may be understandable and maybe even valid, but Egypt's neighbours could have recorded this event because it had no bearing or effect on them.

There is also another argument presented by those who support the occurrence of the exodus event, and that is the fact that there are nations in the world that are known to have settled in certain areas, but did not leave evidence behind, such as the Slavs, the Celtics, the Vandals, to name but a few. They make this as a counter argument to the suggestion that even in Egypt itself, there is no evidence that such a large group of people settled in a specific area and had consequently left that area. This may not be a valid argument because history did record the fact that these peoples had settled in those areas nonetheless despite them not leaving any evidence behind, and with the Israelite nation, only the Hebrew bible reports this as happening. The Merneptah Stele, which is the first recording of the Hebrew nation talks of them as an already established nation under the rule of Egypt, the world superpower of the day. What this means then is that the Hebrew nation did feel the pinch of Egyptian rule, but it was perhaps not in Egypt, but in Canaan. We are then left with the question of where the oppression narrative came from, and the answer is perhaps that there is a historical kernel to the story of a certain group that did escape oppression in Egypt and made its way towards Canaan and met up with the larger group, and because their story was so powerful, it became a national story. Hence we have names that bear Egyptian origin, such as Moses, Phineas, and Miriam to support a kernel to the Egypt story. And perhaps another question one may ask at this point is why Israel would choose to have a history of slavery, something which was maybe something of an embarrassment in the ANE to descend from slaves.

There is then the Sinai event which was something that became pivotal for the nation of Israel, whether it was experienced by the whole nation or a fraction of the nation may be irrelevant. This is because regardless of the small facts on who it was who experienced the event, it became a defining story for the whole nation, and one cannot describe or talk about Israelite history without talking about what happened at Sinai. At Sinai, Israel received the law and it was where God made a covenant with the nation of Israel, the He shall be their God and they shall be His people. At Sinai, YHWH did not create a new covenant with Israel, but He cemented the relationship that already existed between Himself and the Patriarchs. What perhaps was done for the first time is the giving of the law, which would help govern the nation of Israel in the land that YHWH was going to give to them as an inheritance, as promised to the Patriarchs. Sinai was also known as the mountain of YHWH, where God dwelt and would be visited throughout the history of the nation, as years later the Hebrew Bible records that Elijah met the Lord there. This then perhaps sent us to the next point, that of the origin of YHWH worship.

It is true that the origin of YHWH worship may have been one of the more complex issues we looked at in this dissertation, because of the question of where and when Israel may have encountered YHWH. The question becomes whether He was a God they already knew before Egypt or was He a God they met post-slavery as a liberator God. The reason we asked this question is because it seems that the first time Israel comes to know of YHWH is when Moses introduces Him at the liberation of Israel from slavery. We do acknowledge here that even though in the biblical narrative, perhaps from the book of Genesis, the name YHWH had been invoked, but Israel only starts calling Him by this name after Egypt, which may mean they only got to know Him or of Him after Egypt. This may be in support of some suggestions that YHWH was a deity that was worshiped by the Midianites where Moses had found a wife and has encountered YHWH through his father-in-law Jethro

who was a priest in Midian and by extension a priest of YHWH. A counter suggestion we saw to this, something that YHWH actually says Himself when He introduces His name, is that YHWH had always been the God of Israel, through her Patriarchs, but He was not known by His name YHWH but was known by other names, names which represented a promise. The name YHWH then came and represented the fulfilment of those promises made to the Patriarchs. The name YHWH stood for the ever present and promise fulfilling God.

Chapter 2 covered what happened around the giving of the Decalogue and not necessarily the Decalogue itself, and it is in chapters 3 and 4 that we zoned in on the Decalogue itself and what it potentially meant, both for its first recipients and for us today. But before we could look at the individual commandments we looked at perhaps the build up to the giving of the commandments. Israel in its formative period went through a lot, having lived in Egypt for so many years and was exposed to their religious style, they were bound to pick up a few things that God did not want in a nation that belongs to Him and one that is called by His name. Not only did they pick these things up in Egypt alone but also from other nations in the ANE, so God needed to set His by giving them a set of guidelines to help them live right both in relation to Him and to each other.

In chapter 2 we discovered the strong relationship between the first and second commandments and that they, to some degree, complement each other. The first two commandments are concerned with who Israel, and by extension who we today, worship because it prescribes that there be no other deity placed before or made more important than YHWH. What we saw with the first command is that God is saying that He does not want to compete for the allegiance of those who claim to follow or worship Him, so the command “You shall have no other gods” is YHWH saying He will not be made to scramble or compete for our worship. The second

commandment is concerned with images or idols, and bowing down or submitting to them. We saw an argument to the effect that Israel should not have images made of anything in the created order that they use as a representation of God, simply because nothing in all of creation is adequate enough to represent YHWH. The issue with the day and age we live in today is there are a lot of things we place before God, be it our titles, our possessions, our education or even our families. Once these draw our attention away from God, they consequently become more important than God, and they themselves become other gods. One may then argue that we do not bow down to them, but the truth is if it takes away from your worship time or stops you from worship, they have become more important than the God you are meant to worship. What perhaps was even more radical with these commands is that they were what set Israel apart from their neighbours because they lived during a polytheistic time, and not only polytheistic but used images to represent their gods.

The third commandment is concerned with how we worship and what we say. God in this commandment warns against the misuse of His name, and that those who do misuse it will not be held guiltless. We found that in the ANE knowing someone's personal name meant having some sort of leverage or hold over them, so with Israel now having been given the personal name of God, they knew a very authoritative name. God then was saying that now that they knew His name, they were not to use for their own personal and selfish gain. It remains true even today that the name of God has a lot of authority and carries a lot of weight, so those who use the name of the God but use it in vain achieve the desired results, regardless of their motives. One remembers the words of Jesus in Matthew 7:22 that it is not every person that calls on the name of God that works for God, but others do it for their own selfish reasons. As powerful as the name of the God was when it was given to Moses, it is still as powerful today.

The fourth commandment is concerned with the day of rest that God ordained, it is about the Sabbath. God instructs here that there needs to be observed a day of rest, where all activities cease for both man and beast. This command is concerned about when we worship. God commands that the seventh day should be set apart for God and His worship, and we should be sure to observe this day because God Himself rested on the seventh day. Admittedly, the seventh day of the week is on a Saturday, so the question becomes why the church meets on a Sunday, the first day. The answer we found was that the church uses the day of the resurrection of Jesus who represents the new covenant we have with God. Some may even push this point to suggest that the day we worship does not matter because we live in a less legalistic society than Israel, but what is important is that the Sabbath is kept.

The real struggle of this dissertation has been placing the relevance of the Decalogue, and mainly finding out when in the history they became relevant. Some suggestions, especially for the first two commands was during the times of Hosea and Josiah respectively, who in their own ministry and service, they introduced or enforced these commands. What we can walk away with from the ministry of Hosea is that even though we live in a time and age where there are a number of things that may draw us away from God, but we need to make the effort to stay faithful to God. From Josiah, we can take away that there are many images that have been used to represent God or Jesus, but we need to refrain from attaching significance to them. Israel had started using the serpent God had instructed Moses to make in the desert as a god, perhaps because they saw it as what saved them.

Still, these suggestions could not help us place when the Decalogue became significant in the life of Israel as a nation, and perhaps this was the aim of the Decalogue, because it is relevant throughout the ages, and cannot be confined to

one century, era, or generation, because if it could, then its timelessness might cease to be.

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