
The Ten Commandments

Introduction: Part 1

by: Ronald L. Dart

The world can be a very confusing place, can't it? It isn't always easy to know the right thing to do, the right road to take, the right decision to make. Most of us, most of the time, want to do the right thing. At least we want to think we want to do the right thing.

The problem is in the modern world, the right thing to do seems to keep shifting ground on us. Today it's one way and a year ago it was another way.

There's no constant standard, no absolute truth, some people want to tell us.

Absolutes

The problem is, that life and death really are absolutes. When the chest pains come on you, and they have yelled, "Clear" and try to shock you back to life and failed, and when they have pulled that sheet up over your face, you are absolutely dead.

Sickness, poverty, slavery, disease, hunger, these are real absolutes in the world, so don't tell me there are no absolutes. If you lose your job, you are absolutely out of work. And when you spend your last dime and have exhausted all your credit, you are absolutely broke.

So how come, we hear people telling us there are no absolutes when we know better. Why should anyone be so stupid as to believe there aren't rules of life somewhere that make the difference between life and death, sickness and health, wealth and poverty, when you see these absolutes, in your face, every day, all around you.

Oh, I know, time and chance account for a lot of man's troubles, but on the whole, there's a way that leads to life, and there's a way that leads to death and intuitively most of us know that. We just aren't very clear about what those absolutes might be. When you come to the crossroads, how can you know which road to take?

What Standards Should We Look To?

There was a group of men on this continent, many generations ago, who found themselves at the crossroads. They were sick to death of an oppressive regime from overseas, the British Crown. They were sick to death of the taxation. They were sick to death of the arrogant way they were being treated by the British government and they wanted a change. The situation was desperate. It was confusing. It was dangerous. Some of the men wanted independence from England and others wanted to remain loyal to the Crown, and they were already in revolution and at war long before July 4, 1776.

The question they had to answer was a fundamental question. Perhaps the most fundamental question of all, what was the right thing to do and what was the wrong thing and more important, how could they know? What kind of a standard could they look to? What actually made something right? What made one course of action right? What made the other course wrong? Was it merely the question of what worked and what didn't? Was it a question of might making right? Well, if that was the case, Britain was right, and the American colonies were wrong, and they should have sat down and shut up, but they didn't want to do that.

They debated this for months, or years really, and when they finally boiled it all down and they sat down and started to put it down on paper, the issue at last became clear to them.

There were standards, and there was a source for those standards that they could look to.

Endowed by Their Creator

"We do hold these truths to be self evident," they wrote, "that all men were created equal and were endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights: life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

All men were created, and they were endowed by their Creator. So where do the rights and wrongs come from? Where does the knowledge of the right way, the standards of life, which road we take at the crossroads come from? How do we know? We know from our Creator. We derive our rights from the One who made us, we derive our sense of right and wrong from the Creator and our nation's founding fathers sat down and wrote the document, the 'Declaration of Independence', followed by the 'Constitution of the United States.' All of this was put together on the presumption that there was a right way to do things and a wrong way to do things, and that those rights and wrongs were defined by the Creator.

An Ancient People Enslaved by A Despotic Power

Something like this had happened before to a people, who because of the ebb and flow of history, had found themselves enslaved to despotic power and had been in slavery for hundreds of years. Generation after generation. Every single person who was there, had been born in slavery, their parents had been born in slavery, their grandparents had been born in slavery. They

knew no one, who knew what it was like, to be a free man among their people. In their case, they were trapped. They had no way out. The 'Declaration of Independence' would have gotten them no where.

In their case, God himself had to intervene and rescue them. The people were the children of Israel. Their captors were the Egyptians, Pharaoh in particular. The story is one of the most dramatic in the history of man.

It is a story that you are probably fairly familiar with, from things like the movie, the 'Ten Commandments', or the animated version of it, the 'Prince of Egypt,' where we learn the story of how the Israelites were delivered from Egypt.

Miraculously, not by a Declaration of Independence, but by God who then told them, there is a way to life and a way to death and you ought to choose life.

How Did Israel Become Slaves?

The story of how free people can become slaves is a sobering story and it is of value giving attention to. We have a man named Jacob, whose name eventually was changed to Israel. He had 12 sons who became the 12 tribes of Israel. This is all very familiar to our contemporary culture. They went down into Egypt, just a handful of people, about 70 or so in their families altogether (Genesis 46:26-27). They were a free people, and they had favor with the Pharaoh and with the Egyptian people. They gave them a section of country to live in, Goshen (Genesis 47:6). Joseph, one of Jacob's sons had really saved Egypt entirely as a nation and had made them great through a time of seven years of plenty and seven years of famine, so they were good people in the eyes of the Egyptians (Genesis 47).

But in the process of time, they multiplied. They grew. They were a strong, active, outdoor agricultural people. The Egyptians were inactive, they went to war, but they were an indoor people by and large. Their population was in decline, not entirely different from the population of the United States right now.

The Israelites, on the other hand, were having kids and having kids and having more kids. This became a major political problem in Egypt. In the process of time, that Pharaoh died, another Pharaoh rose up, who didn't feel he owed Joseph, or Joseph's people anything. And this is where the trouble began to arise (Exodus 1:8).

Pharaoh and his counselors began to talk this over and they said (Exodus 1:9-10), "Look, the people of the children of Israel are more and they are stronger than we are, in other words, Israel had grown to the place to where they had out populated the Egyptians in their own country. He said, "Let's deal shrewdly with these people. We are going to have to be really careful because they are going to multiply, and it is going to happen in the event of a war, they might turn around and join our enemies and fight against us and we would be helpless if that happened. {11} So they began to set taskmasters over them. They began to put them to more work and to afflict them with their burdens and

The Israelites built supply cities for Pharaoh, Pithon and Raamses. The problem was, the more the Egyptians afflicted them, the more Israel multiplied and grew (Exodus 1:12-14).

It got to the place where the Egyptians were in absolute dread and fear of the children of Israel. It just wasn't working. They thought, let's put them to work and keep them busy so they don't have so much time to multiply, but you know how it is: You work all day long. You hate your job. You're tired. You come home at night and the only joy in life is, your wife and your bed and the result, more kids.

So, the problem began to become really serious. So, the Egyptians afflicted the Israelites more. And the more they afflicted, the more they grew. They made their lives bitter with hard bondage and mortar and brick and all manner of service in the field.

Because you see, Pharaoh and his people were the ones that had the weapons and the Army. The Israelites did not. So, the Egyptians were able to force their will, to make complete and total slaves out of the Israelite people.

Hebrew Midwives

The King of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives and he told them, (Exodus 1:15-21) "When you do your duties as a midwife for the Hebrew women and you see them on the birthing stools, if it is a son, you whack his head against the stone at the bottom of the stool and kill him. If it is a daughter, then you can let her live."

What a thing to tell a midwife. You know, if you think in terms of what those women do, of holding their hands and bringing babies into the world and helping women with these babies and putting them to the breast and the Pharaoh was asking the midwives to kill babies as they come out of the womb.

Well, not hardly, the midwives feared God, and they wouldn't do it. They saved the male children alive.

The king of Egypt, not being the sort of guy who really liked to have his word denied, called them in and said to them, "Why are you doing this? Why are you saving all these men children alive? The midwives, being no fools, had their answer ready. They said, "The Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women." A slight put down. "They are lively, and they give birth before the midwives can even get to them." So, God dealt well with the midwives and the people multiplied and they grew even more in population.

I don't know how long this took, but it went on for a long time. "It came to be, because the midwives feared God, He really took care of them."

Pharaoh's Command

Then Pharaoh said to all of his people, "Every son that is born of the Israelite slaves, I want you to throw him into the river to the crocodiles. You can save the daughters alive" (Exodus 1:22).

Wow. You have to understand something at this point, this is going to become a Holocaust, this is attempted genocide. They were really wanting to put a stop to the development of the Israelite people entirely. The women posed no great threat. They could make them household servants, slaves and concubines. Whatever they wanted to do with them, but they didn't want any more Israelite boys. Kill them all. And so, they did.

Now there was a man of the house of Levi (Exodus 2), who had a wife, one of the daughters of Levi. Levi was the 'would become' priestly tribe of Israel. So, his wife conceived and bore a son, and when she saw that he was a beautiful child, she hid him for three months and when she couldn't hide him any longer, she knew that she was going to have to do something or he would be crocodile bait. So, she took some bulrushes and made an ark and dabbed it with asphalt and pitch, so it would float, put the child in it and laid it in the reed bed by the river bank. His sister stood a long way off to know what would become of this child.

Well it's a familiar story (Exodus 2:5), the daughter of Pharaoh found the baby. She adopted the baby, took him into her household and Moses became a reality. The man that would actually deliver the Israelites from Egyptian bondage.

Now there is one fact out of this story up to this point, I want you to remember, and never forget. The Pharaoh commanded ALL his people saying, "Every son who is born, you will cast them into the river to the crocodiles" (Exodus 1:22). What this means is, that the Egyptian people as a whole, all of them were complicit (participating in a wrongful act) in the killing of hundreds, perhaps thousands of Hebrew boy babies. You want to remember this, when the time comes that God turns the river to blood for the Egyptians. This act is a criminal act of genocide and cannot go without justice or God would not be God.

Pharaoh's Daughter

It was Pharaoh's daughter who gave this little boy the name Moses. She named him that, she said, "Because I drew him out of the water", so his name is connected to that event (Exodus 2:5-10).

Moses grew up in Pharaoh's household and somehow in the course of time he knew that he was a Hebrew. How? We are not told.

Moses Flees to Midian

We are told that one day (Exodus 2:11-25), when Moses was grown, he went out to his brethren, and looked at their burden and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his brethren, so he looked this way and he looked that way and no one was around, so he killed the Egyptian and buried him in the sand. Now he didn't do that, out of sheer mercy toward a slave.

He knew that this was one of his brothers. How could that have been? Well as it turned out, his mother had nursed him as a baby. Pharaoh's daughter never knew it was his mother, but Moses' sister saw her take him from the river and went to Pharaoh's daughter and said, "I can get you a nursemaid to nurse the little child," and she said, "Okay, do that for me", so she went and got

Moses' mother and so the connection with his family, with his sister, and his mother was known to him. Probably from the time he could remember anything. So, he knew who he was and knew what he was.

There came an appointed time when he couldn't take it anymore. Well, a couple days after he killed this Egyptian, two Hebrew men were fighting, and he said to the one who did the wrong, "What are you fighting for?" And the man turned to him and said, "Who made you a Prince and a judge over us? Do you intend to kill me like you did the Egyptian?" Moses feared and said, "Surely this thing is known." Well of course it was known, how could he have imagined it would not become known.

He saved a man's life, by killing a man. Does he think that man would never tell anyone what he had done? But that's when the reality of it came home.

Pharaoh heard of it, and he was going to kill Moses, so Moses fled into the land of Midian and sat down by a well. And here is where he actually meets the woman who would become his wife, and his future father-in-law. It's where he will find himself a career as a herder of sheep among these people, and in the course of time, 40 years, he will meet God. The story of this encounter is enough to raise the hair on your neck.

Moses and the Burning Bush

Moses was wondering along the mountainside (Exodus 3), keeping track of the sheep. It was his job and as he walked along the mountainside, he saw a bush that was on fire, but the bush wasn't being consumed by the fire. He stood there and watched it, the fire continued, but the bush wasn't being harmed and Moses said, "I think I had better take a closer look at this." He turned aside to look and see what was happening and when God saw that he had turned aside, He said, "Moses, Moses!" Moses said, "I'm here." God said, "Don't come any closer. Take your sandals off your feet, the place where you stand is holy ground."

What Moses thought about this, we are not told, I'm sure he took his sandals off immediately and stood barefoot before God. God said, "I am the God of your fathers, I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob."

Moses hid his face because he was afraid to look upon God, and the LORD said, "I've seen the oppression of my people in Egypt, and I have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows" (Exodus 3:7).

After all these years and after all that had happened, after all the pain and all the suffering, these people still knew to pray, God still considered them His people, and He heard their prayer. He said, "I'm going to do something about it. I've come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, to bring them from there to a good land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites and the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites," all of these Canaanite tribes.

"Now therefore, behold the cry of the children of Israel has come to me, and I've seen what the Egyptians have done to them" (Exodus 3:9).

What God has to mean by that is, He saw all the babies being thrown into the Nile River. He saw the Egyptians killing them. He saw them cutting babies throats. He saw it all.

God said, {10} "I am going to do something about this." "I'm going to send you down to Pharaoh that you can bring my people, the children of Israel out of Egypt, and Moses said to God, {11} "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?"

Now this is really interesting because, and you will run into this with Moses again and again. He's identified in the Bible as a very meek man (Numbers 12:3), but you know, I don't know how you feel about this, but if I were in a situation where I saw God in a vision, or I saw a burning bush somewhere and God was talking to me out of the bush, I don't know if I would say "No" to God. I don't know, if He said to go do this, I think I would probably just go do it.

Moses said, {11} "Uh, who am I that I should go to Pharaoh. I can't do this sort of thing."

You can kind of understand where Moses is coming from, because of all the places in all of the world that Moses did not want to go, Egypt would have been number one on the list because of what had happened there and the fact that Pharaoh wanted him dead.

So how, Moses thought, could I possibly go back there? How could I possibly bring these people out? God said, {12} "I'll be with you. This shall be a sign to you that I have sent you. When you bring the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain." And Moses said to God, {13} "Okay, when I come to the children of Israel and say, "The God of your fathers has sent me unto you," and they say to me, "What is his name?" What shall I tell them?" {14} And God said to Moses, "I am who I am" and He said, "Thus shall you say to the children of Israel, "I am has sent you.""

Now this all falls very strangely on our ears. Because what God is doing in this particular situation is, He is saying to Moses, "My name is the first person singular of the verb 'to be' of existence. "I am." You could add all kinds of words around this, you could say always have been, always will be. or whatever you want to add to it.

But God says, "My name is "I am." And what is really significant about this is that, the first person singular of the verb 'to be', that is to exist, exists in all languages. It is completely translatable in whatever language you want to turn to.

God said, "You go tell them, "I am" has sent me unto you." He went on beyond that, "Tell the children of Israel this, {15} "The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is my name for ever, and it is my memorial to all generations. In fact, no matter when, no matter where, no matter what language you are, no matter what culture you are in, "I am" translates.

"Now go," {16} "and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, "The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob appeared to me saying, "I have visited you and have seen what is done to you in the land of Egypt, and I have said, "I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites," {18} "to a land flowing with milk and honey." They will listen to your voice and you will come, and the elders of Israel will come before the King of Egypt, and you are going to tell the King of Egypt." What?

Now I know what Moses is thinking. Right? I'm going to go before the King of Egypt. Am I going to tell the King of Egypt anything?

God goes on, {18} "You shall say to him, "The LORD God of the Hebrews has met with us and now please, (be very polite about this,) let us go three days journey into the wilderness that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God, {19} But I am sure the King of Egypt will not let you go, not even by a mighty hand, so I'm going to stretch out my hand and smite Egypt with all my wonders which I'll do in their midst and after that, he will let you go."

God's Outline for Moses

God just simply outlined it for Moses, here's the plan, you are going to go down there and you are going to tell him, "We want to go three days journey into the wilderness to sacrifice to God."

It was important that they get away from the Egyptians because if they started killing the animals with the Egyptians around watching, it would have generated a riot, because some of these animals were gods to the Egyptians, so they have to go out of Egypt, to do this.

Now the plan is this, he will not let you go. Common sense tells you, that he's going to laugh in your face and say "No" and the result of this is, I am going to systematically demonstrate all my wonders and my power and when it's all said and done, he will let you go. And I'll give this people, Israel, favor in the sight of the Egyptians and it shall be, when you do go out, you won't go out empty-handed. They are going to give you silver, gold and clothing, you are actually going to plunder the Egyptians (Exodus 3:19-22).

Moses is still trying to get his mind around this, but you see, the Israelites have worked for the Egyptian people for hundreds of years now, for generation after generation, and they paid them nothing. They owed every bit of this to the Israelites. The Egyptians had killed all the Hebrew boy babies for years. There is going to have to be justice for this. They are going to have to pay or the books will never be balanced. No one will ever believe that God is God or that God is a God of justice if he's willing to allow the Egyptians to get off scot free with what they have done.

The Penalty of Egypt's Sins

The penalty they will suffer, will be a succession of 10 terrible plagues which will absolutely destroy the economy of Egypt, and in the end, they will lose, not every male child, but every firstborn male child of the Egyptians will die.

Now Moses, well Moses is not convinced. He said, "But suppose they will not believe me or not listen to my voice" (Exodus 4:1).

I think that's a very good question. Moses walked in amongst these Israelites here and tells them this. I don't know if I would believe him. They would say, "The LORD has not appeared to you. Why should we believe the Lord has appeared to you?" Moses thought this was a sensible question.

God said, {2} "What have you got in your hand?" Moses said, "A rod, a staff." God said, "Throw it on the ground." So, he threw it on the ground and all of a sudden it was not a rod. it was a snake. Moses backed away from it as fast as he could. God said, "No, no. reach out your hand and take it by the tail." Right? "You and me LORD."

Well, Moses reached out, caught it by the tail and it turned into a staff again in his hand. "Okay," God said, "This is so they may believe that the LORD God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac the God of Jacob, has appeared to you."

"Now, put your hand into your bosom" (Exodus 4:6), and he put his hand inside his garment, in his bosom, and when he took it out, it was leprous like snow. God said, "Put it back in there again." And he did and when he brought it out, it was restored like his other hand. God said, "If they don't believe the first sign, then they will believe the second sign."

Now I don't know what Moses was thinking right here, but I have an idea, he wasn't convinced that a couple of quick magic tricks was going to do the job.

The late Ronald L. Dart was a Christian evangelist whose teachings still inspire thousands of people around the world. His legacy spans decades. For more information about the teachings of Ronald L. Dart, visit RLDEA.com where you will find booklets, articles, sermons, Bible studies, and books by Mr. Dart.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you find it interesting that the more the Egyptians afflicted the Israelites the more the Israelite population grew?
2. What can we learn from the Hebrew midwives?
3. Have you ever thought about the fact that all Egyptians were to comply to throwing the Hebrew boys into the Nile? What does that say about Pharaoh's daughter?
4. What is your opinion of Moses' reaction to God when God tells him to go back to Egypt?

5. Some of us may think we would have behaved differently than Moses if we were asked to do something by God in such a miraculous way, however, have you ever allowed fear to keep you from doing what you knew God wanted you to do?
6. If so, what happened?
7. We know the absolute truth that God never changes, so why do we have ‘Moses’ moments where we doubt His power?
8. Do you learn something new every time you read the story of Israel in Exodus?
9. What is your favorite lesson to learn from this story?
10. Why do you think God commanded Israel, and in a way us, to tell this story to our children?