

Commentary on Exodus 20:1-11

By L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.

The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Series*) for **September 12, 2010**, is from **Exodus 20:1-11**. Five **Questions for Discussion** follow the Bible Lesson Commentary. These are my preliminary verse by verse study notes before writing my Bible Lesson for *The Oklahoman* newspaper. They may help you in your class preparation and discussion. I do encourage you to write your own verse by verse notes and questions before reading the notes and questions below.

Exodus 20:1 Then God spoke all these words:

Never forget the amazing fact that God created us, has taken notice of us, and in spite of our sinning against Him, He has spoken to the human race in real, understandable words. His words were accurately recorded and preserved in the Bible for all people to read (and now translated into almost every language and dialect). His moral laws, the 10 commandments and the law of love, for examples, are universal laws that bring happiness and a blessing from God when obeyed.

2 I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery;

God spoke and identified himself by name, the name He revealed to Moses for all people to use forever, not just the Hebrews. He showed that He was all powerful over all creation, over the highest religious and political leaders (in Egypt, in the Exodus), and over all false gods, when He overcame all opposition to Him and Moses, and freed the Israelites from slavery.

3 you shall have no other gods before me.

In response to God freeing them from slavery, God expected the Hebrews to reject all other gods or idols that they might be tempted to worship, fear, or follow wherever they encountered them, especially after they entered the Promised Land. From their experience with the LORD (YHWH), and from their ability to reason about their history as God worked in the lives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (and Joseph), they should know and believe that there is no higher God than the LORD.

4 You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.

Understanding that there is no higher god than the LORD (YHWH), and that the LORD is all-sufficient for all their needs and a trustworthy leader to follow in the future, they should know the futility of creating (and should not create) any idols that represent anything that God has created in nature (or that they create in their imaginations or that the devil inspires them to create). The Creator God is

far greater than anything in creation or anything that people can fashion.

5 You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me,

Our actions, decisions, and examples have effects on those around us, especially our families. It is evil, it is rebellion against God, for anyone to worship a false god or anything or things (false gods) they place above God in their lives. To do so will mislead and leave lasting scars on their children. In turn, their children will mislead their children and grandchildren—leading to suffering for generations. Consider some of the nations in the world today that have worshiped false gods for centuries. What are the human and natural consequences that have resulted. By the grace of God, the children and grandchildren of these parents can turn to the LORD and receive forgiveness and healing.

6 but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

Similarly, if we love the LORD and obey His commandments, by our teaching and example, we will have a positive, godly influence upon our children and grandchildren. There may be some exceptions, where a child has turned from the LORD, and the Bible calls this the “mystery of iniquity.” Each person is given free will; that is why God warns each person not to turn to idolatry. God-fearing, Christian parents and leaders do make a difference, and God is able to show families and nations His steadfast love through their leadership to future generations.

7 You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.

Wrongful use of God's name can include swearing, or using God's name to mislead someone about yourself or your intentions. It can include using God's name to manipulate trusting, unsuspecting or ignorant people, who will then give themselves, or their property, or their money, or their families, to some selfish or self-centered person or group who is misusing God's name to mislead them. God will eventually punish such person.

8 Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy.

God has given us one day in seven to rest and worship Him, to learn from Him, and to refresh ourselves so we can have the strength to live for Him in the week ahead. On this seventh day, we need to be careful that we do not do anything that will violate the holiness of God, but instead consecrate the day to the LORD.

9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work.

Labor is important and a requirement of God to be obeyed. All who are able can and should work. This is a command from God as part of the Ten Commandments. If we are unemployed, it can be our work to look for a job or take a job that is less than we might desire while we look for better work. If we are retired, we can do volunteer work and care for our homes (which does require work). For some, praying daily for others and their needs, for good churches, pastors, teachers, evangelists, and missionary work, will be the work that God wants them to do as well.

10 But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work — you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns.

We need to plan our work and work hard so we can get all the necessary work done in six days, and do not need to work on the seventh. We are not to require others to work on their seventh day of rest so we can rest or not need to work. We are not to require people of other races or other nations to work so we do not need to work.

11 For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.

Anything I can do someone else in the world can probably do faster and better, that is probably true of most of us. God can do anything faster and better than anyone God has created, and all creatures depend totally on God for their existence. We should expect God to be able to create “heaven, the earth, the sea, and all that is in them” as fast or as slowly as God wants to do it. We should expect God to be able to create the world faster and better than chance (or undirected, unintelligent) evolution (which some atheists and scientists believe in instead of believing in God). God could easily create “heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them,” in six days without leaving out any steps (or even taking shortcuts) by just speaking the word and it making it so. Then, God followed His own moral law and gave an example for us to follow, that we should rest on the seventh day. If God thought it important enough to show and tell, it is certainly a command that we should observe.

Five Questions for Discussion

1. What are some of the consequences of not believing in the God of the Bible or not believing that God has spoken to the human race? How has disbelief in the God of the Bible had an effect on some nations for generations?

2. What are some idols that people worship in our world and in our nation? What are some of the effects of worshipping these idols, even though they may not be figurines created by human hands.

3. Is it punishment to allow someone to suffer the natural, logical, or legal consequences of their actions without interfering to stop them from suffering? How would you respond to someone who argued that God is unfair in Exodus 20:5? If you think God is unfair in Exodus 20:5, what would you do in the same situation if you were God without violating anyone's freewill?

4. In what ways do some people misuse God's name today, perhaps without even know it? Inside the church? Outside the church?

5. If a nation or company has a forty hour workweek, how can someone with a forty hour workweek still violate the Sabbath law? Do you think God's law regarding the Sabbath still applies today? Why or why not?

Copyright 2010 by L.G. Parkhurst, Jr. Permission Granted for Not for Profit Use.