

A CRITICAL AND HISTORICAL APPROACH TO THE  
STUDY OF THE BIBLE

LECTURE SERIES BY RABBI ADAM MINTZ  
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*SOURCE MATERIALS DISTRIBUTED  
AT NOVEMBER 5<sup>TH</sup> LECTURE,*

*“THE HISTORY OF THE BIBLE I:  
WHAT REALLY HAPPENED AT SINAI?”*

the people capable men who fear God, trustworthy men who spurn ill-gotten gain. Set these over them as chiefs of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens, and let them judge the people at all times. Have them bring every major dispute to you, but let them decide every minor dispute themselves. Make it easier for yourself by letting them share the burden with you. 21 If you do this—and God so commands you—you will be able to bear up, and all these people too will go home unwearied."

24 Moses heeded his father-in-law and did just as he had said. 25 Moses chose capable men out of all Israel, and appointed them heads over the people—chiefs of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens; 26 and they judged the people at all times: the difficult matters they would bring to Moses, and all the minor matters they would decide themselves. 27 Then Moses bade his father-in-law farewell, and he went his way to his own land.

# 19

On the third new moon after the Israelites had gone forth from the land of Egypt, on that very day, they entered the wilderness of Sinai. 2 Having journeyed from Rephidim, they entered the wilderness of Sinai and encamped in the wilderness. Israel encamped there in front of the mountain, 3 and Moses went up to God. The Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus shall you say to the house of Jacob and declare to the children of Israel: 4 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Me. 5 Now then, if you will obey Me faithfully and keep My covenant, you shall be My treasured possession among all the peoples. Indeed, all the earth is Mine, 6 but you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the children of Israel."

אֱלֹהִים אֲנִישׁ אֲמַת שְׂנְאֵי בָּעַץ וְשִׁמְתָה עֲלֵיהֶם שָׂרִי אֲלָפִים שָׂרִי מֵאוֹת שָׂרִי חֲמֵשִׁים וְשָׂרִי עֶשְׂרֵת: 22 וְשִׁפְטוּ אֹתָם הָעָם בְּכֹל-עֵת וְהָיָה כֹּל-דִּוְקָב רְגוּלָה וְכִי-אֵלֶיהָ רָכַב-הַדִּוְקָב הִקְטִין וְשִׁפְטוּ-בָּם: 23 וְכִי-אֵת-הַדִּוְקָב מַעֲלֶיךָ וְעֵשָׂה וְצֹפֵן אֲלֵהֶם וְהָלַךְ הַדִּוְקָב הָיָה מִנְעִשָׂה וְצֹפֵן אֲלֵהֶם וְהָלַךְ עִמָּךְ וְגַם כֹּל-הָעָם הָיָה עִלְמִקְמוֹ יָבֵא בְּשָׂלָם:

24 וַיִּשְׁמַע מֹשֶׁה לְקוֹל חֲרוֹנוֹ וַיַּעַשׂ כַּל אֲשֶׁר אָמַר: 25 וַיִּבְחַר מֹשֶׁה אֲנָשִׁי-יְהוָה מִכָּל-יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּתֵּן אֹתָם רִאשִׁים עַל-הָעָם שָׂרֵי אֲלָפִים שָׂרֵי מֵאוֹת שָׂרֵי חֲמֵשִׁים וְשָׂרֵי עֶשְׂרֵת: 26 וַיִּשְׁפֹּטוּ אֹת-הָעָם כְּכֹל-עֵת אֲתֵּי-הַדִּוְקָב הִקְטִין וַיִּבְחַר אֶל-מִשְׁחָה עִם-הַדִּוְקָב הִקְטִין וְצֹפֵן אֲלֵהֶם וְהָלַךְ עִמָּךְ וְגַם כֹּל-הָעָם הָיָה עִלְמִקְמוֹ הֵם: 27 וַיִּשְׁלַח מֹשֶׁה אֶת-חֲרוֹנוֹ וַיֵּלֶךְ לוֹ אֶל-אֲרָצוֹ: פ

# 19

וַיִּשְׁלַח מֹשֶׁה אֶת-חֲרוֹנוֹ וַיֵּלֶךְ לוֹ אֶל-אֲרָצוֹ: פ  
וַיִּשְׁמַע מֹשֶׁה לְקוֹל חֲרוֹנוֹ וַיַּעַשׂ כַּל אֲשֶׁר אָמַר: 25 וַיִּבְחַר מֹשֶׁה אֲנָשִׁי-יְהוָה מִכָּל-יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּתֵּן אֹתָם רִאשִׁים עַל-הָעָם שָׂרֵי אֲלָפִים שָׂרֵי מֵאוֹת שָׂרֵי חֲמֵשִׁים וְשָׂרֵי עֶשְׂרֵת: 26 וַיִּשְׁפֹּטוּ אֹת-הָעָם כְּכֹל-עֵת אֲתֵּי-הַדִּוְקָב הִקְטִין וַיִּבְחַר אֶל-מִשְׁחָה עִם-הַדִּוְקָב הִקְטִין וְצֹפֵן אֲלֵהֶם וְהָלַךְ עִמָּךְ וְגַם כֹּל-הָעָם הָיָה עִלְמִקְמוֹ הֵם: 27 וַיִּשְׁלַח מֹשֶׁה אֶת-חֲרוֹנוֹ וַיֵּלֶךְ לוֹ אֶל-אֲרָצוֹ: פ

hardships that had befallen them on the way, and how the Lord had delivered them. 9 And Jethro rejoiced over all the kindness that the Lord had shown Israel when He delivered them from the Egyptians. 10 "Blessed be the Lord," Jethro said, "who delivered you from the Egyptians and from Pharaoh, and who delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. 11 Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods, 12 eyes, by the result of their very schemes against [the people]." 13 And Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and sacrifices for God, and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to partake of the meal before God with Moses' father-in-law.

14 Next day, Moses sat as magistrate among the people while the people stood about Moses from morning until evening. 15 But when Moses' father-in-law saw how much he had to do for the people, he said, "What is this thing that you are doing to the people? Why do you act alone, while all the people stand about you from morning until evening?" 16 Moses replied to his father-in-law, "It is because the people come to me to inquire of God. 16 When they have a dispute, it comes before me, and I decide between one person and another, and I make known the laws and teachings of God."

17 But Moses' father-in-law said to him, "The thing you are doing is not right; 18 you will surely wear yourself out, and these people as well. For the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone. 19 Now listen to me, I will give you counsel, and God be with you! You represent the people before God: you bring the disputes before God, 20 and enjoin upon them the laws and the teachings, and make known to them the way they are to go and the practices they are to follow. 21 You shall also seek out from among all

וַיִּצְלַם יִתְרוֹ: 9 וַיִּחַדּוּ יִתְרוֹ כֹּל-דִּשְׁוֹלָבָה אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂה יְהוָה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר חָצִילָה מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם: 10 וַיֹּאמֶר יִתְרוֹ בְּרוּךְ יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר חָצִיל אֹתְכֶם מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם וּמִיַּד פְּרָעֹה אֲשֶׁר הֵצִיל אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרַיִם: 11 וַיַּעֲמֵת יִתְעִי כִּי-רְגוּלָה יִדְוָה מִכָּל-דִּשְׁוֹלָבָה כִּי בְּדָבָר אֲשֶׁר וָדָד עֲלֵיהֶם: 12 וַיִּחַדּוּ יִתְרוֹ חֲרוֹן מִשְׁחָה עִלְהָ וַיִּשְׁבַּח לְאֱלֹהִים וַיֹּבֵא אֹתוֹ וְכָל וְקָמוּ וַיִּקְרְבוּ לְאֹהֲלֵי-לֶחֶם עִם-חֲרוֹן מִשְׁחָה לִפְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים:

13 וַיִּזְדַּק מֹשֶׁה כַּמְשַׁלֵּת וַיֵּשֶׁב מִשְׁחָה לִשְׁפֹט אֹתָם הָעָם וַיַּעֲמֵל הָעָם עַל-מִשְׁחָה מִרְדֵּי-בִקְרָה עַל-הָעָרֶב: 14 וַיֵּרָא חֲרוֹן מִשְׁחָה אֶת-כֹּל-אֲשֶׁר-הוּא עֹשֶׂה לְעָם וַיֹּאמֶר מִרְדֵּי-הַדִּבְרָה הָיָה מְאֹד אֲשֶׁר עֹשֶׂה לְעָם מִדַּוְעַת אֲמֹתָ יוֹשֵׁב לְבָבְךָ וְכֹל-הָעָם נֹכַח עֵלְיֶךָ מִרְדֵּי-בִקְרָה עַל-הָעָרֶב: 15 וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה לְחֲרוֹנוֹ כִּי-יִבְרָא אֵלַי הָעָם לְרִשׁ אֲלֵהֶם: 16 כִּי-יִיחַדּוּ לָהֶם דִּבְרַי כִּי אֵלַי וְשִׁפְטוּהֶם כִּי אֵינִי רֹכֵן רַקְעוֹ וְהוֹדֵעִתִּי אֶת-יְהוָה הָאֱלֹהִים וְאֶת-תּוֹלְדוֹי:

17 וַיֹּאמֶר חֲרוֹן מִשְׁחָה אֵלַי לֹא-טוֹב הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה עֹשֶׂה: 18 וְכָל הַנֶּלֶל גַּם-אִתְּמוֹת גַּם-הָעָם הָיָה אֲשֶׁר עֹמֵךְ כִּי-רָבַד מִמֶּךָ הַדָּבָר לֹא-תוֹכַל עֲשׂוֹה לְבַדְּךָ: 19 עָתָה שִׁמְעֵנִי בְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר אֵינִי עֹשֶׂה וְיִדְוּ אֲלֵהֶם עֹמֵךְ חָדִי אֲמֹתָ לְעָם מִלִּי הָאֱלֹהִים וְהִבְאֵת אֲמֹתָ אֶת-הַדָּבָרִים: 20 אֶל-הָאֱלֹהִים: 21 וְהוֹדֵרְתֶם אֹתָם אִתְּמוֹתִים וְאֶת-הַתּוֹרָה וְהוֹדֵעֵת לָהֶם אֶת-הַדָּבָר וְלָכֵן בָּהּ וְאֶת-הַמִּשְׁעָעֵשָׂה אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁעוּ: 22 וְאֹתָהּ תִּתְּנוּ מִכָּל-הָעָם אֲנִישֵׁי-חַזֵּל וְרֹאֵי תִתְּנוּ:

cc Meaning of Heb. uncertain  
d. Lit. "It" as magistrate, cf. v. 13.





*tables of stone, written with the finger of God* (Ex. xxxi, 18)? He replied: It was like a disciple writing while the master guides him.

R. Joshua b. Levi and the Rabbis joined issue. R. Joshua said: Israel heard two utterances from the mouth of the Holy One, blessed be He, viz. '*I am*' and '*Thou shalt not have*', for so it is written, LET HIM KISS ME WITH [Lit. 'FROM'] THE KISSES OF HIS MOUTH—with some and not all the kisses. The Rabbis, however, say that Israel heard all the commandments from the mouth of the Holy One, blessed be He. R. Joshua of Siknin<sup>1</sup> said in the name of R. Joshua b. Levi: The reason of the Rabbis is because it is written, '*And they said to Moses: Speak thou with us, and we will hear.*' What does R. Joshua b. Levi do with this verse? He maintains in opposition to the Rabbis that strict chronological order is not followed in the Torah. But perhaps the words '*Speak thou with us, and we will hear*' were spoken only after two or three commandments?—R. 'Azariah and R. Judah b. Simon speaking in the name of R. Joshua b. Levi followed his view. They said: It is written, *Moses commanded us a law*. The whole Torah contains six hundred and thirteen commandments. The numerical value of the word 'Torah' is six hundred and eleven, and so many commandments Moses spoke to us, but '*I am*' and '*Thou shalt not have*' Moses did not speak to us but we heard them from the mouth of the Holy One, blessed be He.<sup>2</sup>

§3. R. Johanan interpreted the verse as applying to Israel when they went up to Mount Sinai. It was as if a king wanted to marry a wife of good and noble family, so he sent an envoy to speak with her. She said: 'I am not worthy to be his handmaid, but all the same I desire to hear from his own mouth.' When the envoy returned to the king, he was full of smiles, but he would give no clear report to the king.<sup>3</sup> The king, who was very discerning, said: 'This man is full of smiles, which would show that she consented, and

<sup>1</sup> Or Sogana (v. Josephus, *Life*, 51), north of Jotapata in Galilee.

<sup>2</sup> There seems no reason for this repetition, unless it is to quote the new interpretation of '*from*' in a partitive sense.

<sup>3</sup> Lest the king should regard her request as belittling his majesty.

<sup>9</sup>And YHWH said to Moses, "Here, I am coming to you in a mass of cloud for the purpose that the people will hear when I am speaking with you, and they will believe in you as well forever." And Moses told the people's words to YHWH. <sup>10</sup>And YHWH said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow; and they shall wash their clothes <sup>11</sup>and be ready for the third day, because on the third day YHWH will come down on Mount Sinai before the eyes of all the people. <sup>12</sup>And you shall limit the people all around, saying, 'Watch yourselves about going up in the mountain and touching its edge. Anyone who touches the mountain shall be put to death. <sup>13</sup>A hand shall not touch him, but he shall be stoned or shot. Whether animal or man, he will not live.' At the blowing of the horn they shall go up the mountain."

<sup>14</sup>And Moses went down from the mountain to the people. And he consecrated the people, and they washed their clothes. <sup>15</sup>And he said to the people, "Be ready for three days. Don't come close to a woman."

<sup>16</sup>And it was on the third day, when it was morning, and it was: thunders and lightning and a heavy cloud on the mountain, and a sound of a horn, very strong. And the entire people that was in the camp trembled. <sup>17</sup>And Moses brought out the people toward God from the camp, and they stood up at the bottom of the mountain. <sup>18</sup>And Mount Sinai was all smoke because YHWH came down on it in fire, and its smoke went up like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain trembled greatly. <sup>19</sup>And the sound of the horn was getting much stronger. Moses would speak, and God would answer him in a voice. <sup>20</sup>And YHWH came down on Mount Sinai, at the top of the mountain, and YHWH called to Moses at the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. <sup>21</sup>And YHWH said to Moses, "Go down. Warn the people in case they break through to YHWH, to see, and many of them fall. <sup>22</sup>And also let the priests who approach YHWH consecrate themselves, or else YHWH will break out against them."

<sup>23</sup>And Moses said to YHWH, "The people is not able to go up to Mount Sinai, because you warned us, saying, 'Limit the mountain and consecrate it.'"

<sup>24</sup>And YHWH said to him, "Go. Go down. Then you'll come up, you and Aaron with you.\* And let the priests and the people not break through to come up to YHWH, or else He'll break out against them." <sup>25</sup>And Moses went down to the people, and he said it to them.

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\*The command that Aaron is to go up together with Moses is unexpected here in J. Aaron has never been mentioned up to this point in J. In fact, Aaron is never mentioned at all in J outside of this verse. Moreover, Aaron does not in fact go up with Moses in J. The

## 20

<sup>1</sup>And God spoke all these words, saying:\*

<sup>2</sup>I am YHWH, your God, who brought you out from the land of Egypt, from a house of slaves.

<sup>3</sup>You shall not have other gods before my face.

<sup>4</sup>You shall not make a statue or any form that is in the skies above or that is in the earth below or that is in the water below the earth.

<sup>5</sup>You shall not bow to them, and you shall not serve them. Because I, YHWH, your God, am a jealous God, counting parents' crime on children, on the third generation, and on the fourth generation for those who hate me, <sup>6</sup>but practicing kindness to thousands for those who love me and for those who observe my commandments.

<sup>7</sup>You shall not bring up the name of YHWH, your God, for a falsehood, because YHWH will not make one innocent who will bring up His name for a falsehood.

<sup>8</sup>Remember the Sabbath day, to make it holy. <sup>9</sup>Six days you shall labor and do all your work, <sup>10</sup>and the seventh day is a Sabbath to YHWH, your God. You shall not do any work: you and your son and your daughter, your servant and your maid and your animal and your alien who is in your gates. <sup>11</sup>Because for six days YHWH made the skies and the earth, the sea, and everything that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day. On account of this, YHWH blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.\*\*

next time that Moses goes up the mountain in J, God tells him, "No man shall go up with you" (Exod 34:3). It is rather in E that Aaron (and others) will go up with Moses (24:1). Therefore, it appears that a redactor has added here in order to deal with the fact that Moses' ascent in E along with Aaron and other persons is now inserted before the J account of an ascent that Moses makes alone in Exodus 34. The redactor who made this addition could be either R or RJE.

\*The text of the Ten Commandments here does not appear to belong to any of the major sources. It is likely to be an independent document, which was inserted here by the Redactor. A slightly different version was used by the Deuteronomistic historian in Deuteronomy 5.

\*\*The most striking difference between the text of the Decalog as it appears here and as it appears in Deuteronomy 5 is the reason that is given as the basis of the Sabbath command. Here it is "because for six days YHWH made the skies and the earth, the sea, and everything that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day. On account of this, YHWH blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy," referring to the P creation story. In Deuteronomy it is so "you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and YHWH, your God, brought you out from there with a strong hand and an outstretched arm. On account of this, YHWH, your God, has commanded you to do the Sabbath day."

<sup>12</sup>Honor your father and your mother, so that your days will be extended on the land that YHWH, your God, is giving you.

<sup>13</sup>You shall not murder.

<sup>14</sup>You shall not commit adultery.

<sup>15</sup>You shall not steal.

<sup>16</sup>You shall not testify against your neighbor as a lying witness.

<sup>17</sup>You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his servant or his maid or his ox or his ass or anything that your neighbor has.

<sup>18</sup>And all the people were seeing the thunders and the flashes and the sound of the horn and the mountain smoking. And the people saw, and they moved and stood at a distance, <sup>19</sup>and they said to Moses, "You speak with us so we may listen, but let God not speak with us or else we'll die."

<sup>20</sup>And Moses said to the people, "Don't be afraid, because God is coming for the purpose of testing you and for the purpose that his fear will be on your faces so that you won't sin."

<sup>21</sup>And the people stood at a distance, and Moses went over to the nimbus where God was. <sup>22</sup>And YHWH said to Moses, "You shall say this to the children of Israel: You have seen that I have spoken with you from the skies. <sup>23</sup>You shall not make gods of silver with me, and and you shall not make gods of gold for yourselves. <sup>24</sup>You shall make an altar of earth for me, and you shall sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen. In every place where I'll have my name commemorated I'll come to you, and I'll bless you. <sup>25</sup>And if you'll make an altar of stones for me, you shall not make them cut. When you have elevated your sword over it, then you have desecrated it. <sup>26</sup>And you shall not go up by stairs on my altar, so that your nudity will not be exposed over it."

**21** <sup>14</sup>And these are the judgments that you shall set before them:\*

<sup>24</sup>When you will buy a Hebrew slave, he shall work six years, and in the seventh he shall go out liberated for free. <sup>3</sup>If he will come by himself,

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\*Exod 21:1–23:19 is a law code known as the Covenant Code. It was originally a separate, independent document, but it was used by the author of E as part of the E work.