

SEED & BREAD

FOR THE SOWER ISA.55:10 FOR THE EATER
BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES FROM

THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

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THE TERMS OF THE COVENANT

Anyone who speaks concerning the law which God gave to Israel should have fixed in his own mind the truth set forth in certain direct statements of Scripture. When the new generation of Israelites were taught the lessons of Sinai, Moses declared to them: **"Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall you diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD (Yahweh) your God which I command you"** (Deut. 4:2). To this we should add the instruction found in Prov. 30:5,6: **"Every word of God is pure: He is a shield unto them that put their trust in Him. Add not unto His words, lest He reprove thee, and thou be found a liar."**

In spite of these precepts wherein God declares, "I said all I meant, and I mean all I have said," there have been thousands of expositors who have not hesitated to include in these laws hundreds of statements which they say are set forth in these words. This is not right. No one has the right to add anything to or delete anything from a covenant once it has been confirmed. Paul declares that even if it is only a man's covenant no man can disannul any part of it or add to it if it has been confirmed (Gal. 3:15).

Another truth that must be recognized and remembered is expressed in the question asked by Moses in Deuteronomy 4:7,8: **"For what nation is there so great who hath God so nigh to them, as the LORD (Yahweh) our God is in all things that we call upon Him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law (torah) which I set before you this day?"** Nevertheless, in complete disregard of this statement many insist that the ten commandments were laid upon all mankind as a moral code, and given alike to every nation. Among those who do so are two men for whom I have very high respect.

Dr. E. W. Bullinger in *The Companion Bible* states that the Hebrew word for God in Exodus 20: 1 is Elohim, "hence of universal application . . . not Jehovah, for this title would have limited the law to Israel." This is not true since all the facts in the case state that the law was limited to Israel. Facts are stubborn things, **and we can never**

erase the fact that Paul says in Romans 2: 14 that "the Gentiles have not the law."

Dr. James M. Gray in his *Christian Workers' Commentary* states: "While it has primary reference to Israel, still it affects the whole race for time and eternity since the moral law is the expression of God's will, the reflection of His nature, and the immutable standard of right for His accountable creatures." Gray is simply stating here the popular idea that has long prevailed in Christendom concerning the law in Exodus 20. But he does not seem to be comfortable with the idea since he immediately says: "These remarks apply particularly to the ten commandments, but the special enactments which follow them pertain for the most part only to Israel."

With these things in mind we are ready to give consideration to each one of the ten stipulations of the covenant. Inasmuch as the reader is expected to follow along with an open Bible, only the leading words of each commandment will be given.

1. **Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.** The words "before Me" may mean "before My face" or "in front of Me." This was a most reasonable demand. It was not an excessive burden, and it was a command that they could keep. Knowing from the work of the Logos that God existed, they should have immediately given Him the first place and the only place. Tens of thousands in Israel were already doing this (Exo. 18:21). This attitude toward God had been an obligation of every Israelite before the law was given. Now it becomes a term of the covenant. If they had added another god before Sinai they would have sinned. If they do it after Sinai, they will not only sin, they will break the covenant that promised them glorious blessings.

2. **Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image.** All of verses 4 and 5 must be read here. The making of these images was expressly forbidden as well as the worshipping of them. This was a very easy command to keep. One could not stumble into a sin such as this. If this sin were committed, it had to be willful and deliberate.

3. **Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD (Yahweh) thy God in vain.** In time the people of Israel extrapolated this command to the extreme that they had it saying, "You shall not pronounce the name of Yahweh at all." This was an unreasonable interpretation of the words God had given. This commandment forbids the taking or the using of Yahweh's name as an empty thing, using it when it is utterly meaningless to do so, using it when one has no authority to do so. But whatever this commandment means, it was one that could be kept.

4. **Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy.** It is an observable fact that those who have been stirred up by the Spirit of God to do something in regard to their relationship with Him often go into a state of frenzied excitement and begin to thrash

about looking for things to do in connection with Him. Instead of "being still" as God directs, they reason: "I must join a church, I must be baptized, I must observe the sabbath." Out of their memory store they bring forth the words, "Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy." So they reason that all they need to do is discover which day is the sabbath, and go to church on that day and they will be fulfilling God's command. The word "sabbath" means rest, and indicates the cessation of all activity. Israel had observed "sabbaths" (days of rest) before the law was given, as Exo. 16:23-30 will clearly show. At Sinai the strict observance of the seventh day as a sabbath became a stipulation of the covenant. And of all the terms of the covenant, this one was the easiest to keep.

To us, the rigid rules and drastic penalties that accompanied the sabbath command seem unusually severe, yet they were not so to the people of Israel under the conditions of life that then prevailed. Up to this time these people had been nomads, traveling to a land that had been promised to them. As they were not then established in the land as a nation, no national habits or customs had been formed, no deep rooted traditions had been established. It was, therefore, a much easier matter to establish a way of life that would be in harmony with this law. And since the climate of Palestine was mild, it caused no inconvenience if they could not kindle a fire one day in seven in their dwellings. In Michigan, where I made my home for a good many years, the temperatures' could fall as much as 60 degrees below freezing. Heat in a home was an absolute necessity, especially if there were a babe or an invalid in the family. If the fire went out, one had no choice but to rekindle it, even though the law said: "**Ye shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations upon the sabbath day**" (Exodus 35:3). But in temperate Palestine, no such problem ever arose. the law could be kept. To do so was not a burden, it was a privilege.

5. **Honor thy father and thy mother.** A very simple command to say the least. To "honor" means to regard with respect and loving care. In commanding this, God asked nothing more than what they should be doing, a thing that would spring forth from "natural affection." They were certainly doing this before the law was given. If any were not doing it, the law would awaken them to their personal obligation. The law was added because of transgressions (Gal. 3: 19). The law was not made for righteous men, (1 Tim. 3:9), but for the lawless and disobedient. This law also could be kept.

6. **Thou shalt not kill.** The Hebrew word for "kill" here is *a/sach* which means to murder. This command had nothing to do with the judicial taking of life. In later commandments they are told that certain men must be put to death. (See Exodus 21:12, 16, 17; 22; 19). Would anyone dare say that this commandment cannot be kept? There are millions who have never in any manner violated this precept.

7. **Thou shalt not commit adultery.** A man commits adultery when he has sexual relations with a woman who is the wife of another man. This act is called "adultery" as it fouled up (adulterated) the lines of descent, a matter of great importance in Israel. For example, if the wife of a priest in Israel had relationship with another man, the male child would enter into the priesthood, and it would be known to none but the woman that he had no right to such a place. It hardly needs to be pointed out that this command could be kept.

8. **Thou shalt not steal.** This law secured the property of every man in Israel. The essence of stealing is taking for ourselves that which rightfully belongs to another. There are many ways to steal. This blunt command was a most reasonable term of the covenant.

9. **Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.** This stipulation has reference to testimony in courts of law. In all judicial matters the truth was to be established by the testimony of witnesses. False witness is perjury, and when it is done it destroys the judicial process. This command does not deal with *lying* in general, but with one particular form of lying.

10. **Thou shalt not covet.** The word "covet" means "to fix the desire upon," "to ardently want something;" and it is a feeling not sinful in itself, but it becomes sinful when the thing desired is someone's property. This law protected an Israelite's possessions, and it was a fair and just stipulation. This sin of the heart could be difficult to keep, but there were many in Israel who already hated covetousness, even before God said: "Thou shalt not covet." This would show that the law was not the basis of real morality, not even in Israel.

In view of this, why would anyone say: "The ten commandments constitute the moral law, a perfect rule of duty for all men everywhere."

With the leading features of Exodus 19 and 20 before us, and with the terms of the covenant in mind, we are ready to go on and consider certain popular misconceptions that are in the minds of many in regard to the ten commandments.

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