

# Scripture Lesson Text

**EXOD. 31:12** And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

**13 Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the LORD that doth sanctify you.**

14 Ye shall keep the sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people.

**15 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.**

16 Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant.

**17 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.**

18 And he gave unto Moses, when he had made an end of communing with him upon mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God.

## NOTES

# Obedience in Rest

Lesson Text: Exodus 31:12-18

Related Scriptures: *Genesis 2:1-3; Exodus 35:1-3; Leviticus 23:1-3; Mark 2:23-28; Hebrews 4:1-13*

TIME: 1445 B.C.

PLACE: Mount Sinai

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**GOLDEN TEXT**—"Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the Lord that doth sanctify you" (Exodus 31:13).

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## *Lesson Exposition*

### **SABBATH REGULATION— Exod. 31:12-13**

As part of the Decalogue, the commandment to "remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy" (Exod. 20:8) was recognized from the very beginning of Israel's history as vitally important.

In our passage this week, more details are given about the observance of the Sabbath. Since the Hebrew word translated "Sabbath" comes from the word meaning to stop or cease, the concept of refraining from ordinary work was inherent in the very word chosen for this commandment.

Like the rainbow (Gen. 9:17) and circumcision (17:11), God said, "[The Sabbath] is a sign between me and you throughout your generations" (Exod. 31:13). Although there are similarities between Israel's law and other ancient moral codes, the Sabbath law was unique to Israel.

### **SABBATH REJECTION— Exod. 31:14-16**

**Serious consequences (Exod. 31:14).** According to the Mosaic Law, a number of sins were considered so

grave that they required the death penalty.

Breaking the Sabbath was considered so serious that the death penalty could be meted out for this sin as well.

**Sacred duty (Exod. 31:15-16).** Since the Sabbath was the Israelite day of worship, it can easily be confused with the Lord's Day of the New Testament. Although there are similarities and a relationship between the two, they are not identical.

Since the Sabbath was the seventh day of the week and the Lord's Day the first day of the week (cf. Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2; Rev. 1:10), they are not exactly the same.

Especially among Orthodox Jews, the observance of the Sabbath may include meticulous rules concerning what is considered proper or improper. For instance, the command "Ye shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations upon the sabbath day" (Exod. 35:3) is taken to mean that a light switch cannot be turned on once the Sabbath begins.

Such interpretations are not unlike those encountered by Christ when

confronted by the Pharisees regarding His supposed breaches of the Sabbath (cf. Mark 2:23—3:6; John 5:1-18; 9:1-16). Not content with the basic instructions given in the law, the Pharisees had added much legalistic minutiae to the Sabbath commandment.

The emphasis in the Mosaic Law concerning the Sabbath was on physical rest and spiritual refreshment.

That the Sabbath was to be “holy to the Lord” (Exod. 31:15) meant that it was to be different from other days, especially as it related to physical refreshment and worship. How ancient Israelites worshipped on the Sabbath is not clear from Scripture.

The Sabbath was also to be observed as a “perpetual covenant” (vs. 16), testifying that those who observed it were God’s covenant people.

### **SABBATH RATIONALE—**

#### **Exod. 31:17-18**

**Covenant sign (Exod. 31:17).** The Lord reiterated that His people’s Sabbath observance was the sign of a covenant between God and man. Israel was reminded that the six days of Creation were followed by a Sabbath. “On the seventh day [God] rested.” However, we should not think of God being tired, as we might be after six days of labor. The idea is cessation of labor or activity, not recuperation.

The word “refreshed” comes from a Hebrew word meaning to breathe. This is anthropomorphic language and should not be construed to mean that the eternal God literally needed refreshment after His creative work was completed.

**Covenant stone (Exod. 31:18).** The Lord gave Moses “two tables of testimony, tables of stone.” The stone tablets contained God’s commandments for Israel—the Ten Com-

mandments in particular (cf. 34:28). Although there were many other commandments given to Moses at this time, the Ten Commandments were at the very heart of the covenant God made with Israel.

The reference to the commandments being “written with the finger of God” (Exod. 31:18; cf. Deut. 9:9-10) shows they were in some way written by the power of God (cf. Exod. 8:19; Luke 11:20). Whatever the precise method, it is clear that the Ten Commandments and all of God’s commandments came from heaven and not from men.

—John Alva Owston.

## **QUESTIONS**

1. What is the primary meaning of the word “Sabbath”?
2. What was the punishment for violating the Sabbath commandment? Why was the punishment so severe?
3. How was the Sabbath a sign between Israel and God?
4. What is the difference between the Sabbath and the Lord’s Day?
5. What is one reason Christ had conflicts with the Pharisees over the Sabbath?
6. In what sense was the Sabbath to be “holy to the Lord” (Exod. 31:15)?
7. What did the Lord reiterate about the Sabbath?
8. What do you think it means that God “rested” and was “refreshed” (vs. 17)?
9. What was engraved on the tablets of stone the Lord gave to Moses?
10. What might be meant by “the finger of God” (vs. 18)?

—John Alva Owston.

## PRACTICAL POINTS

1. God makes His expectations clear to all men (Exod. 31:12).
2. As God's people, we live set apart for His purposes (vss. 13-14).
3. Through the principle of the Sabbath, God teaches believers to depend on Him (vs. 15).
4. Believers must teach the next generation to know, worship, and obey God (vs. 16).
5. God's people are renewed through worship and strengthened as they remember who He is and what He has done (vs. 17).
6. Man's standards can change from day to day, but God's will always endures (vs. 18).

—Cheryl Y. Powell.

## RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. Why do you think God would declare that violating the Sabbath would be punishable by death? What does this penalty teach us about the character and priorities of God?
2. How did the establishment of the Sabbath Day as a covenant sign identify the people with their God (cf. Gen. 2:1-3; Neh. 13:15-22; Isa. 58:13-14)?
3. In what practical ways can believers today ensure that Sunday is a meaningful observance? What actions can we take to protect that time in the midst of active lifestyles?
4. How does observing Sunday help Christians grow in godliness?

—Cheryl Y. Powell.

## Golden Text Illuminated

**“Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the Lord that doth sanctify you” (Exodus 31:13).**

We can learn from God's sabbaths, given to His Old Testament people, Israel, in the Law of Moses as an abiding ordinance for their lives. They were to do their work in six days and then give God the seventh day. There were also other holy days of rest and worship.

The Sabbath Day is called a sign (Exod. 31:13; cf. vs. 17) between God and His people that they were in covenant together. Going back to God's work of Creation, the Sabbath observances of Israel reflected God's rest and satisfaction with all that He had made (Gen. 2:1-3). The point is that those in a covenant with God are to recognize His authority and leadership. He has a right to issue His commands, and the people have a duty to obey them.

The sign of God's Sabbath has a connection to sanctification. In this it is somewhat like the sign of circumcision. Notice the purpose statement in God's command to His people to follow the Sabbath: “that ye may know that I am the Lord that doth sanctify you.” The word “sanctify” is the common term for making something holy, separating it for God's use. The point of God's covenantal dealings is to create a people for Himself who learn and display His holy ways. They belong to Him and are to be devoted to His purposes.

—Jeff VanGoethem.