

Welcome to 10 Minute Topics

This week's topic is: Noachide Laws

Bereishit – Chapter 9

G-D'S COVENANT WITH NOAH

(1) And G-d blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them: 'Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth. (2) And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, and upon all wherewith the ground teems, and upon all the fishes of the sea: into your hand are they delivered. (3) Every moving thing that lives shall be for food for you; as the green herb have I given you all. (4) Only flesh, with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat. (5) And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it; and at the hand of man, even at the hand of every man's brother, will I require the life of man. (6) Whoso sheds man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of G-d made He man. (7) And you, be ye fruitful, and multiply; swarm, in the earth, and multiply therein.' (8) And G-d spoke unto Noah, and to his sons with him, saying: (9) 'And for Me, behold, I establish My covenant with you, and with your seed after you; (10) and with every living creature that is with you, the fowl, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you; of all that go out of the ark, even every beast of the earth. (11) And I will establish My covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of the flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth.'

RAINBOW AND THE ETERNAL COVENANT

(12) And G-d said; 'This is the token of the covenant which I make between Me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: (13) I have set My bow in the cloud and it shall be for a token of a covenant between Me and the earth. (14) And it shall come to pass, when I bring clouds over the earth, and the bow is seen in the cloud, (15) that I will remember My covenant, which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh. (16) And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between G-d and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth.' (17) And G-d said unto Noah: 'This is the token of the covenant which I have established between Me and all flesh that is upon the earth.' (18) And the sons of Noah, that went forth from the ark, were Shem, and Ham, and Japheth; and Ham is the father of Canaan. (19) These three were the sons of Noah, and of these was the whole earth overspread.

A covenant is defined as an agreement. G-d gave Noah and all his descendants (B'nei Noach or "children of Noah") seven commandments that they are to obey. These seven commandments are symbolized by the seven colors of the rainbow. These Seven Commandments (mitzvot) are not arbitrary laws, but rather G-d's plan for mankind. Adherence to this moral code guarantees harmony among us, with the rest of Creation, and with G-d. Non-Jews who (1) reject all idolatrous ideas and accept the kingship of the One G-d, (2) accept the priesthood of the Jewish people as the guardians and teachers of Torah, and (3) commit to following the seven

commandments revealed to Noah are called B'nei Noach (aka Noachides) or "Children of Noah." The Rambam's (Maimonides) commentary in The Laws of Kings 8:11 reads: "Anyone who accepts upon himself the fulfillment of these Seven Mitzvot [commandments] and is precise in their observance is considered one of the righteous among the nations and will merit a share in the World to Come." B'nei Noach are permitted to keep any of the 613 mitzvot given to the Jews with these exceptions:

- 1) Observing Shabbat in the same manner as the Jews;
- 2) Observing the Jewish holy days in the same manner as the Jews;
- 3) Studying the parts of the Mishnah/ Talmud that are not related to the B'nei Noach mitzvot;
- 4) Writing a Torah Scroll;
- 5) Receiving an aliyah;
- 6) Making, writing, or wearing tefillin

Law #1: Prohibition of idolatry and Law #2: Prohibition of blasphemy

These can be derived from Genesis 4:26 - 'And as for Seth, to him also a son was born, and he named him Enosh. Then to call in the Name of Hashem became profaned.' This is a reference to the beginnings of idolatry, which in and of itself is a form of blasphemy. This verse is saying that calling out in prayer to anything but Hashem profanes Hashem's name (Blasphemy). These people call to idols - whether natural phenomena or actual wood and stone.

Idolatry

1. Against entertaining the thought that there exists a deity except Hashem. (Exodus 20:3)
2. Against making any graven image. (Exodus 20:4)
3. Against making idols for use by others. (Exodus 20:4)
4. Against making any forbidden statues. (Exodus 20:20)
5. Against bowing to any idol. (Exodus 20:5)
6. Against worshipping idols in any of their customary manners of worship. (Exodus 20:5)
7. Against causing our children to pass [through the fire] in the worship of Molech. (Leviticus 18:21)
8. Against practicing Ov (sorcery). (Leviticus 19:26)
9. Against practicing Yiddoni (fortune-telling). (Leviticus 19:31)
10. Against turning to idolatry. (Leviticus 19:4)

Blasphemy

1. To acknowledge the existence of Hashem. (Exodus 20:2; Deuteronomy 5:6)
2. To fear Hashem. (Deuteronomy 6:13; 10:20)
3. To pray to Hashem. (Exodus 23:25; Deuteronomy 6:13)
4. To sanctify Hashem's name. (Leviticus 22:32)
5. Against desecrating Hashem's name. (Leviticus 22:32)
6. To study the Torah. (Deuteronomy 6:7)
7. To honor the scholars, and to revere one's teacher. (Leviticus 19:32)
8. Against blaspheming. (Leviticus 22:32)

Law #3: Prohibition of theft

Clearly stated in Genesis 6:11 as one of the direct reasons for the flood... 'and the earth became filled with robbery'. This prohibition can also be derived from Eve taking the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. Hashem instructed them not to eat of it...i.e. it was His property. When they did eat, they in effect stole the fruit and received their due punishment.

1. Against stealing. (Leviticus 19:11)
2. Against committing robbery. (Leviticus 19:11)
3. Against shifting a landmark. (Deuteronomy 19:14)
4. Against cheating. (Leviticus 19:13)
5. Against repudiating a claim of money owed. (Leviticus 19:13)
6. Against overcharging. (Leviticus 19:13)
7. Against coveting. (Exodus 20:14)
8. Against desiring. (Deuteronomy 5:18)
9. A laborer shall be allowed to eat of the fruits among which he works. (Deuteronomy 23:25-26)
10. Against a laborer eating of such fruit. (Deuteronomy 23:26)
11. Against a laborer taking of such fruit home. (Deuteronomy 23:25)
12. Against kidnapping. (Exodus 20:13)
13. Against the use of false weights & measures. (Leviticus 19:35)
14. Against the possession of false weights & measures. (Deuteronomy 25:13-14)
15. That one shall be exact in the use of weights and measures. (Leviticus 19:36)
16. That the robber shall return the stolen object. (Leviticus 5:23)

Law #4: Prohibition of murder

This one is pretty simple. Cain kills Abel...Cain is punished. And again in Genesis 4:23-24 Lamech rues over the punishment he will receive for committing an accidental murder. Also Genesis 9:6 'Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man his blood shall be shed...' This also is a reference to the establishment of courts...if one commits murder, then it is up to the courts to convict and punish.

1. Against any person murdering anyone. (Exodus 20:13)

Law #5: Prohibition of sexual misconduct

This mitzvot is derived primarily from the relationship between Adam and Eve. Eve is created as a 'helpmate' to Adam. Together, they are given the command to 'be fruitful and multiply' - Genesis 1:28. Thus, sexual conduct within a husband/wife relationship is sanctified and all other types of sexual conduct are not sanctified. Two examples of the consequences of this are the stories of Eve and Lamech. The serpent's attempted seduction of Eve shows that there is a prohibition of sexual conduct between a human and an animal – as well as forbidding affairs. The story of Lamech's wives Adah and Zillah (it is derived that at that time men would take two wives...one to bear them children and the other for fun) also points toward this mitzvah. Zillah was the one for fun as evidenced by her giving birth to Tubal-Cain where Genesis 4:22 says 'And Zillah too'. A Midrash brings down that it was through Tubal-Cain that Lamech came to slay Cain...and then in his grief, killed Tubal-Cain. (In Genesis 23 Lamech says: 'Have I slain a man by my wound and a child by my bruise?' Lamech was blind ...the man was Cain [a target identified by Tubal-Cain] and the child, Tubal-Cain himself.) Then in chapter 6, we see that as a

result of the 'sons of rulers' who take whatever women they chose, Hashem issues the decree that in 120 years, He will destroy mankind (Genesis 6:3). And again in Genesis 6:12 '...for all flesh had corrupted its way upon the earth'.

1. Against having union with his mother. (Leviticus 18:7)
2. Against having union with his sister. (Leviticus 18:9)
3. Against having union with the wife of his father. (Leviticus 18:8)
4. Against having union with another man's wife. (Leviticus 18:20)
5. Against copulating with a beast. (Leviticus 18:23)
6. Against a woman copulating with a beast. (Leviticus 18:23)
7. Against lying carnally with a male. (Leviticus 18:22)
8. Against lying carnally with his father. (Leviticus 18:7)
9. Against lying carnally with his father's brother. (Leviticus 18:14)
10. Against engaging in erotic conduct that may lead to a prohibited union. (Leviticus 18:6)

Law #6: Prohibition of eating live meat

This seventh law is clearly stated in Genesis 9:4 'But flesh, with its soul its blood you shall not eat.'

1. Against eating a limb severed from a living animal, beast, or fowl. (Deuteronomy 12:23)
2. Against eating the flesh of any animal which was torn by a wild beast which, in part, prohibits the eating of such flesh as was torn off an animal while it was still alive. (Deuteronomy 14:21)

Law #7: Prohibition of failing to establish courts of justice

From Genesis 1:28 '...and rule over the fish of the sea, the bird of the sky and every living thing that moves on the earth.' Also we see throughout that Hashem acts as a court when He chooses to intervene. Also, we see in chapter 6 that a hierarchy of people had been established. Although those rulers were evil, as the chapter delineates, the idea of the system is good in two ways...one it emulates Hashem's court and two, later on Moses (with Hashem's permission) sets up a justice system so that a single individual is not faced with all the legal questions (and also to help prevent a single person from becoming a tyrant). Also Genesis 9:6...see above in Prohibition of murder.

1. To appoint judges and officers in each and every community. (Deuteronomy 16:18)
2. To treat the litigants equally before the law. (Leviticus 19:15)
3. To inquire diligently into the testimony of a witness. (Deuteronomy 13:15)
4. Against the wanton miscarriage of justice by the court. (Leviticus 19:15)
5. Against the judge accepting a bribe or gift from a litigant. (Exodus 23:8)
6. Against the judge showing marks of honor to but one litigant. (Leviticus 19:15)
7. Against the judge acting in fear of a litigant's threats. (Deuteronomy 1:17)
8. Against the judge, out of compassion, favoring a poor litigant. (Exodus 23:3; Leviticus 19:15)
9. Against the judge discriminating against the litigant because he is a sinner. (Exodus 23:6)
10. Against the judge, out of softness, putting aside the penalty of a mauler or killer. (Leviticus 19:15)
11. Against the judge discriminating against a stranger or an orphan. (Deuteronomy 24:17)
12. Against the judge hearing one litigant in the absence of another. (Exodus 23:1)

13. Against appointing a judge who lacks knowledge of the Law. (Deuteronomy 1:17)
14. Against incrimination by circumstantial evidence. (Exodus 23:7)
15. Against punishing for a crime committed under duress. (Deuteronomy 22:26)
16. That the court is to administer the death penalty by the sword. (Exodus 21:20; Leviticus 24:21)
17. Against anyone taking the law into his own hands to kill the perpetrator of a capital crime. (Numbers 35:12)
18. To testify in court. (Leviticus 5:1)
19. Against testifying falsely. (Exodus 20:13)

Text based on “The Holy Scriptures” – Jewish Publication Society, 1917

*The usage of G-d and L-rd is in compliance with the command to not take the Name of G-d in vain or to erase His Name. If you print out these pages, please treat them with respect. If you need to get rid of them, please take them to a synagogue and ask that they be reused or placed in a geniza.

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