

Fundamentals of Old Testament Ethics

Hebrew Bible: consists of 39 books written over 1,000-year period between 1200-200 B.C.E.

It is understood by Jews and Christians as the revelation of God to humankind, the word of God, setting forth his will for humankind, as well as the record of the relationship between God and his people Israel.

1. Old Testament Theology, including Ethics is grounded in Creation.

Gen 1:1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Implication: 1. Ethics are based in the Character, Attributes and Nature of the Creator, 2. The Creator is infinite and absolute; therefore it would be assumed that ethics would be objective and absolute. 3. Because God is good, his original creation is good.

2. Old Testament Ethics are secondarily grounded on the Nature of Man being created in the Image of God.

Gen 1:26 Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

Man has 1) dignity (pinnacle of creation) and intrinsic worth (only man has God breathe into his nostrils to instill

live), 2) responsibility (the capacity for reason, especially in ethical choices) and an intuitive knowledge of what is good and 3) authority over the rest of creation.

3. The first man was placed under a deontological (rule based) ethics with an explanation of the Consequences (utilitarian), having the capacity to choose whether or not to follow the command.

Gen 2:15-17 Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it. **(16)** The LORD God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; **(17)** but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die."

There was one clearly defined law.

The seriousness and consequences of Sin in the OT:

Alienation (Genesis 3): 1) from God, 2) in human relationships, 3) humanities relationship to the Creation (his dominion).

Hardship or suffering: 1) upon the woman in childbirth, 2) in the creation's response to man's dominion.

Death: 1) as separation from God, 2) the end of life.

The means of restoration (reconciliation, redemption, propitiation [ka-phor]).

Sacrificial substitution.

From Adam to Moses, mankind was under Conscience rather than Law. Ka-phor was the responsibility of the head of the household.

God gave Law to Moses as a covenant contract between a specific people and God. Ka-phor was the responsibility of designated priests.

The Laws are:

Exo 20:1-17 Summary of Ten Commandments:

Laws regarding the communities relationship to God:

1. Do not worship other gods.
2. Do not make graven images
3. Do not take the name of God in vain.
4. Observe the Sabbath rest.

Laws in relationship to other humans (especially within the covenant community)

5. Honor your father and mother
6. Do not kill.

7. Do not commit adultery.
8. Do not steal.
9. Do not bear false witness against your neighbor
10. Do not covet your neighbor's property.

The entire Law is summarized in two Old Testament verses:

Deu 6:4-5 "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! (5) "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

And

Lev 19:18 'You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD.