Obeying God’s Law
Exodus 20:18-26
SS Lesson for 10/15/2017

Devotional Scripture: Ps 119:49-64

OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW AND KEY VERSE OF THE LESSON
Key Verse: Exodus 20:24
Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary
Commentary from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

LESSON INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND
From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

MAJOR THEME ANALYSIS

OBEEDIENCE THROUGH TESTING (EXODUS 20:18-20)
Testing based on the Fear of the Lord (18)
Fear of the Lord to keep His commandments (Eccl 12:13)
Fear of the Lord leads to God fulfilling our desires (Ps 145:19)
Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Prov 9:10)
Fear of the Lord leads to the knowledge of God (Prov 2:3-5)
Fear of the Lord is part of God’s everlasting covenant (Jer 32:40)

Testing based on God’s word (19)
Testing based on God’s word for obedience (Gen 22:9-12)
Testing based on God’s word to determine true listening (Ex 15:24-27)
Testing based on God’s word for humility (Deut 8:2)
Testing based on God’s word to determine love for God (Deut 13:3)

Testing so that we don’t sin (20)
Not sinning through hiding God’s word in heart (Ps 119:11)
Not sinning through God’s power (Ps 19:13)
Not sinning through standing firm in the faith (Gal 5:1)
Not sinning through showing proper respect to others (1 Peter 2:16-17)
Not sinning through not giving Satan a foothold (Eph 4:25-27)

OBEEDIENCE TO THE ONLY GOD (EXODUS 20:21-23)
Only God that is approachable (21)
Approachable because God doesn’t want anyone to perish, but come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9)
Approachable because all are one in Jesus (Gal 3:26-29)
Approachable because of being justified through faith (Rom 5:1-2)
Approachable because there is freedom and confidence in approaching God (Eph 3:12)
Approachable because there is cleansing from sin and guilt (Heb 10:19-22)

Only God who speaks to us (22)
God speaks to us therefore we should listen (1 Sam 3:10)
God speaks to us so we can recognize His voice (1 John 4:6)
God speaks to us so we can find what we need to know (Acts 10:33)
God speaks to us to strengthen (Dan 10:19)
God speaks to us so we can be a doer of His Word (James 1:22)

Only God that should be worshipped (23)
Only God that should be worshipped because of the message from God (Josh 5:13-14)
Only God that should be worshipped not angels (Col 2:18)
Only God that should be worshipped and served (Matt 4:10)
God is the only one to worship as a response of discipleship (1 Cor 3:5-9)
Only God that should be worshipped because He is worthy (Ps 145:3)

OBEEDIENCE THROUGH WORSHIP (EXODUS 20:24-26)
Worship with offerings (24)
Worship with offerings done willingly (2 Cor 8:12)
Worship with offerings that are offered right (Gen 4:2-7)
Worship with offerings that are sacrificial (Phil 4:16-18)
Worship with offerings because of being in the household of God (1 Peter 2:5)
Worship with offerings that are part of being generous (Ps 112:5-6)
Worship with offerings that are given in secret (Matt 6:2-4)
Worship with offerings that provide for disciples (Matt 10:42)

Worship with holiness (25-26)
Worship with reverence (Ps 2:11)
Worship to the Lord in the splendor of His holiness (Ps 29:2)
Worship to bring glory to God's name (Ps 86:9-10)
Worship in spirit and in truth (John 4:24)
Worship God with holiness because He is exalted above all (Ps 99:2-3)

CONCLUSION AND OTHER THOUGHTS

COMMENTARY THOUGHTS FROM THOMAS CONSTABLE
CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM THE NIV STANDARD LESSON COMMENTARY
PRACTICAL POINTS FROM THE BIBLE EXPOSITOR AND ILLUMINATOR COMMENTARY
Introduction

Overview and Key Verse of the Lesson

The lesson examines and helps us understand that the purpose of God’s covenant and **Obeying God’s Law** was to help the Israelites and us stay away from sin. The **study’s aim** is to sense that God’s purpose for any of His commands is to keep His people from sin. The **study’s application** is to renew a commitment to give full obedience to God’s Word in order to avoid sin.

(Adapted from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary)

Key Verse: Exodus 20:24

**An altar of earth you shall make for Me, and you shall sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen. In every place where I record My name I will come to you, and I will bless you.**

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

**20:18-21.** The response of the people gathered before the mountain was one of fear and awe (cf. 19:16). Recognizing the mighty power and majesty of God, they wanted to hear of Him through Moses—not directly lest God destroy them. Moses assured them that the purpose of this display of God’s power and holiness was to test their reaction to Him. Fear of Him would help curb their disobedience. Tragically Israel soon lost this fear of Him (Ex. 32)—a frequent theme in her history. God applied and elaborated on the Decalogue in its civil and religious implications for the nation. This section is called “the Book of the Covenant,” based on that phrase in 24:7.

**20:22-26.** God gave the nation regulations about their worship of the true God and the building of an altar. He had come from heaven to Mount Sinai (19:20) to give the Ten Commandments. Now (20:22-23:19) He elaborated on many of those 10. The command to worship God alone, not other deities (20:23), and the caution against making carved or molten idols **of silver or... gold**, re-emphasizes the first and second commandments (vv. 3-4). On an altar the people were to offer **burnt offerings and fellowship offerings**, which would result in His name being honored and their lives being blessed. Reference to a single altar indicates that God intended that worship should be centralized in one place. The altar was to be unadorned by craftsmanship; it was to be ofearth (i.e., of natural stones; cf. Deut. 27:5-7), and without steps so the priests would not be indecently exposed. Altars with elaborate craftsmanship and elevated platforms were common in the worship of false deities.

Commentary from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

As we have been learning in our review of God's covenants, we see again from this text that a covenant with God involves being in relationship with Him. Entering a covenant means establishing a relationship. God's covenant with us gives us the parameters and practices of how to walk with Him in an obedient relationship. It is a high and wonderful privilege to experience this covenant relationship, and there are many more blessings to be found as we walk in it. This text speaks of God coming to His people. A great blessing of our covenant relationship is that of redemption. We notice in Exodus 20 that redemption came before the giving of the Law (vss. 1-2). Our relationship with God must be established before we can truly understand God's law. Obeying God's law, loving God's law, being able to respond in a positive way to God's law—all this comes after redemption. To apply this to us today, our hearts are changed by the Holy Spirit through redemption so that we are able to truly receive the instruction of God and begin to walk in blessed obedience. So first there is the life-changing blessing of redemption, and this leads to an obedient walk with God. The text also stresses the presence of God as it observes that He records His name in the places He chooses to do so. A glorious blessing of being in a covenant relationship with God is experiencing His presence as we walk with Him in obedience. Exodus 20 majors on some of the manifestations of the presence of God (cf. vss. 18-22). God has ways of making Himself known to us! Yes, He can come in the still, small voice, but He can also speak loudly as we are drawn into a covenant relationship with Him. This experience of the presence of God is what humbles our hearts and leads us toward reverentially obeying Him. God's law instructs our humbled hearts on the practical ways we can obediently serve Him. Indeed, the text speaks of the Old Testament people meeting with God around the altar, renewing the sense of His presence through their worship and sacrifices. We experience the blessing
of the presence of God as we obediently worship Him. We can see many practical blessings of our covenant with God that result from an obedient walk with Him. Perhaps this is what is meant when God said, "I will bless thee." There are blessings that come from worshipping God free of the idolatries of the human heart. In this we are able to experience His mercy (cf. Exod. 20:6). There are blessings within the command of Sabbath rest (vs. 11) as we learn to follow the Lord and honor Him. There are certainly many practical blessings involved in the command to honor parents (vs. 12). Indeed, we could go on speaking indefinitely of the blessings of obedience to God’s law. Redemption brings us into a covenant with God. It changes our hearts, and we willingly embrace the blessed yoke of God’s good and godly commands. As we then learn to walk obediently with God in our relationship with Him, many more blessings come! Are we walking in obedience as we should?

Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

On September 19, 2014, Omar J. Gonzalez, an Iraq War veteran with post-traumatic stress disorder, jumped over the White House’s fence and entered the building’s front door. He was quickly stopped by security officers and arrested. Gonzalez was carrying a knife, and he had two hatchets, a machete, and 800 rounds of ammunition in his vehicle nearby. In June 2015, when he was sentenced to 17 months in prison, Gonzalez said, “I never meant to harm anyone.” At the time of his arrest, he said he wanted to warn the president that the atmosphere was collapsing. We would never presume to barge into the presence of a world leader in such a way. We would want our meeting to communicate the respect the office deserves. The same is true with God.

Our lesson text today covers the Israelites’ response to God’s declaring the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20:1-17. (You may also have heard the Ten Commandments called The Decalogue, meaning “ten words.”) Our passage is part of the record of God’s covenant with the Israelites. He had told them previously through Moses, “Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:5, 6). Within the Ten Commandments are the fundamentals concerning how the people of God were to obey him. Obedience is required of God’s covenant people; in fact, a disobedient covenant people is a contradiction in terms—now as then.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Obedience Through Testing (Exodus 20:18-20)

18 Now all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood afar off.
19 Then they said to Moses, “You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die.”
20 And Moses said to the people, "Do not fear; for God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin."

Testing based on the Fear of the Lord (18)

Fear of the Lord to keep His commandments (Eccl 12:13)

13 Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man’s all.

Fear of the Lord leads to God fulfilling our desires (Ps 145:19)

19 He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; He also will hear their cry and save them.

Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Prov 9:10)

10 "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.
Fear of the Lord leads to the knowledge of God (Prov 2:3-5)
3 Yes, if you cry out for discernment, And lift up your voice for understanding, 4 If you seek her as silver, And search for her as for hidden treasures; 5 Then you will understand the fear of the Lord, And find the knowledge of God.

Fear of the Lord is part of God’s everlasting covenant (Jer 32:40)
40 And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from doing them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts so that they will not depart from Me.

Testing based on God’s word (19)
Testing based on God’s word for obedience (Gen 22:9-12)
9 When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. 10 Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. 11 But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!” “Here I am,” he replied. 12 “Do not lay a hand on the boy,” he said, “Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.”

Testing based on God’s word to determine true listening (Ex 15:24-27)
24 So the people grumbled against Moses, saying, “What are we to drink?” 25 Then Moses cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a piece of wood. He threw it into the water, and the water became sweet. There the Lord made a decree and a law for them, and there he tested them. 26 He said, “If you listen carefully to the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord, who heals you.” 27 Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs and seventy palm trees, and they camped there near the water.

Testing based on God’s word for humility (Deut 8:2)
2 Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands.

Testing based on God’s word to determine love for God (Deut 13:3)
3 You must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The Lord your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul.

Testing so that we don’t sin (20)
Not sinning through hiding God’s word in heart (Ps 119:11)
11 I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.

Not sinning through God’s power (Ps 19:13)
13 Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. Then will I be blameless, innocent of great transgression.

Not sinning through standing firm in the faith (Gal 5:1)
5 It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

Not sinning through showing proper respect to others (1 Peter 2:16-17)
16 Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God. 17 Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king.
Not sinning through not giving Satan a foothold (Eph 4:25-27)

25 Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. 26 "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27 and do not give the devil a foothold.

Obedience To The Only God (Exodus 20:21-23)

21 So the people stood afar off, but Moses drew near the thick darkness where God was.
22 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: 'You have seen that I have talked with you from heaven.
23 You shall not make anything to be with Me — gods of silver or gods of gold you shall not make for yourselves.

Only God that is approachable (21)

Approachable because God doesn’t want anyone to perish, but come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9)

9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

Approachable because all are one in Jesus (Gal 3:26-29)

26 You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, 27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Approachable because of being justified through faith (Rom 5:1-2)

1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

Approachable because there is freedom and confidence in approaching God (Eph 3:12)

12 In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

Approachable because there is cleansing from sin and guilt (Heb 10:19-22)

19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

Only God who speaks to us (22)

God speaks to us therefore we should listen (1 Sam 3:10)

10 The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

God speaks to us so we can recognize His voice (1 John 4:6)

6 We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.

God speaks to us so we can find what we need to know (Acts 10:33)

33 So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us."
God speaks to us to strengthen (Dan 10:19)

19 "Do not be afraid, O man highly esteemed," he said. "Peace! Be strong now; be strong." When he spoke to me, I was strengthened and said, "Speak, my lord, since you have given me strength."

God speaks to us so we can be a doer of His Word (James 1:22)

22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

Only God that should be worshipped (23)

Only God that should be worshipped because of the message from God (Josh 5:13-14)

13 Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him and asked, "Are you for us or for our enemies?" 14 "Neither," he replied, "but as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come." Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, "What message does my Lord have for his servant?"

Only God that should be worshipped not angels (Col 2:18)

18 Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions.

Only God that should be worshipped and served (Matt 4:10)

10 Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"

God is the only one to worship as a response of discipleship (1 Cor 3:5-9)

5 What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe — as the Lord has assigned to each his task. 6 I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. 7 So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. 8 The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. 9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.

Only God that should be worshipped because He is worthy (Ps 145:3)

3 Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom.

Obedience Through Worship (Exodus 20:24-26)

24 An altar of earth you shall make for Me, and you shall sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen. In every place where I record My name I will come to you, and I will bless you.
25 And if you make Me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stone; for if you use your tool on it, you have profaned it.
26 Nor shall you go up by steps to My altar, that your nakedness may not be exposed on it.'

Worship with offerings (24)

Worship with offerings done willingly (2 Cor 8:12)

12 For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have.
Worship with offerings that are offered right (Gen 4:2-7)

2 Later she gave birth to his brother Abel. Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. 3 In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. 4 But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, 5 but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. 6 Then the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? 7 If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it."

Worship with offerings that are sacrificial (Phil 4:16-18)

16 for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need. 17 Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. 18 I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.

Worship with offerings because of being in the household of God (1 Peter 2:5)

5 you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Worship with offerings that are part of being generous (Ps 112:5-6)

5 Good will come to him who is generous and lends freely, who conducts his affairs with justice. 6 Surely he will never be shaken; a righteous man will be remembered forever.

Worship with offerings that are given in secret (Matt 6:2-4)

2 "So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. 3 But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Worship with offerings that provide for disciples (Matt 10:42)

42 And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward."

Worship with holiness (25-26)

Worship with reverence (Ps 2:11)

11 Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling.

Worship to the Lord in the splendor of His holiness (Ps 29:2)

2 Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness.

Worship to bring glory to God’s name (Ps 86:9-10)

9 All the nations you have made will come and worship before you, O Lord; they will bring glory to your name. 10 For you are great and do marvelous deeds; you alone are God.

Worship in spirit and in truth (John 4:24)

24 God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."

Worship God with holiness because He is exalted above all (Ps 99:2-3)

2 Great is the Lord in Zion; he is exalted over all the nations. 3 Let them praise your great and awesome name — he is holy.
Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Thomas Constable

The response of the Israelites (20:18-21)

The rest of this section contains the record of the Israelites' reaction to the giving of the Law and God's reason for giving it as He did. He wanted the people to reverence Him and therefore not to sin (Exodus 20:20).

"It can be argued that in the present shape of the Pentateuch, the Decalogue (Exodus 20:1-17) is intended to be read as the content of what Moses spoke to the people upon his return from the mountain in Exodus 19:25. After the Decalogue, the narrative in Exodus 20:18-21 looks back once again to the people's fear in Exodus 19:16-24. In retelling this incident, the second narrative fills the important "gaps" in our understanding of the first."

Similarly Genesis 2 retells the story of creation in Genesis 1 to fill in important gaps.

"The Book of the Covenant begins technically with Exodus 20:22, having been separated from the Decalogue by a brief narrative (Exodus 20:18-21) describing the people's response to the phenomena accompanying Moses' encounter with Yahweh on Sinai (cf. Exodus 19:16-25). The technical term "ordinances" (mispatim), which describes the specific stipulations of the covenant, does not occur until Exodus 21:1, so Exodus 20:22-26 serves as an introduction to the stipulation section. This introduction underlines Yahweh's exclusivity, His self-revelation to His people, and His demand to be worshiped wherever He localizes His name and in association with appropriate altars."

God evidently spoke the Ten Commandments in the hearing of all the Israelites (Exodus 19:9; Exodus 20:19; Exodus 20:22) to cause them to fear Him (Exodus 20:20). The people were so awestruck by this revelation that they asked Moses to relay God's words to them from then on (Exodus 20:20), which he did (Exodus 20:21).

"This verse [Exodus 20:20] contrasts two types of "fear": tormenting fear (which comes from conscious guilt or unwarranted alarm and leads to bondage) or salutary fear (which promotes and demonstrates the presence of an attitude of complete trust and belief in God; cf. the "fear of the LORD God" beginning in Genesis 22:12). This second type of fear will keep us from sinning and is at the heart of the OT's wisdom books (cf. Proverbs 1:7; Ecclesiastes 12:13 et al.)."

"Whereas Exodus 19:16-24 looks at the people's fear from a divine perspective, Exodus 20:18-21 approaches it from the viewpoint of the people themselves. What we learn from both narratives, therefore, is that there was a growing need for a mediator and a priesthood in the Sinai covenant. Because of the people's fear of God's presence, they are now standing "afar off" (Exodus 20:21). Already, then, we can see the basis being laid within the narrative for the need of the tabernacle (Exodus 25-31). The people who are "afar off" must be brought near to God. This is the purpose of the instructions for the tabernacle which follow this narrative."

Verse 22-23

Exodus 20:22 is a preamble and historical background for what follows. On the basis of God's revelation on the mountain, the Israelites were to obey Him as follows.

The Israelites were not to make idols representing gods other than Yahweh nor were they to represent Yahweh by making idols to help them worship Him (Exodus 20:23).

Verses 22-26

The basic principles of worship in Israel (20:22-26)

God did not just condemn forms of worship that were inappropriate, but He instructed the Israelites positively how they were to worship Him.

"The point of the section is this: those who worship this holy God must preserve holiness in the way they worship-they worship where he permits, in the manner he prescribes, and with the blessings he promises."
This pericope serves as an introduction to judgments in Exodus 21:1 to Exodus 23:12. A similar section repeats the emphases of the introduction and forms a conclusion to the judgments (Exodus 23:13-19).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prohibition of idolatry (Exodus 20:22-23)</th>
<th>42 judgments (Exodus 21:1 to Exodus 23:12)</th>
<th>Prohibition of idolatry (Exodus 23:13)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proper forms of worship (Exodus 20:24-26)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Proper forms of worship (Exodus 23:14-19)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Verses 22-33**

The stipulations of the Book of the Covenant (20:22-23:33)

"It is worth noting that the stipulations are enfolded within matching frames that stress the exclusivity of Yahweh (Exodus 20:22-23; cf. Exodus 23:24-25; cf. Exodus 23:32-33), His presence in specified places (Exodus 20:24; cf. Exodus 23:14-17; Exodus 23:20; Exodus 23:28-31), and a proper protocol and ritual by which He may be approached by His servant people (Exodus 20:24-26; cf. Exodus 23:18-19). It is within the context of a vertical covenant relationship, then, that the horizontal, societal, and interpersonal relationships of the Book of the Covenant take on their ultimate meaning."

"The section before us has something to say about each of the ten commandments, even if only incidentally."

**Verses 24-26**

Yahweh permitted His people to build altars where He granted special theophanies, that Isaiah, manifestations of His presence. These were in addition to the altars at Israel’s central sanctuary (the tabernacle and later the temple; cf. Judges 6:25-27; Judges 13:15-20; I Samuel 9:11-14; I Samuel 16:1-5; I Kings 18:30-40). They were to build these altars for formal worship and for special occasions (e.g, Joshua 8:30; Judges 6:25-26) out of earth or uncut stone. The Canaanites used cut or "dressed" stone for their altars, and it was probably to distinguish the two that God directed Israel as He did.

Israel’s altars were not to have steps, as many Canaanite altars did, so the naked flesh of the priests might not appear as they mounted them to make their offerings.

"Possibly the verse intends to oppose the practice of certain peoples in the ancient East, like the Sumerians for instance, whose priests ... used to perform every ritual ceremony in a state of nakedness. Likewise the Egyptian priests ... used to wear only a linen ephod, a kind of short, primitive apron."

"This simple description of true worship is intended to portray the essence of the Sinai covenant in terms that are virtually identical to that of the religion of the patriarchs-earthen altars, burnt offerings, and simple devotion rather than elaborate rituals. A simple earthen altar is sufficient. If more is desired (e.g, a stone altar), then it should not be defiled with carved stones and elaborate steps. The ultimate purpose of any such ritual is the covering of human nakedness that stems from the Fall (Exodus 20:26 b; cf. Genesis 3:7). The implication is that all ritual is only a reflection of that first gracious act of God in covering human nakedness with garments of skin (Genesis 3:21)."

(Adapted from URL: https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/dcc/exodus-20.html)

**Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary**

When I was growing up, revivals were an important part of church life. My home church in Indiana usually held two revivals, one in the spring and one in the fall, and for a number of years each of those revivals consisted of two weeks of nightly services, Monday through Friday. It was at one of those services in the spring of 1964 that I went forward at the preacher’s invitation and voiced my desire to become a Christian. The invitation hymn that was sung that night was “Trust and Obey.” The words of that song, particularly the chorus, came to mind while preparing these lessons on the subject of obeying God’s voice: “Trust and obey, for there’s no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.” Those words remain as true today as they were over 50 years ago when I decided that I would become a follower of Jesus. They were also true for the Israelites who stood at the foot of Mount Sinai and heard God’s voice amidst all the overpowering sights and sounds that were a part of
that unforgettable experience. Of course, being “happy in Jesus” was not an issue for those Israelites at Sinai. But in order to fulfill their responsibilities as God’s covenant people, to “trust and obey” was essential. Obedience—that is what God has always required of his people, in both Old and New Testaments. To foolish, disobedient King Saul, the prophet Samuel gave this rebuke: “To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams” (1 Samuel 15:22). The northern kingdom fell to the Assyrians “because they had not obeyed the Lord their God” (2 Kings 18:12). Jeremiah confronted the people of the southern kingdom of Judah with a review of their history and of what God had demanded of their forefathers: “Obey me, and I will be your God and you will be my people” (Jeremiah 7:23). The present reality facing Jeremiah was a far different story: “Say to them, ‘This is the nation that has not obeyed the Lord its God or responded to correction. Truth has perished; it has vanished from their lips’” (7:28). Christians are of the new covenant. With that new covenant, God has not come with all the phenomena that we have seen displayed at Mount Sinai in today’s lesson text. Instead he has come to be with us in Jesus, or Immanuel, meaning “God with us” (Matthew 1:22, 23). We do not deal with issues such as preparing burnt offerings and constructing altars on which to sacrifice them—matters covered in today’s text. However, what God requires of us remains exactly what was required of the Israelites. That requirement is captured in one word: obedience. “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’” asks Jesus, “and do not do what I say?” (Luke 6:46). He also tells us, “If you love me, keep my commands” (John 14:15). In other words, trust and obey.

Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

1. When God speaks with full power and authority, people are in awe (Exod.20:18)
2. Awareness of our sin threatens to keep us away from God; we really need to draw closer (vs. 19)
3. God’s love draws us away from sin to follow and serve Him (vss. 20-21)
4. God has given us ample evidence that He alone is God (vss. 22-23)
5. Worship is about remembering that God is our Creator and Sustainer and inviting Him to take over our lives (vs. 24)
6. We must be distinct as Christians and careful that our worship is centered on God alone (vs. 25)
7. True worship of God does not use the sensual to draw people (vs. 26)