

Scripture Lesson Text

EXOD. 20:1 And God spake all these words, saying,

2 I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

3 Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

4 Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that *is* in heaven above, or that *is* in the earth beneath, or that *is* in the water under the earth:

5 Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth *generation* of them that hate me;

6 And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me,

and keep my commandments.

7 Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

8 Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.

9 Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work:

10 But the seventh day *is* the sabbath of the LORD thy God: *in it* thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that *is* within thy gates:

11 For *in* six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them *is*, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.

NOTES

Obedience in Worshipping God Alone

Lesson Text: Exodus 20:1-11

Related Scriptures: *Deuteronomy 5:6-15; 6:4-15; Leviticus 26:1-13;*
Deuteronomy 4:9-20; Ezekiel 20:1-31

TIME: 1445 B.C.

PLACE: Mount Sinai

GOLDEN TEXT—"I am the Lord thy God, . . . Thou shalt have no other gods before me"
(Exodus 20:2-3).

Lesson Exposition

THE ONLY GOD—Exod. 20:1-6

Knowing the unique God (Exod. 20:1-3). The findings of archaeologists have revealed two kinds of treaties that were prominent in the ancient world. One was called a parity treaty. In it two parties of equal status agreed on similar or identical obligations. The other was called a suzerainty treaty. In this type a king spelled out the duties and obligations of his servants or vassals. There are many similarities between that kind of treaty and what God presented to Israel as His expectations of them in the law.

A suzerainty treaty always began with the master identifying himself. That is what we find in Exodus 20:2. The fact that verse 1 specifically states that God spoke all the words that follow assures us that Moses did not copy ideas or instructions from any previously established treaty. These were God's instructions meant for His chosen people.

The next part of a suzerainty treaty usually consisted of the master explaining all the good things he had

done for the people, giving a basis for his expectations of them. This is what God did in mentioning that He had brought the people out of Egypt and their previous bondage.

With this reminder as a basis for His next instructions, His first one was that He was to be their only God. They were never to accept or worship any false gods.

Avoiding all likenesses (Exod. 20:4-5a). Here is a command related to properly worshipping God. Their conception of God was to be spiritual rather than material. The Israelites were not to make any carved images to represent God. They were not to worship idols; nor were they to make images of Him. The Hebrew word that has been translated "graven" is *pesel*. This word is derived from the primitive root *pasal*, which specifically refers to something that was carved out of wood or stone.

God was communicating to them that He simply cannot be adequately represented by anything man can see; so they should avoid trying to do so.

The use of such idols would be misleading and cause them to have wrong concepts and, therefore, wrong practices. His command was clear: "Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them" (Exod. 20:5). This is the logical follow-up to the first command, in which God said they should not have any gods besides Him. Making images would lead them into disobeying that first command.

Reason for the command (Exod. 20:5b-6). *The MacArthur Study Bible* (MacArthur, ed., Thomas Nelson) makes this comment: "The mode or fashion of worship appropriate to only one Lord forbids any attempts to represent or caricature Him by use of anything He has made. Total censure of artistic expression was not the issue; the absolute censure of idolatry and false worship was the issue. Violation would seriously affect succeeding generations because the Lord demanded full and exclusive devotion, i.e. He is a jealous God."

GOD'S NAME AND THE SABBATH— Exod. 20:7-11

Respecting God's name (Exod. 20:7). God revealed Himself as Yahweh to Moses. God specifically stated that His name should never be used lightly or frivolously. It is obvious that when God told Moses the name he was to use with the people of Israel, He meant it to cause a sense of wonder, amazement, and hope; it was to reassure Israel that He was indeed present and coming to their assistance. It is sad that in our day there is often little or no respect for God's name. We as believers need to be especially careful about this as we endeavor to counteract the world and be a testimony to it.

Charles Erdman noted that this command "is not merely a prohibition of profanity. It is that, and as such is distressingly disregarded in the pres-

ent day. More specifically, however, the commandment forbids perjury (Lev. 19:12). It indicates that sacredness of an oath" (*The Book of Exodus*, Baker). This is reiterated in Deuteronomy 6:13, which says, "Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name." This type of oath became a solemn, sacred obligation that was never to be taken lightly.

This particular command is coupled with a solemn warning: "The Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain" (Exod. 20:7). The Hebrew word translated "guiltless" means in many contexts "to be clean." God will never excuse a person for using His name irreverently.

Respecting the Sabbath (Exod. 20:8-10). This is not the first time the Sabbath was named as a holy day. When God gave Israel manna, every day they were to gather just enough for that day's use (16:15-19). On the sixth day, however, they were to gather enough for two days, for there would be no manna on the seventh day. "To morrow is the rest of the holy sabbath unto the Lord: bake that which ye will bake to day, and [boil] that ye will [boil]; and that which remaineth over lay up for you to be kept until the morning" (vs. 23).

The Sabbath Day was to be held as a day set apart from the other days of the week. All work was to be done on the other six days. The Hebrew word for "Sabbath" is *shabbath* and means "intermission." It comes from a primitive root, *shabath*, which means "to repose" or "desist from exertion." It is clear from these definitions that the Sabbath Day was to be viewed as a day of rest. This was supposed to include every person and every animal that worked: parents, children, male and female servants, animals, and visitors or guests.

By the time of the prophet Jeremiah, Israel had wandered far from the commands of God. One day God had

Jeremiah stand in the gate of Jerusalem and warn, "Thus saith the Lord; Take heed to yourselves, and bear no burden on the sabbath day, nor bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem; neither carry forth a burden out of your houses on the sabbath day, neither do ye any work, but hallow ye the sabbath day, as I commanded your fathers" (Jer. 17:21-22). Their ancestors had not obeyed and had been punished because of it.

When Nehemiah saw the people violating the Sabbath (Neh. 13:15-16), he contended with them (vs. 17) and had the city gates shut. Throughout the Old Testament the observance of the Sabbath day was important for the Jews. Christians observe the first day of the week instead because of Jesus' resurrection on that day.

Reason for the command (Exod. 20:11). God connected His command for rest on the Sabbath with His rest on the day after Creation. For God, this was a sovereign rest; He had no need for the kind of rest required by our bodies. But in doing this He sanctified the seventh day and set Israel apart from other peoples.

The Sabbath command is repeated in Exodus 31:15-17: "Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the sabbath of rest, holy to the Lord: whosoever doeth any work in the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed."

Deuteronomy 5:15 adds this: "And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the Lord thy God com-

manded thee to keep the sabbath day." As long as Israel had been in slavery to Egypt, they had not been allowed days of rest. Their observance of the Sabbath Day was also a cause of praise to their God for His mighty deliverance that gave them the freedom.

All of the Ten Commandments but this one are reiterated in the New Testament. There are those who teach that we should continue to worship on the seventh day. Jesus rose from death on the first day of the week, and immediately His followers began to gather on that day instead of the seventh. To continue to worship on the seventh day is to believe that we are still under the Mosaic Law.

—Keith E. Eggert.

QUESTIONS

1. What are two kinds of treaties found in ancient records, and which did God use as a pattern for His covenant with Israel?
2. What was the basis for God's expectations of Israel?
3. What command did God give regarding worship?
4. Why did God say they should make no images for their worship?
5. What did God command about His name?
6. What warning accompanied the command concerning God's name?
7. When did God first refer to the Sabbath as a day of rest?
8. Who was expected to benefit from the rest on the Sabbath Day?
9. With what did God connect His command to rest on the Sabbath?
10. What did Moses add later as another reason to keep the Sabbath?

—Keith E. Eggert.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. God's commands have authority because they are based on who He is and what He has done (Exod. 20:1-2).
2. No person or thing is to take precedence over God in our lives (vs. 3).
3. We distort God's holiness when we replace God with representations of God (vss. 4-6).
4. We dishonor God when we bring disrespect on His name (vs. 7).
5. We honor God as Lord of all by setting aside one day a week for worship (vss. 8-10).
6. By participating in weekly worship, we acknowledge God as Creator (vs. 11).

—Jarl K. Waggoner.

Golden Text Illuminated

“I am the Lord thy God, . . . Thou shalt have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:2-3).

It has been said that there really is no present. As soon as we speak of it, it is gone—it is in the past. Yet the point is that God is here now. He walks with His people each day.

God is the God of the present. He will be there for us down the road. Perhaps you have lost your job. That can be a fearful matter. But because the God of the past is here taking care of us and will continue to take care of us, we do not need to fear at all. Easier said than done? Absolutely. But that is where the rubber meets the road in terms of our faith.

The second part of the golden text, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me,” is quite interesting. If misunderstood, it sounds as though God could be saying that it is OK to have other gods—just do not make them more important than He is! Sadly, that is how many people (even some Christians) live their lives. They do not mind having the one true God in their lives as long as they do not have to give up anything else.

That most certainly is not what the golden text is saying! The Hebrew actually says, “You shall have no other gods before my face.” The idea is that there can be no other gods in addition to Yahweh. As Matthew Henry wrote, “We cannot have any other God but he will certainly know it. There is none besides him but what is before him” (*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Hendrickson).

—John Haynes.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. Are there subtle ways in which even Christians can put other “gods” before the Lord (Exod. 20:3)? Explain.
2. What sorts of things does the commandment against images rule out for believers (vs. 4)?
3. How do our sins affect future generations (vs. 5)?
4. In what ways can we be guilty of taking God's name in vain (vs. 7)? Do we commit this sin when we claim God's guidance for unbiblical actions?
5. What steps can you take to guard your day of worship from becoming just a “day off”?
6. How do the first four commandments protect our relationship with God?

—Jarl K. Waggoner.