

## – Chapter 20 –

**The Ten Commandments and Laws about Altars – Part 1**

As chapter 19 ended, the Israelites were gathering before Mt. Sinai, preparing to hear the voice of Jehovah. Even though barriers had been placed to prevent them from approaching and actually touching the mountain, God told Moses, ***“Go down and warn the people, lest they break through to gaze at the Lord, and many of them perish.”*** The chapter ends with these words: ***“So Moses went down unto the people, and spoke unto them.”*** (NKJV) And, chapter 20 begins: ***“And God spoke all these words...”***

As you know, the chapter and verse divisions we have now were not in the original manuscripts. Some were done in the 13th century, but it was in the mid 16th century that editors sought to print an “easy to read and reference” Bible, divided like we see today. Charles François Houbigant, a French priest also known as one of the most qualified scholars and commentators of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, believes the translators made a mistake with their placement of the phrase ***“all these words”*** in the first sentence of chapter 20.

He holds that they belong with the previous chapter so that the final verse of chapter 19 would read: ***“And Moses went down unto the people and spoke unto them all these words.”*** ***“These words”*** being the solemn charge not to approach the mountain, thereby acknowledging that when the Lord manifested Himself there, it would become holy ground.

Houbigant suggests that chapter 20 – among the most famous of the entire book – should begin with the simple, yet elegant words: ***“God spoke thus:”*** After all, this is the moment when He will introduce His Law – His Covenant – and these words of introduction lend great dignity to the beginning of this important discourse with His people.

We know from chapter 19 that the Lord had told Moses to ***“...Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow... and let them be ready for the third day”*** – the day when they would stand before the mount and a trumpet would sound, a cloud would descend over the mountain and the rock itself would tremble. Exodus 19:18 tells us ***“Mount Sinai was***

*completely in smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire.”* In order to be in the presence of the Almighty, the Israelites had to be symbolically clean or “sanctified.”

Even though we won't hear God's voice speaking to us directly from a mountain or the sky today, we do have the ability to communicate with Him. And we know that we cannot have an intimate, personal relationship with our Creator while we are in an unconsecrated (sin-ridden) state. Our blotches, stains and blemishes have to be washed away by the blood of Jesus. The physical washing these people were commanded to do represents the same idea. ***“By those who come near Me, I must be regarded as holy; and before all the people I must be glorified.”*** (Leviticus 10:3 NKJV)

On this day, the Creator of all things – who previously had only spoken with the Patriarchs – was now going to address all the Israelites, and allow them to see His presence (a consuming fire) and hear His voice for the first time. Speaking through Moses, God had already communicated to them that a new covenant was imminent. After all, in chapter 19:5 we read, ***“if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine.”*** No greater words of comfort could have been spoken to a people traveling across the desert toward a new and uncertain future than these: ***“You shall be a special treasure to Me.”***

A covenant is an agreement (a pledge) between two or more parties with “terms” that all parties involved agree to follow. Contained in those terms is often a penalty if either party breaches them. Our God is a God of His word, and He made great promises to Israel, BUT... for them to come true, they had to live up to their side of the agreement. God makes great promises to us as well, and under New Testament law, ALL people are a ***“special treasure”*** to Him – we are His creation! We know He doesn't want anyone to perish (2 Peter 3:9), but we still must abide by His covenant... on His terms.

We know the foundation of His covenant as The Ten Commandments. And, contrary to what many believe, the concepts were not new ones. No, they hadn't yet been written in stone, but they had been written into the heart of man when he was created and placed in the Garden of Eden. Man was sinless in the beginning. There were no thoughts of evil, immorality or

deception in his heart. But with the passage of time and the ever-present influence of Satan, sin had pushed those unspoken rules so far back in man's memory that they were virtually forgotten. Remember what God said before the great flood? ***"... every imagination of the thoughts of his [man's] heart was only evil continually."*** (Gen. 6:5 KJV) And the 239 years they spent in Egypt – where the concept of morality was all but non-existent – drove these concepts even farther away from their hearts and minds.

And, as I intimated above, the 10 Commandments we are about to discuss are not the sum total of Jehovah's covenant. They are the foundation upon which His standard for how He wants His people to live is built. All around us is evidence that they have been distorted, amended, or even eradicated by man's opinion of *"what God surely meant"* when He said these things. But, regardless of what man chooses to believe, those "rules" serve as the standard by which many judgments are going to come upon this earth, first to the household of faith and then to everyone else: ***"For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?"*** (1 Peter 4:17 NKJV)

As Moses is reviewing the 10 Commandments with the Israelites in Deuteronomy, he reminds them, ***"Jehovah our God made a covenant with us when He said, 'I am the Lord, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.'"*** There is much more to these foundational Ten Commandments than what appears on the surface. Let's discuss each of these "terms" of God's covenant individually.

### THE FIRST COMMANDMENT –

***"You shall have no other gods before me."*** (Exodus 20:3 NKJV)

We know that heathen nations worship idols. But lest we think we are "safe" from violating this first commandment because we don't have a statue of a god in our home; let's remember what an idol can be: Anything that comes between us and the Lord! It could be money, our career, a pastime, a relationship with someone, an inappropriate behavior, or even

our own family – it is anything we value more than our relationship with our Heavenly Father. ***“He alone is to be our exceedingly great reward.”*** (Numbers 18:20 KJV) What many people do not understand is this: If He is our first priority – and we allow everything else to fall in place behind that relationship – we will make better decisions in all areas of our life and actually live it more fully. And, there is no mistaking the message contained in these words: ***“For you shall not worship any other god, for Jehovah, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.”*** (Exodus 34:14 KJV)

Let’s again refer to the review of the Law that Moses records in Deuteronomy:  
***“Therefore know this day, and consider it in your heart, that the Lord Himself is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other. You shall therefore keep His statutes and His commandments which I command you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may prolong your days in the land which the Lord your God is giving you for all time.”*** (Deuteronomy 4:39 & 40 NKJV) That was a promise to Israel and, by extension, all that are joined with Israel in the eternal kingdom often called the **“New Jerusalem.”**

Those Israelites standing at the foot of the mount when Jehovah descended upon it were the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The 10 Commandments, along with the rest of His Law, (also called the Law of Moses) provided them with two things:

- a. A spiritual standard to follow, including regulations for worship, requirements for the priests, sacrifices, feasts, and worship in the tabernacle (later, the temple) that would guide His people until the time was right for Jesus to come to earth and deliver a new law – a better covenant (Hebrews 8) that would incorporate ALL people and would guide them until the end of the world and beyond.
- b. Physical ordinances for maintaining cleanliness and living in peace in a communal society.

The Bible gives at least four reasons why God gave the Mosaic Law to His people:

- a. For their own good

- b. To reveal Himself to them,
- c. To set them apart in order that He may be revealed to others
- d. To reveal humanity's need for a savior.

Keep in mind that fourth reason as we consider the following:

- a. The God of Heaven created a perfect world without sin and a perfect pair – Adam and Eve – to populate it. They enjoyed the privilege of communing directly with God because they were sinless and therefore worthy to be in His presence. The law God gave them consisted of only one commandment: **Do not eat the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge.** However, when they broke this covenant with the Lord and were forced to leave the perfect Garden, the world entered into what is called the Patriarchal Age, where God only spoke directly to the patriarchs such as Adam, Enoch, and Noah. As time went on, more and more people chose to follow their own desires instead of God's and eventually only one righteous man remained – Noah. So, God decided to start over.
- b. The 8 people in Noah's family were responsible for repopulating the earth after the flood, and as the generations came and went, men like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob remained faithful, but they were certainly a minority.
- c. Now, hundreds of years after the flood, the families of that lineage are set to receive the "Law of Moses," a new covenant. This time God chose NOT to destroy all other living creatures, but to provide this new law in an attempt to keep them close to Him. So... when Moses gathered all Israel around him and said, "***Jehovah our God has made a covenant with us in Horeb***" we need to remember that God, in His infinite wisdom, already knew something greater was needed to reconcile sinful man to Him: only the supreme sacrifice of the blood of Christ could wipe away man's sin. But the Law of Moses was a sort of "place holder" until the time was right for Jesus to come to earth and personally establish His new and perfect covenant. (Eph. 1:7)

We know that during the 40 days Moses was on the mountain receiving the Law, the Israelites became impatient and made the infamous “golden calf.” Remember, these are the same people who, just over a month before, had heard a heavenly trumpet and stood in front of the mighty mountain as it became engulfed in smoke, trembling as the presence of God manifested itself upon it. And yet... they thought they needed something they could see and touch in order to worship fully.

“**No other gods before Me,**” was His command. It was true then and it’s true now. The embracing of worldly values and pursuits does not give glory to Jehovah or His Son. It does not put us in a position to receive God’s blessings any more than the golden calf did all those centuries ago.

#### THE SECOND COMMANDMENT –

*“You shall not make for yourself a carved image...”* (Exodus 20:4 NKJV)

This commandment is linked with the first, and it reminds us that if we allow anything on this earth to capture our heart so much that it owns a piece of our heart, we are displeasing to God. In Luke, Jesus said, *“If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.”* (Luke 14:26 NKJV) In this context “**hate**” means “**esteem them over Him.**” Then in Matthew he tells us, *“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross, and follow Me.”* (Matthew 16:24 NKJV)

So, in other words, anything or anyone, regardless of how beloved they may be to us, can become an idol to us, if we defer to them or prioritize them at the expense of our relationship with God. This can even include worship practices that deviate from what we are commanded to do in favor of what we “want to do” or “have always done.” In other words, if we allow our traditions to dictate how we worship or how we live – and these traditions have no basis in scripture – they have become an idol to us. Notice the words of Matthew 15:8-9. *“These people*

*draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. In vain they worship Me teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.* (NKJV)

It is very important for us to be honest enough with ourselves to recognize that when something in our lives is holding too much sway over us, or we are clinging to something unscriptural out of stubbornness or pride, we must TEAR THAT IDOL DOWN!

Let's use King Josiah (2 Kings 22-23) as an example. In 2 Chronicles 34 we learn: *“Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. He did right in the sight of Jehovah... and did not turn aside to the right or to the left. He began to seek the God of his father David, and in the twelfth year he began to go throughout the whole nation tearing down and utterly demolishing by grinding to powder every idol that kept his people from solely and wholeheartedly seeking and worshiping the Holy One of Israel.”*

I think it's safe to say that when Josiah's soldiers were carrying out his wishes, the people of Jerusalem weren't lining the streets cheering each time an idol fell. Years of evil kings had embedded idol worship in their minds and hearts. But, in spite of any opposition he might have faced, Josiah did what was right. It is that kind of devotion that the Almighty demands from each of us! I should mention that the faith of this young king did not come from “book learning” because the books recorded by Moses (probably the Torah) of Jehovah's holy teachings had been lost after years of evil kings and idolatrous people. But he was being led by the “spirit of truth” to seek the God of his fathers and he knew that his relationship with God wasn't to be ONE of his priorities – but his FIRST priority!

The prophet Jeremiah tells us, *“And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.”* (Jeremiah 29:13 NKJV) and the Hebrew writer, *“...He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”* (Hebrews 11:6 KJV)

We long to hear the phrase, *“Well done, good and faithful servant.”* (Matthew 25:23) The equivalent of this was said about Josiah in 2 Kings 23:25: *“...there was no king like him who turned to Jehovah with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might...”* In

## A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF EXODUS

Ron Roberts

Lesson 13

other words, he exemplified the attitude each of us should cultivate: to love God and seek to serve Him no matter what.

You know, earthly preoccupations in general can be our idol, even ones that aren't "bad" things. What do you spend the most time thinking about? That could be an indication of where your heart is. The Apostle Paul puts it this way: ***"To be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. For if you live after the flesh, ye will die: but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."*** (Romans 8:6, 13-14 NKJV)

By the way, what Josiah did by tearing down those idols and places of idol worship foreshadows what the Lord is going to do to this earth when the final trumpet sounds. The gorgeous properties of the rich and famous will be demolished. All the technological advances man has made will be nullified. Every trophy anyone has ever won will turn to dust. Every bank account in the world will be erased. All the power and prestige that people have managed to "accumulate" will be meaningless. These things so valued and sought after by mankind – their idols, if you will – are foolishness to the One who holds eternity.

Be aware that Satan knows where your weaknesses lie. He will do his best to keep those things ever before your eyes. If we are honest enough with ourselves to acknowledge our temptations – those things which threaten to take precedence over our relationship with God – we can call on our Helper, the powerful Holy Spirit, to help us defeat them and, the sooner the better. The longer you allow them to get close to you, the more likely these temptations will wrap themselves around your heart like vines and squeeze out the only priority that really matters. (See 2 Cor. 10) Oh, to be of the same mind as David: ***"I delight to do Your will, O my God."*** (Psalm 40:8)

Is there anything YOU would exchange for your eternal inheritance? ***"What good is it for someone to gain the whole world (and all its camouflaged idols) yet forfeit their soul?"*** (Mark 8:36 NIV)



## THE THIRD COMMANDMENT –

*“You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain;”*

(Exodus 20:7 NKJV) The original Hebrew manuscripts actually says, *“You shall not bring to naught the name of Jehovah,”* in other words, “make it meaningless” or “obliterate it” because God will not *“leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain.”* (Deuteronomy 5:11 KJV) Many commentators believe this third commandment refers only to cursing, but the meaning goes beyond that.

Moses was told in Exodus 3 to call Him, *‘Jehovah, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob ...’ This is My name forever, and this is My memorial to all generations.* The Creator has an incomparable and sacred name which Isaiah 42 tells us He will not share, so not to *“give His glory to another.”*

A shortening of Jehovah’s true name was made long ago, first by the priests of Israel. They claimed *“Jehovah’s name was too holy for the people, especially for the Gentiles, to speak.”* so they shortened it to “Jah” or “Yah”. Here is an example from Psalms 68:4 KJV: *“...Extol him that rideth upon the heavens by his name Jah and rejoice before him.”* I believe this transgresses the commandment by “obliterating” His holy name, and substituting it for another. Later, Gentile translators used the term "Lord" as a legitimate translation of the Hebrew word and it appears over 6000 times in the Old Testament and, of course, many times in the New Testament as well. In Deuteronomy 28:58-59, the Israelites are warned to *“fear this glorious and awesome name, THE LORD YOUR GOD.* The underlined expression is translated from two Hebrew words: *“Yehvah” – THE LORD* and *“Elohiym” – YOUR GOD.* In Hebrew, *“Elohiym”* actually means *“the supreme God”* and the term *“Yehveh”* implies a God who is *“self existent or eternal.”* So, the name of *“the supreme eternal God”* is not to be used lightly or irreverently!

Our English word **Jehovah** comes from that word, **“Yehveh”**. Though some Jewish scholars believe that the word starts with a “V” so that it would read **“Vehveh,”** most Hebrew language experts overwhelmingly agree that the letter Y is correct. In very early writings (the

book of Genesis) it is often rendered as only a four letter word “YHWH,” intentionally written without vowels because such a holy word was not meant to be pronounced. There is also some discussion about whether an “e” or an “a” would be the correct second letter in the original Hebrew, but for those of us who will only be studying in English, we need only know that “our” God is named **Jehovah**.

So, what is the message here for us? Jehovah’s name is holy and sacred! Our Lord never intended to share His name with an endless number of worshiped beings (called gods). And He certainly did not intend for His name to be woven in with a curse, or even used as a casual exclamation peppering everyday conversation, like we hear every day. If we say His name aloud, it should only be in a reverent or prayerful manner.

Let’s add the word HALLELUJAH to this discussion. This exalted form of praise has been spoken and sung by Jews and Christians alike for thousands of years. The word Hallelujah, when broken down, means: **Hallelu** – “*praise be to,*” and **Yah** – “*Jehovah,*” the almighty King!

Many of the psalms, especially those by King David, were aimed at the magnification and exaltation of Jehovah’s great name. Notice how, in this excerpt from Revelation 19:1-6, a variation of the word – “*alleluia*” – is used as the multitude praises God before His throne: ***“After these things I heard a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, “Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honor and power belong to the Lord our God! For true and righteous are His judgments, because He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication; and He has avenged on her the blood of His servants shed by her.” Again they said, “Alleluia! Her smoke rises up forever and ever!” And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sat on the throne, saying, “Amen! Alleluia!” Then a voice came from the throne, saying, “Praise our God, all you His servants and those who fear Him, both small and great!” And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, “Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns”.*”**

*“Alleluia”* – “Praise be to Jehovah.” When we see this beautiful word in the context of the Heavenly chorus singing our Creator’s praises, we are again reminded that it is most certainly not intended for casual utterance, either. If we use this word, it should only be in direct praise to our Father for His Goodness or an answered prayer.

#### THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT –

*“Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.”*

Mankind attempted to tamper with this commandment right up until the time when God abolished it with the death and resurrection of Jesus. Even afterwards, the recognition of it as a day of rest was called into question. We will read more of that further below in this lesson. The Jews suffered great judgments from the hand of Jehovah for desecrating or neglecting the holy Sabbath. Jehovah speaking through the prophet Ezekiel said: *“Her priests [religious leaders] have done violence to My law... and they hide their eyes from My Sabbaths...”* (Ezekiel 22:26) And Nehemiah rebuked Jehovah’s people with these words: *“What is this evil thing you are doing, by profaning the Sabbath day? Did not your fathers do the same so that our God brought on us, and on this city, all this trouble? Yet you are adding to the wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath.”* (Nehemiah 13:17-18) And, of course, in the New Testament, the Pharisees of Jesus’ time abused it to suit their own agenda as well.

Since we tend to focus on what could NOT be done on the Sabbath, it leaves us to wonder, what DID they do? The Israelites’ instructions for that day are contained in Leviticus and Numbers; but for modern day Jews I relied on one of my favorite Jewish websites for the answer – and found an interesting and easy-to-read article which I have included below:

The point of the Sabbath (Shabbat) is to rest. Resting isn’t being lazy; it’s restorative and gets you ready for the week to come. Staying away from the mall and other hectic places makes that easier. If you want to go big, you can follow stricter rules, like not driving, not carrying money, not using email or not watching TV. Some people observe Shabbat rules from sundown on Friday until

sundown on Saturday. But for most of us, that's not practical, and honestly, we don't want to. The important thing is to set Friday nights apart and make them special because I'm not going to lie – Saturday services are kind of long.

Saturday services at most synagogues take about two hours, sometimes longer. They follow a similar order, and it might help if you know what's coming:

The Warm-Up: The service starts out with a few Hebrew hymns. The songs are pretty, and it's a good way to get yourself in the right mindset, kind of like the first few poses in a yoga class.

Blessings: Next are the core Jewish prayers, which include the Sh'ma (*one of the most common Hebrew blessings, and, some say, the most important*) and the blessings that go with it, like the V'ahavta and Mi Chamocha. (*These are all in Hebrew, so there are going to be a lot of those throat-clearing sounds*). There may be readings and other blessings too, but we're just trying to hit the highlights here. (*Side note: If there's a Bar/Bat Mitzvah, the child might help lead a lot of these prayers. It all depends on the synagogue, the rabbi, and the kid.*)

The Torah Service: This is the main event, and it starts with some prep work. (Again, if you're at service for a Bar/Bat Mitzvah, the person having the Bar/Bat Mitzvah has a starring role.) The first step is taking the Torah out of the ark and then walking around the synagogue with it in a processional. Lots of people kiss the Torah when it comes past, usually by kissing their prayer book or the corner of their tallit and then touching it to the Torah. It's also a good time to give a wink to your friend who's carrying the Torah, shake hands with the rabbi (for some reason, people really like that), and honestly, chat for a few minutes with your friends while you're waiting. Once the Torah makes it back to the bimah it's unwrapped of its fancy covering and placed on the platform to be read.

Next comes the actual Torah reading. (*There's a blessing before the Torah reading called an Aliyah. We'll tell you more a little later.*) The Torah is divided into weekly portions, and each week has a corresponding parasha, which is basically the lesson to be learned from the Torah reading. Once the Torah is read in Hebrew, the Bar/Bat Mitzvah kid or the rabbi typically makes a short speech translating what was just read (*this is called the D'var Torah*) and giving their own take on the lessons within it. It's the part of the service that is typically the most interesting because each person has their own interpretation and people can get creative or funny with it. The Torah is then rolled back up and put away, or sometimes someone sits with it on the bimah.

The Haftorah: Seriously, we grew up under the assumption that the Haftorah is simply half the Torah. Makes sense, right? Ah, if it were only that easy. Actually, the Haftorah is a selection from the Books of Prophets (*Nevi'im*) about a bunch of well, prophets, including Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings. Only selected passages make it into the Haftorah cycle. There's a portion to match each week's Torah reading. The Haftorah is part of a book, not a scroll, and, unlike the Torah, it has vowels, which makes the Hebrew infinitely easier to read. (Don't worry – there's no quiz on this.)

More Prayers: The next few parts, the Musaf service, then the Amidah, and then Repetition go pretty quickly.

Kaddish: Before the service is over, there is also the Mourner's Kaddish, which is a prayer for those who have died. First, the rabbi generally announces who in the congregation is observing yahrzeit and in whose memory they're saying it. Yahrzeit marks the anniversary of someone's death. So, if your dad died in August, it is common to go to synagogue on the anniversary of his death to say Kaddish for him. The rabbi might say, "Today we remember Stanley Green, father of Jim, grandfather of Ben." And if Jim is at services, he will stand during Kaddish. Chances are that Ben (*who, in this example, is the grandson*) won't

stand, because usually you just say Kaddish for your parents, brother, sister, or children, but it's still a free country, so if he wants to stand, he can. Also, if your parent died within the past year, you always stand for Kaddish. This is not a hard and fast rule, but in Reform synagogues, it is generally the custom for everyone to stand during the recitation of Kaddish. Some people like to do this to remember the 6 million Jews who were murdered in the Holocaust and have no one to say Kaddish for them. In Conservative and Orthodox synagogues, only those in a period of personal mourning or observing a *yahrzeit* usually stand. This is also nice because the community can see who is standing, and perhaps give them an extra hug later.

Healing Prayer: Another popular prayer that you may see at Shabbat services is the *Mi Shebeirach*, which is the Jewish prayer for healing. It is often sung to a sweet tune that was written by a fabulous singer-songwriter, Debbie Friedman. The *Mi Shebeirach* prays for a physical cure, as well as spiritual healing, and it asks for blessing, compassion, restoration, and strength within the community and for others who are ill, as well as for all Jews and all human beings. Often, before the *Mi Shebeirach* is sung, the rabbi asks the congregation if they would like to name someone who is in need of healing. Then people say the name out loud. This is another touching time when the community can see who among them might need a little extra TLC.

The End (Almost): Then there's usually another reading or two, then announcements, then the service is over. But after the service is over, there is usually an *Oneg*, a little post-service reception, which is formally a celebration in honor of the Sabbath, but informally, it's the time when you get to have a cookie for sitting through the whole service!

While I assume that the rather casual and light-hearted style of the above article was to make it entertaining reading for those of us who are not familiar with Jewish traditions, it causes me to wonder if Jews take these proceedings seriously. Our Heavenly Father was very clear

about what the Sabbath was supposed to mean to His people: “...*You shall surely observe My Sabbaths; for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am Jehovah who sanctifies you. ... it is holy to you.*” (Exodus 31:13-14 KJV)

And, of course, He is equally clear about the reverence He wishes us to attach to our modern worship.

And by the way, the Sabbath was not a new institution first introduced to Moses on Mt. Sinai. Look back at what Jehovah had previously ordained at creation: “... *Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.*” (Genesis 2:2-3 KJV) Like Jehovah’s holy name, the Sabbath was to be remembered and observed as a memorial of the Creator’s work and rest. “*But the seventh day is a day of rest in honor of the LORD your God. So on that day no one should work – not you, your sons and daughters, or your men and women slaves. Even your animals and the foreigners living in your cities must not work!*” (Exodus 20:10 KJV) Some want to call it “the Jewish Sabbath,” but the truth is it’s the Sabbath of our God Jehovah. And, because of the way the Jewish day was marked, it began at sunset on Friday and ended at sunset on Saturday.

D. L. Moody, an American evangelist and publisher, writes: “*The Sabbath was binding in Eden ... This Fourth Commandment begins with the word “remember,” showing that the Sabbath had already existed when God wrote the law on the tablets of stone at Sinai.*”

I mentioned earlier that attempts have been made throughout history to abolish the Sabbath – even when it was kept as a way to honor Jewish tradition, not as a religious observance. The emperor Constantine (AD 280-337) made Christianity the state religion of the Roman Empire, probably due to the influence of his mother. Prior to that Constantine had been an avid sun worshiper, so with a half-hearted show of reverence for the Holy Scriptures (in deference to his mother?) he fused the day of the worship of the Roman sun deity (SUN-day) with the “day of rest” significance of the Sabbath and in 321, made Sunday a public holiday. The edict proclaimed, “*All judges, city people, and craftsmen shall rest on the venerable day of the Sun.*” Many people continued the long-standing practice of observing the Sabbath (Saturday) as a day of rest, but, because of the edict, also added the first day of the week,

Sunday. Thus, the “weekend” was born. That lasted until the mid-360’s when the church forbade it. Edicts from the Council of Laodicea in 363-364 forbade Christians to observe the Sabbath as a day of rest because they did not want this tradition to survive.

The Romans in the church viewed the Jews’ tradition of “resting” on that day as laziness, and that practice became identified as “Judaizing” and was deemed totally unacceptable to the Christian religion. In fact, Christians were then required to work on that day in order to prove that it held no significance for them.

Following the Council of Laodicea, the seventh day of the week lost its biblical name. This formerly holy day was now being called by its pagan name, “SATUR-day,” named for Roman god Saturn. SUN-day became the day of rest, as decreed by the state religion of Rome.

#### TRADITION ABOVE SCRIPTURE

During the dark centuries of the Middle Ages, ordinary people had no access to the Scriptures so much of their worship came from tradition – what had been passed down to them – which, through time, had drifted farther and farther away from Scripture. When thanks to the printing press, the Bible became available during the Reformation, (1517-1648), anyone who opened its pages could see that many of their worship practices did not match the Holy Scriptures. But, because “*this is the way we want to do it and have always done it*” was a more powerful argument to the religious leaders than the infallible authority of the Word – it was decided among those leaders that tradition stood above Scripture.

Of course, we know from the book of Acts that the church was established on the day of Pentecost under the New Law. The teaching of the Apostles was clear: Jesus’ death and resurrection fulfilled the Law of Moses and replaced it with the new law of Christ. Under this new dispensation nothing is said about the Sabbath, and Christians were to henceforth worship on the Lord’s Day! However, many (especially those Jews who were still waiting for “their” Messiah, having never accepted Jesus’ authority) refused to acknowledge that the Old Law had been replaced. Therefore, they continued to observe the Sabbath among other parts of the Law of Moses, as they had done for centuries.



Since Jesus was not “their” Messiah, His teachings were therefore not binding to them, either. So for these people, the decision to observe or not observe the Sabbath had nothing to do with it no longer being a holy day under the New Law, but instead with their own decision – or their church’s decision – or their government’s decision – to no longer honor it. It was the establishment of a new tradition, if you will. And, as was said above, “tradition over Scripture” was their motto. Jesus spoke vehemently about this to the Pharisees and their hypocritical religion and their man-made traditions. “... *you invalidated the word of Jehovah for the sake of your tradition...*” (Matthew 15:6-9)

#### THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT –

*“Honor your Father and your Mother.”*

*“Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy. ‘Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father, ... ’ (Leviticus 19:2-3 NKJV)*

Unless you honor your father and mother, you cannot honor Jehovah! Notice that this is the first commandment with a promise (Ephesians 6:2-3) “... *that your days may be long, and that it may be well with you in the land which the Lord your God is giving you.*” (Deut 5:16). Reverence for your parents implies reverence for the Almighty who gave them to you, and the love and respect you show them will teach you to love God with all your heart and soul.

As recorded in Matthew 15, the hypocritical Pharisees did NOT honor their mother and father. Money that should have been set aside to care for their parents was labeled “devoted to God” so, under the pretense of being righteous, they could keep this money for themselves, thereby dishonoring their parents as well as attempting to deceive the Lord. They nullified the word of God by their traditions.

Solomon said, “*My son, observe the commandment of your father and do not forsake the teaching of your mother.*” (Proverbs 6:20) and “*Listen to your father who begot you, and*

*do not despise your mother when she is old*” (Proverbs 23:22). The apostle Paul wrote:

*“Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right.”* (Ephesians 6:1)

As parents our number one priority is, by example and leadership, to show our children what it means to honor God above all. They will then, in turn, honor us.