



Lesson 7 October 14th, 2017

Obeying God's Law

Study Scripture – Exodus 20:18-26

Background Scripture – Exodus 20

Key Verse:

“An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings, and thy peace offerings, thy sheep, and thine oxen: in all places where I record my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee.”

Exodus 20:24

INTRODUCTION

The Lesson Scripture poses for us the question as to whether we should regard the whole of the Bible to be inspired or only certain portions to be inspired. Are some parts to be paid attention to and regarded as if they had only temporary relevance, and if so what criteria are to be used to make such a determination?

In our Study Scripture God revealed Himself in an incredible way and dramatic way as an all-powerful, majestic, unique and incomparable God. He was the only true God and He had chosen to show His people that powerful though He was they were not to fear Him, and live in terror of Him. Instead they were to note carefully the display of who He was and remember the hazards of sin and straying from Him. They were to remember why He wanted them to be reverent to Him and why they should be reverent, worshipful, obedient, and keep away from the things He hated. So why the importance of the Law of this unique God?

If one accepts the interpretation of 2 Timothy 3:16 *All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable...* then we have to accept that the inspiration of all Scripture is affirmed.

We are helped in our to look at the scope of the inspired Scripture by examining 2 Peter 1:19-21 and its reference to the prophetic word, John 10:34-35 with its reference to the law and the word of God the Father, and the passages in Luke 24:25-27, 44-45 which expands the definition of Scripture to what Moses and all the prophets said. Jesus even quotes from Psalms 82:6, 78:2 and Psalm 35:19 supporting that these contained the law.

The Apostle Paul as one writer comments:

“refers to different types of passages as “law”: Isaiah 28:11-12, (1 Corinthians 14:21); Psalms and Isaiah (Romans 3:19); and even Genesis 16:15 and 21:9, which are narrative passages (Galatians 4:21-22). And Peter refers to the “prophetic word” (2 Peter 1:19) and every “prophecy of Scripture” (vs. 20) in such a way as to lead us to believe that the whole of the

collection of writings commonly accepted in that day is in view. It appears that “law” and “prophecy” were often used to designate the whole of the /Hebrew Scriptures”.

It is to be noted that 2 Peter 3:16 refers to the writings of Paul as Scripture but added that some had difficulty understanding what he was saying properly. The Apostle John clearly affirmed that the entire Book of Revelation was Scripture and warned of the severe consequences to anyone trying to tamper with it.

GOD’S NATURE

Scripture stresses throughout that God is morally pure and this means He is holy, righteous, and just. He is majestic and unique. He is untainted, unstained, and untouched by the evil in the world. See Exodus 15:11, 1 Samuel 2:2, Isaiah 57:15, Isaiah 6:1-4.

God’s perfection is the standard for our moral character. It is emphasized that we are to be like God. Note that God does not follow any standard external to God but follows His own nature. The reality of truth, righteousness and holiness is Himself and that is the standard He follows. One theologian therefore puts it squarely before us:

“When one measures one’s holiness, not against the standard of oneself or of other humans, but against God, the need for a complete change of moral and spiritual condition becomes apparent.

Paul stresses the point that those whom God has called to be His people are therefore to separate themselves from unclean things and be perfectly holy (2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1). The same idea is found in 1 Thessalonians 3:3 and 4:7. In an evident reference to the Old Testament requirements of spotlessness and freedom from any blemish, Paul notes that the church is also to be completely holy:

“that the church might be presented before him in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish”. Ephesians 5:27).

In addition to the realization that we must be holy, worship and reverence are also natural consequences of seeing God in his spotlessness and holiness. Psalm 99:9 says

“Extol the LORD our God and worship at his holy mountain; for the LORD our God is holy!”

A very similar thought is found in Revelation 15:4: ***Who shall not fear and glorify thy name, O LORD? For thou alone art holy”.***

One should note carefully that God’s moral purity, His holiness shines through in His relationship with other beings. God is righteous and this means the law and commandments of God

“being a true expression of His nature, is as perfect as He is” Psalm 19:7-9 puts it this way: ***The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart. the commandments of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes, the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the ordinances of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether”.***



God in His nature therefore is perfect and completely holy. He is simply the way He is. The law of God therefore is not something impersonal and foreign to God. It expresses God's person and His will. We therefore conclude with one scholar:

“The law is something of a transcript of the nature of God. When we relate to it, whether positively or negatively, we are not relating to an impersonal document or set of regulations. Rather, it is God Himself whom we are obeying or disobeying. Disobeying the law is serious, not because the law has some inherent value or dignity which must be preserved, but because disobeying it is actually an attack upon the very nature of God himself. Thus, legalism—the attitude that the law is to be obeyed for its own sake—is unacceptable. Rather, the law is to be understood as a means or relating to a personal God”.

The Law came as Israel was in a covenant relationship with God. Under the Covenant there were blessings and there were sanctions for lawbreaking. But note all the law was a magnificent gift of grace, for it was necessary because of the existence of sin. The people had to be moulded and conformed to the image of a holy God.

THE TEXT

Verse 18.

The intensity and awe in which the law was given to the people clearly generated extraordinary terror among the people, as it should as they were in the presence of their Creator and Redeemer. There was without a doubt awe in the pomp and circumstance with which each word was accented, and every sentence paused, with thunder and lightning. Perhaps much louder and brighter, than ordinary, as within all that was the presence of the Almighty God.

One might beg the question?! Why was the law given in such a dreadful manner, and with all this tremendous ceremony?

A reasonable guess would be that it was designed to give a sensible discovery of the glorious majesty of God, for the assistance of our faith concerning it, that, *knowing the terror of the Lord*, we may be persuaded to live in His fear. God is not to be trifled with.

Dealing with Him who is omnipotent. Omniscient, and omnipresent, it would be wise to recognize our place in respect to Him, and so God in His infinite wisdom spoke to the very core of their being as He prepared to relay a message on a simpler level about how to engage life with Him. The impact of the thundering and lightning on their senses, leaving them dazed and confused no doubt speaks to the overwhelming discomfort of their bodies' attempt to process who is speaking to them; one can only surmise the impact on their sinful souls.

As the verse indicates, the people had to retreat due to the strong impressions made upon their minds, as it filled them with fear and dread. How can sinful man stand in the presence of their God? If Moses had not been already chosen of God, his reaction might have been similar to the rest of the people. This dramatic action again can be taken from God as a sign of great wisdom,



and shows to the people of Israel who Moses was, and that he was God's choice to lead the people. So there are many aspects to ponder!

It could also serve as a precursor to that final Day of Judgment. These people had discovered that God speaks with man, and yet man still lives. However, they felt so much less than Him, as they should, as the flesh that they were, they felt before Him, powerless, frail, and alienated by sin from the holy God. They were afraid lest they should be consumed by this great fire, if they listened any longer to the voice of God.

All sinners, including the children of Israel will be called into an account of their lives before the Judge. By which law shall they be judged? That would be the commandments laid out before them, and later, the law laid in our hearts by Jesus Christ. So this appearance of God before them, was a specimen of the terrors of the general judgment; it gives notice to man that the Judge is coming, and judgment is nigh!

It could be said that it was also an indication of the terror of those convictions which the law brings into conscience, to prepare the soul for the comforts of the gospel. And so, the law given by Moses in such a manner might startle, affright, and humble men, that the grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ might be the more welcome.

Now before God had spoken with the people they were motioning to get closer to the mountain, to perhaps see God, but now after hearing their Redeemer, Creator and Sustainer, they were effectually cured of their presumption, and taught to keep their distance.

Verse 19.

Moses had come down from the mountain after being in the presence of God, when all the heads of the tribes and elders of the people came from the camp, and out of their tents, and spoke with him. Mostly, it was to tell him that what they had just experienced was too much for them. That, they would have it that Moses would communicate to them what the Will and pleasure of God was. That they will gladly obey whatever was said to them as if it came from the mouth of God, but for them to hear it themselves was too much, and that Moses should act as the go between, between their God and them.

At this point Moses might have gotten suspicious of the people. This was a chance, no matter how sinful they had been to get closer to the Almighty God, their Creator and speak with Him or hear His words first hand. But yet they passed as you will on that great opportunity. Sin separates God's creation and people from Him on many levels. As Christians, we can only hope and pray that we never fall into such depths as to not want to be as close to God as possible.

Even though the people chose Moses as being fit to be their mediator, and acquiesced all their authority to him, why would a God-fearing people do such a thing? Why would they not wish to speak with their God? We know that soon afterwards, the people had no trouble falling back into idolatry and doing things to pleasure a god that they created with their own minds and



hands, but here they had a chance at being as close to God as any of God's people had been in a long while.

If we are truly persuaded, then let us repent and boldly move closer to God. Yes, when we hear the voice of our Master and Lord speak, it will fill us with fear, but this is healthy. If we understand who God is, this is not to be seen however, an inhibiting fear, but one of respect and honour for who it is that we address. Moses displayed that type of reverence when approaching God, which is a stark contrast to the rest of the people.

Verse 20.

Moses seeing the people in distress over the presence of God through the lightning and thunder tried to encourage them by explaining the design of God in His terror. He did his best to explain that the presence of the thunder and lightning on their senses was not there as a warning that fire is upon them to consume them, but is intended for a greater purpose for their growth and understanding of who it is they serve.

The people did have a legitimate reason to fear as the thunder and lightning was one of the plagues given to Egypt, but they knew that it was against the Egyptians because of their refusal to let Israel go free. The Egyptians went against God's will and earned His wrath. If the people do as God desired of them, then why would the God who heard their cry, freed them from the Egyptians, who leads them through the wilderness now destroy them.

In the case of the children of Israel the lightning and thunder had a different purpose. It was sent to prove them, to try how they would like dealing with God immediately, without a mediator, and so to convince them how admirably well God had chosen for them, in putting Moses into that office. Ever since Adam fled upon hearing God, sinful man from that time has echoed similar sentiments upon hearing the voice of the Lord.

Not everyone has to be that way, as Moses has demonstrated. He was moved to go towards the voice of the Lord, and even to seek seeing His face. However, Moses continues to encourage the people, despite their fear. The lightning and thunder was a means to inspire them to keep them to their duty, and prevent their sinning against God. Moses tells the people that they and he himself must not fear with amazement with that fear which has torment, which only works upon the people who are impressed by light shows, those of no depth and substance, unlike a mature Christian. These kinds of people tremble at such events, tends to love bondage, betrays us to Satan, and alienates us from God; but we must always have in our minds a reverence of God's majesty, a dread of His displeasure, and an obedient regard to His sovereign authority over us. This fear will quicken us to our duty and make us circumspect in our walking.

Verses 21.



The people of God continued to stand far away from the presence of God, only Moses continued to draw closer to God. Perhaps the consciousness of guilt and fear of God's wrath continued to overwhelm them despite Moses' reassurances.

Verses 22-23

God Called clearly called Moses, and Moses responded, drawing closer to God. God also encouraged him. Some writers think that angels were assisting Moses to help him draw close to God or there is the sense that he was caused to draw near through the importunity of the people; or rather through the call of God to him, or an impulse upon his mind, which obliged him to obey.

Moses having gone into the thick darkness, where God was, God there spoke in his hearing only, privately and without terror. All that follows is mostly an exposition of the Ten commandments, at least to verse 23. He was to transmit these ideas word of mouth first, and afterwards in writing, to the people. The laws in these verses related to God's worship.

They are here forbidden to make images for worship. The people and Moses have witnessed God speaking with them. He is not a God that does not see, hear and answer. They remain silent. They know He is real. To that end, He instructs them that they will by no means construct any image made even of silver or gold to represent Him, as that is a sin. They were to maintain themselves as separate from the pagan nations in the land. They were not to follow their offensive practices.

The repetition of the second commandment comes in here, either as pointing to that which God had chiefly in view in giving them this law in this manner, that is, their peculiar addictedness to idolatry, and the peculiar sinfulness of that crime. The Ten Commandments were given by God, but Moses is ordered to inculcate upon them especially the first two. They must not forget any of them, but they must be sure to remember those.

As pointing to that which might properly be inferred from God's speaking to them as He had done. He had given them sufficient demonstration of His presence among them; they needed not to make images of Him, as if he were absent. Besides, they had only seen that He talked with them; they had seen no manner of similitude, so that they could not make any image of God; and His manifesting Himself to them only by a voice plainly showed them that they must not make any such image, but keep up their communion with God by His word, and not otherwise.

Two arguments are here stressed God's antagonism against image-worship. The first is that thereby they would affront God. It is clearly stated, "*you shall not make with me gods*". Though they pretended to worship them but as representations of God, yet really they made them rivals with God, which He would not endure.



Also, that by making graven images they would abuse themselves. The idea is intimated in that, "You shall not make unto you gods; while you think by them to assist your devotion, you will really corrupt it, and put a cheat upon yourselves."

At first, it should seem, they made their images for worship of gold and silver, pretending, by the richness of those metals, to honour God, and, by the brightness of them, to affect themselves with His glory; but, even in these, they changed the truth of God into a lie, and so, by degrees, were justly given up to such strong delusions as to worship images of wood or stone.

Verses 24 & 25

They are here directed in in how to make altars for worship: it is meant to refer to occasional altars, such as they reared now in the wilderness, before the tabernacle was erected, and afterwards upon special emergencies, for present use, such as Gideon built (Jdg. 6:24), Manoah (Jdg. 13:19), Samuel (1 Sa. 7:17), and many others.

We may suppose, now that the people of Israel were, with this glorious discovery which God had made of Himself to them, that many of them would incline, in this pang of devotion, to offer sacrifice to God; and, it being necessary to a sacrifice that there be an altar; they are here directed to make their altars very plain, either of earth or of unhewn stone, that they might not be tempted to think of a graven image, they must not so much as hew into shape the stones that they made their altars of, but pile them up as they were, in the rough. This rule being prescribed before the establishment of the ceremonial law, which appointed altars much more costly, intimates that, after the period of that law, plainness should be accepted as the best ornament of the external services of religion, and that gospel-worship should not be performed with external pomp and gaiety. The beauty of holiness needs no paint, an altar of earth does best.

Verse 26

To begin to break them out of pagan practices and to separate them from others, Israel was told to make their altars very low, so that they did not need to have steps to go up to them. The idea that the higher the altar was, and the nearer heaven, the more acceptable the sacrifice was, was a foolish fancy of the heathen, who therefore chose high places in opposition to this. This command was to show that it is the elevation of the heart, not of the sacrifice, that God looks at, so they were here ordered to make their altars low.

We may suppose that the altars they reared in the wilderness, and other occasional altars, were designed only for the sacrifice of one beast at a time; but the altar in Solomon's temple, which



was to be made much longer and broader, that it might contain many sacrifices at once, was made ten cubits high, that the height might bear a decent proportion to the length and breadth. This meant it needed steps for sacrifice in Solomon's Temple. The instructions here would steer Israel away from the sexual perversions in Canaanite worship. The priests would not behave in such a way that their nakedness would be seen. The long garments worn by the priests would not lead to him tripping and having accidents.

They are here assured of God's gracious acceptance of their devotions, wherever they were paid according to His will.

In all places where I record my name, or where my name is recorded (that is, where I am worshipped in sincerity), I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee.

Afterwards, God chose one particular place wherein to record His name: but that being taken away now under the gospel, when men are encouraged to pray everywhere, this promise revives in its full extent, that, wherever God's people meet in His name to worship Him, He will be in the midst of them; He will honour them with His presence, and reward them with the gifts of His grace; there He will come unto them, and will bless them, and more than this we need not desire for the beautifying of our solemn assemblies.

CONCLUSION

Scripture tells us much about the basis and nature of the life as a believer and as a Christian now that Messiah has come, died, been resurrected. It makes it clear that believers are now in union with Christ as they have been "saved", and now have and possess His righteousness.

In this union there will be a continued walk with Jesus, and there will be abiding, and fruit bearing. In John 15:10 Jesus made it clear that union is linked to keeping His commandments and Philippians 3:8-11 expresses this same idea.

In the Old Testament it is made clear that persons were not saved by keeping the Law. They like Abraham were saved by belief in God which law as stated in Deuteronomy 6:5:

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might".

There had to be as Deuteronomy 10:16, and Jeremiah 4:4 stated a circumcision of the heart. The idea of keeping the law as opposed to the Covenant was a clear misstep in Judaism.

But for Paul, who knew very well that Jesus had stated in Matthew 5:17 that He had not come to abolish the Law and the prophets he would state the law was the "law of God" (Romans 7:22,25) As Romans 7:7 declared the law was not sin, but was "holy, just, and good" (vs. 12). It is spiritual (vs.14).



Scripture does not give any basis for disregarding the law. We know that the Coming and activities of Messiah fulfilled several aspects of the “law” for Messiah’s blood had been shed, He had been resurrected and ascended to heaven, and the Holy Spirit had come as promised to indwell believers. Isaiah’s prophecy of the Servant of Jehovah and references in the Psalms had made this clear. So we know that Temple sacrifices, and animal sacrifices were no longer required. It is also clear that the 495 or more Rabbinic laws and their off base interpretations which are called the “tradition of the fathers” were never instituted by God and in many case ran counter to the Biblical Commandments and the spirit of the law.

But Gentile wily-nilly rejection of the stated laws of God and observance of His Sabbaths because they choose to substitute their own day of worship despite no biblical authorization as being for Jews is characteristic of man wanting to make his own laws. Many twist the words of the Apostle to justify what they want to do. They really want to supplant the people of Israel and reject their status in the eyes of God. Much of the distortions of modern Christianity come from the pagan elements which entered the early church with its ideas of “doing away with Israel”. One writer advises how we are to live:

“Just as we did not receive the righteousness to enter the Christian life by doing in our own strength the works which the law requires, so the continuance of the Christian life is by grace, not by works, not by works which fulfill the law. And yet, although Christians do not acquire and maintain righteousness by fulfilling the specific requirements of the law, they are nonetheless to regard the biblically revealed law as an expression of God’s will for their lives, for, as we have seen, the law has not been abolished. Paul notes that we can fulfill several specific commandments of the law by love (Romans 13:8-10). He reiterates the importance of the command to love one’s father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise (Eph. 6:2) ...

“You are my friends if you do what I command you” (John 15:14)

We are not at liberty to reject such commands; to do so would be an abuse of Christian freedom. Therefore, we must seek to guide our lives by these precepts”.

Undoubtedly salvation of the Old Testament saints was based on the work of Christ though it was achieved by the future death of the Messiah the Son of God mediated by the priests and the sacrificial systems and the Temple rites instead of a direct personal relationship with Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit rarely dwelt within the saint before Pentecost but influenced persons with the word of the Bible and direct external influence at times.

The Christian life must now be lived under the control of the Spirit under His power and guidance, meeting the challenges of life, growing and bearing fruit.

What it cannot do is to live like pagans, practising selfishness, abusing and oppressing others and doing the many sins that Micah and the other Old Testament prophets condemn. If a



person want to know how to obey God and to live, like a modern Christian there is no better place to learn than to start growth in knowledge by reading the Old Testament prophets

Obedience to the law of God which is now being written on the heart by the Holy Spirit must be demonstrated.

