

# DEVOTIONAL STUDY FORM

Passage: **Exodus 20:17** - "You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

**Prayer**

(check when done)

**Meditation**

I studied the meaning of the word covet using a Word Study, so I don't want to rehash that here. Suffice it to say that for the context of this study, I will be looking at coveting as meaning "a want that takes up residence in one's heart and becomes his all-consuming passion."

In this passage we see that the desire or lust that is directed at what belongs to someone else is prohibited. This passage specifically prohibits the lusting after an already-spoken for woman and property that is already owned by others.

What I want to see is if there is any significance in the order in which items are listed and the principles I can learn from them.

- 1) *Don't desire your neighbor's house.* – The principle that I see here is that we shouldn't ***desire the circumstances*** or our neighbor. With the idea that the Ten Commandments are given to the Israelites prior to their taking of the land of Canaan, we know that these are meant to allow the Israelites to live in peace and harmony with each other in the land. As we learn in Deuteronomy and Joshua, the tribes are going to have the conquered land divided among them by Moses and Joshua. Each tribe will get a section of land, then each family be bestowed with some land. The division of this land will be very "unfair" and "unjust." See, some land is better than others (Abraham and Lot). It would be easy to get caught up in a mind set of "Why did the Smiths get that property and I got this one?" "Tom's piece of land is bigger than mine." "Her soil is more fertile than mine." "The grass is greener over there, so his sheep will feed better than mine." Any parent with kids who have tried to get split a piece of cake knows that a fight will ensue.

The fact is that some people are born into better situations than others. Our past does affect our current situation and our future. There is a component of luck in success. So often we can get caught up in the idea that "I am more talented, but he had all the breaks."

What God is saying by putting this first is that He understands that while He is the Lord of the Harvest and people will Reap what they Sow, there is injustice in this fallen world. However, it is under His providence that He has given much to some and little to others (Matthew 25:14-30). He will be the arbitrator of how well a person uses the resources that He provided and it is not up to us (Luke 12:48). We must look to our affairs and our own lives (I Thessalonians 4:11).

- 2) *Don't desire your neighbor's wife.* – The principle that I see here is that we shouldn't ***desire the completeness*** of our neighbor. God already addressed "do not commit adultery", so there must be something more here. What is significant about a wife that shouldn't be desired? Under Jewish mindset, a wife completes a man. She is his complement. Since each man is different, the needs he has in a wife are different. God is the one who provides the wife that a man needs (Proverbs 19:14). When an individual desires a man's wife, he desires that which God

has specifically ordained for another man. He is saying that he is like the other man: He has the other man's strengths, his weaknesses. He is abdicating his uniqueness as an individual.

- 3) *Don't desire your neighbor's servants* – The principle that I see is that we shouldn't ***desire the commitments*** of our neighbor. Because of their recent captivity as slaves to the cruelty of the Egyptians, the Israelites redefined the concept of slavery (making it a far cry from the general notion of slavery throughout human history) and placed much obligation on the master. The Jewish people experienced first-hand what it meant being a nation of slaves to Pharaoh. And they are sensitive not to inflict the harsh labor of Egypt onto a servant in their care.

Because all men are owned by God and servants of Him alone, no ownership rights exist in the Jewish concept of slavery. No Jew can subjugate himself to a human master. The circumstances of his enslavement can only ever be temporary; it is never a permanent state. He was not born to serve man, but God. Typically, a Jewish servant works for six years and goes free in the seventh. And even if he voluntarily remains enslaved thereafter, he nevertheless goes free in the year of Jubilee.

While in the capacity of a servant, his master cannot demean him in any way whatsoever. His dignity must be protected at each and every occasion. The Jewish servant cannot be ordered to perform tasks that are unnecessary except to keep him gainfully employed. Nor can he aggrieve him.

A Jewish master can never forget that the servant is, in actual fact, his brother. The Jewish servant has met upon unfortunate circumstances in the ever turning wheel of fortune. And this is an opportunity to bestow kindness upon his brethren. But the master should not ever think that he is superior in any respect. On the contrary, there exists parity between Jewish master and Jewish servant. So if there is only one pillow in the house, the Jewish servant gets it.

When we see the benefits of many servants and we desire those benefits, we fail to remember the responsibility that comes along with it. We are selfish and look only to our needs getting met. A business man may have nicer clothes, nicer car, a vacation home, etc..., but he is also responsible for making decisions that not only affect his life, but also the lives of the people he employs. While many American companies that are ran by boards of trustees often act unethically in this regard, most small business owners that I know take this commitment very seriously. They lay awake at night worrying not just about their own well being, but also that of their employees. Before we wish to have his shoes, we need to spend a night pacing the floor weighing a decision he has to make in them.

- 4) *Don't desire your neighbor's ox or donkey* – The principle that I see is that we shouldn't ***desire the capacity*** of our neighbor. Donkey and oxen are different than livestock. They are used to work the farm and are not usually consumed. If it was wealth of the neighbor that we shouldn't we desire (which we shouldn't), then we would expect to see sheep listed. It was the number of flocks that was a designation of a person's wealth. Oxen and donkey are evidence of person's ability to generate wealth.

We can get caught up in comparing our skill set to others. Some people have more energy and internal resources necessary to "succeed" in life. We shouldn't wish to be like somebody else, nor should we wish to make people just like us.

- 5) *Don't desire anything that belongs to your neighbor* – The principle that I see is that we shouldn't ***desire the catch all of possessions*** of our neighbor. God reinforces the idea of personal property rights here and reminds us to

not only keep our hands to ourselves, but our eyes as well.

One of the overlying themes I see is that all desires come out of failure to find contentment in the situation, people, and place God has set for me. We think we know best about what our lives need, so we begin to covet the things we think we need to find happiness and completeness. God's desire is for us to glorify Him and our desire is for us to glorify ourselves. All covetousness comes out of this need. This world values position, prestige, and possessions. So, when we seek to be glorified in the eyes of man, we desire the things that will be symbols of those. We seek big offices with fancy titles behind our names. We seek to cavort with big names and fancy people. We seek to own big cars, big houses, and big TVs. Our life becomes a chasing after the next level. These are all things that God warns us not to covet.

God values the faithful, hopeful, and loving. If we seek to please God, rather than man, then we will no longer run after the things of this world. We will understand that our treasures are not physical possession, but the residual of the touch of our hands on those around us. We begin to covet time with God at all hours of the day and night (Is. 26:9) and we will seek to know His ways (Ps. 19:10).

#### **Application**

(Personal, Possible, Practical, Provable)

#### **Memorization**