



# International Bible Lessons Commentary

Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series

L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.

## Exodus 31:12-18 New Revised Standard Version September 17, 2017

The [International Bible Lesson](#) (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, September 17, 2017**, is from **Exodus 31:12-18**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the [International Bible Lessons Commentary](#) website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the [International Bible Lesson Forum](#).

### **(Exodus 31:12) The LORD said to Moses:**

God uses messengers to speak to His people. The LORD spoke to Moses, and God used signs and wonders to confirm His words before and after He led the Hebrews out of slavery in Egypt through Moses. God gave the Hebrews enough evidence to believe everything Moses said as a messenger of God, and to disbelieve Moses and refuse to act rightly according to the words of God spoken through Moses was to rebel against God and the Law of God revealed through Moses. When we read the Bible, we are reading the words of God spoken to and through His messengers, and the Bible gives us enough evidence to believe what is written in the Bible and to act accordingly. Every word spoken by anyone who claims to be a messenger from God should be tested by what the Bible teaches, because God will never contradict Himself or His words in the Bible.

**(Exodus 31:13) You yourself are to speak to the Israelites: “You shall keep my sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, given in order that you may know that I, the LORD, sanctify you.**

When God spoke through Abraham, God gave the Hebrews a sign that they must perform to show that the LORD was their God and they were His people. This sign was physical, circumcision, and it was to be performed by a father for his son when he was eight days old. When God spoke through Moses, God gave the Hebrews another sign, a

spiritual sign that required weekly obedience on their part: they must observe the Sabbath. When a Hebrew observed the Sabbath, he showed that he spiritually wanted the LORD to be His God and He would learn all he could about God through worship and study of the Scriptures so He could show his love for God through his obedience to God's Law. Physical circumcision was practiced as a sign a person was a Hebrew, but that religious rite could not make the circumcised person holy. God chose to make people holy through spiritual means as they obeyed Him, observed the Sabbath, learned about God from the Scriptures, and set themselves apart to serve God according to the will of God. By observing the Sabbath according to the Scriptures, we come to know the LORD personally and spiritually as God intends and He will show us how to serve Him.

**(Exodus 31:14) You shall keep the sabbath, because it is holy for you; everyone who profanes it shall be put to death; whoever does any work on it shall be cut off from among the people.**

God set apart the Sabbath for us, for our benefit, for our physical and spiritual benefit. The LORD forbids desecrating work on the Sabbath. God forbids work that insults Him, defiles a believer, or harms others or oneself by sins of commission or omission. God does not forbid deeds of kindness and mercy on the Sabbath. Jesus said: "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27-28). What Christians are forbidden and permitted to do on the Sabbath is best illustrated by what Jesus did and taught, for Jesus healed on the Sabbath and He went to synagogues and the temple on the Sabbath to bless others with His miracles and His teachings. For a law to be a law, the law must have consequences for obedience as well as disobedience. Believers are blessed when they observe the Sabbath. Through Moses God showed how importantly He regarded the observance of the Sabbath when He said those who desecrate the Sabbath were to be put to death. To desecrate means "to treat disrespectfully, irreverently, or outrageously." The refusal to observe the Sabbath, the dishonoring of God and His Law and His people, would eventually pollute the entire nation if not punished rightly. We do not exercise the death penalty today for Sabbath breaking, but the death penalty shows how important it is to God and for us to observe the Sabbath.

**(Exodus 31:15) Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the LORD; whoever does any work on the sabbath day shall be put to death.**

The LORD defined the Sabbath day and repeated His reasons for why the Sabbath day should be observed. God always has good reasons for what He does and all His laws are for the benefit of every person. We need to work six days a week. Someone once said that if we work less than six days a week we are prone to get into mischief. The LORD

has set apart the Sabbath rest for our benefit. It is to be a day of focus on God. By observing the Sabbath we can more easily keep God-centered instead of self-centered. No one is to require another person to work seven days a week, and the Sabbath rest will prevent that when observed. Usually, those who worked on the Sabbath were not put to death; rather, the Hebrews were to openly acknowledge the fact that the one who did not observe the Sabbath had cut himself off from the people of God. One exception may have involved more than just working, the Bible does not give us all the details but says, “While the Israelites were in the wilderness, a man was found gathering wood on the Sabbath day . . . Then the LORD said to Moses, “The man must die. The whole assembly must stone him outside the camp.” (Numbers 15:32, 35). God is willing to enforce His Law, but many more times than we can imagine God has not enforced on us what we deserve. Through His Son, God has plans for us and those who lived before us: “God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished” (Romans 3:25). Jesus Christ bore on the cross the penalties we deserved but did not receive for our sins.

**(Exodus 31:16) Therefore the Israelites shall keep the sabbath, observing the sabbath throughout their generations, as a perpetual covenant.**

Observance of the Sabbath was to be a lasting covenant because there would never be a time when God’s people would not need rest and spiritual renewal upon the earth. The observance of the Sabbath is doing what God says we need because we trust that He knows what we need.

**(Exodus 31:17) It is a sign forever between me and the people of Israel that in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed.”**

When God created the world, He gave us an example to follow. The LORD rested and was refreshed on the seventh day. What is good enough for God is good enough for us. We need rest and refreshment. Think about all the problems people have and all the poor decisions they make when they are not rested and refreshed. Indeed, the LORD made the Sabbath for us. And we show our love and appreciation for God and His people when we gather with them on the Sabbath to worship and learn more with one another from the Scriptures God has given us. God has said and done, and continues to emphasize in every way that He wisely can, that we need to observe the Sabbath for our own mental, physical, and spiritual well-being and the benefit of those around us.

**(Exodus 31:18) When God finished speaking with Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave him the two tablets of the covenant, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God.**

A law written on stone could not be changed, but if it was changed the change would be apparent to the careful observer. God did not want His Law changed, so He wrote it in stone. The penalty for disobedience could not be changed, but the one who broke the Law could find mercy and forgiveness and righteousness through faith in God, through the Messiah Savior who was to come, even as Abraham did. God's Law had no double standard: one for the rich and another for the poor. When Moses sinned against God, he was forbidden to enter the Promised Land and he died, but God forgave Moses and granted him eternal life, for he appeared with Jesus on the mount of transfiguration (see Matthew 17). The LORD deemed the Ten Commandments so important that He Himself engraved them in two stone tablets. These tablets were to be placed under the mercy seat in the ark of the covenant, because God is a loving and merciful God. God gave a sacrificial system to the Israelites that encouraged repentance, promised forgiveness, and pointed to the sacrifice of His Son so all who have disobeyed God can find mercy and forgiveness through faith in Him.

### **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further**

1. Name a way people can show they agree with the covenant God gave through Moses?
2. What does God make us and what is one or two means He uses to do so?
3. Why is there a penalty for disobeying God's Law?
4. Who has given us good examples of what it means to observe the Sabbath?
5. What two benefits did God receive when He rested on the seventh day? Do people need these benefits from observing the Sabbath?

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Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson*.

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