

## Prayer

Dear Lord Jesus, You take notice of our feelings, You understand what we think, and You care for everything that happens to us. Never let us imagine that you do not seek to help us in our troubles, and take away from us those evils that suggest you are absent or unconcerned. Come to our aid when we are downhearted and inspire us when we are full of enthusiasm, so that our lives truly reflect the glory of Your love. Thank You Lord Jesus, AMEN

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: Water

*Pray for the industries involved in the supply of water in your own country. Pray about the integrity of the industry and its responsibilities to God, to people and the environment.*

### On-going prayers

- Give thanks for the joy of doing the Lord's work, and doing it well
- Pray for those who are unemployed, with little prospect of finding jobs
- Pray for industrialists facing ethical and environmental dilemmas

## Meditation

Do not slip, or let your faith be compromised;  
Let the Holy Spirit guide your thoughts;  
Let the love of Christ inspire your deeds;  
Let the faithfulness of God become your inspiration.

For close beside you, all the time,  
Unseen, yet full of potent questioning,  
The evil one will crouch and whisper in your ear  
The thoughts that make you doubt yourself and others.

And when he's summoned your attention,  
With a word that sounds like truth yet is a lie;  
He'll hack your faith from underneath you,  
Quash the love that Christ has placed within your heart.

Know your enemy my friend. Dear brother, sister,  
Satan's lie suggests he has no power - yet  
Christ has died on Calvary to strike a mortal blow  
Against the one who drains the life blood of your soul

Know the enemy is always there - but Alleluia!  
Christ your Saviour conquers all by love. Trust Him!

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## Bible Study - Exodus 34:10-16

<sup>10</sup> So the Lord said, 'Look I am making a covenant before all your people: I will do extraordinary deeds of a kind not yet created in all the earth or in any nation, then all the people you live among will see the work of the LORD; for I will do with you something truly awesome. <sup>11</sup> On your part, keep what I command you today. Look! I will drive out before you the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.'

<sup>12</sup> 'Take care that you do not make a covenant with those who live in the land where you are going, lest it becomes a snare among you; <sup>13</sup> so you must tear down their altars, break their pillars, and cut down their sacred poles. <sup>14</sup> You must worship no other god, because the LORD is named 'jealous'; He is a jealous God. <sup>15</sup> Do not make a covenant with those who live in the land, for when they prostitute themselves to their gods and sacrifice to their gods, they may invite you, and you will eat of their sacrifice; <sup>16</sup> and then you will take wives from among their daughters for your sons, and when their daughters prostitute themselves to their gods they will make your sons do the same to their gods.'

## Review

Exodus 34:10-16 is the first part of an extraordinary passage extending from Exodus 34:10 to 34:26. We will study this in two halves, today and tomorrow. You will recall that in yesterday's passage, we read about how God revealed His name and His character to Moses while he was on Mount Sinai. We learned that the primary qualities of God were His goodness and love, yet this did not compromise His holiness and His justice. This powerful revelation sets the scene for what comes next, the formal renewal of the Covenant between God and His people found in our passages today and tomorrow.

Our passage today has two features. Firstly, the Lord promised to lead His people into their inheritance; the promise of land had always been an important part of the Covenant relationship between God and His people, but it was yet to be fulfilled. For the people of Israel, still smarting from the consequences of their sin whilst in the desert hundreds of miles from Canaan, this fulfilment seemed a long way off. Yet this passage emphasises that God had not forgotten His promise of land, even though it came with both a blessing and with a warning. On the one hand, God would do an astonishing and unique work of displacing other peoples to give the land to His own people, Israel (34:11), He also demanded that the people keep themselves pure and worship Him alone when they come into their inheritance (34:12f.)

The second feature of this passage is that it emphasises God's 'jealous' nature (34:14). He will not be accommodated with any of the gods to be displaced from Canaan; and the second paragraph of our reading makes a number of sharp points, some of which are new to the Old Testament (34:12-16). For example, God demands the removal of all objects used for the worship of other gods, their altars and their 'sacred poles' (34:13 – read later on in the study to find out what this means). In addition, the Lord uses plain language to warn about the sexually devious nature of Canaanite worship. There was a danger that if Israelites intermarried, then young Israelite men would be dragged into the sexual deviancy of the worship of foreign gods for the sake of pleasing their wives. The prospect of this was intolerable to the Lord (34:15,16).

It is important that we spot one particular phrase in the second paragraph. Verse 14 begins, 'You may worship no other gods ...'. This is close to Exodus 20:3, 'You may have no other gods before me ...'. Indeed, the words are very similar in Hebrew, and we rightly suspect that these few words in our passage indicate the beginning of another set of commandments. Indeed, if we glance ahead, we will find that tomorrow's passage is made up of nine further commands from God (depending on how you count them), making ten in all! However, although the first commandment is the same in both Exodus 20 and Exodus 34, the rest of the commandments in Exodus 34 are mostly different from Exodus 20; though this has not stopped some people suggesting that Exodus 34 is an alternative 'Ten Commandments'!

No, this is not an alternative Ten Commandments, but as we will discover tomorrow, these commandments were not intended to replace the original Ten. Exodus 20 remains the absolute statement of God's moral authority in the world and His covenant with Israel. Our passage and its further commandments is a covenant renewal; and a reminder of many laws given by God (see especially chapter 23). Later on in Exodus 34, we find that God told Moses to record this covenant renewal, but chisel the Ten Commandments on the stone tablets destined for the Ark of the Covenant (34:28).

In the same way today, people who take part in an annual 'covenant service' do not repeat their baptismal vows (their essential and original 'covenant' with God), they renew their relationship with the Lord by celebrating a variety of important and essential features of Christian faith. Covenant renewal is an important Biblical concept.

### Going Deeper

The Bible study continues with further information about the following subjects:

- What does this passage reveal about the 'awesome work' God will do for Israel (34:10-11)?
- What are the dangers to Israelites from Canaanite religions?
- What does this passage mean by telling us that God's name is 'jealous' (34:14)?

## Notes on the text and translation

**V10 'So the Lord said ...'** *The Hebrew does not have the words 'the Lord', however, it is very clear that the Lord is the subject of this sentence and the one who speaks, so I have added His name for clarity.*

**V10 '... deeds of a kind not yet created in all the earth'** *Many other Bible versions have 'wonders of a kind not yet done ...' or similar. I have used the word 'created' because the Hebrew verb here is the same as that used in the story of the Creation in Genesis 1 (the Hebrew word 'bara'), and I reckon that the use of this word is no coincidence (see study).*

**V11 'On your part, keep what I command you today.'** *The language here indicates the singular 'you', so we might imagine that it is Moses who is being addressed. However, the Scriptures frequently*

*address Israel in this way, and the singular can either be thought of as referring to the nation as one people, or to each individual Israelite specifically. The effect is the same.*

**V13** *'cut down their sacred poles.'* The meaning of these poles is uncertain. The Hebrew word is 'Asherim', a name linked with a female goddess of immense importance in ancient times, cropping up in various literature as a consort to a High God named 'El' (unfortunately, a name used occasionally in the Bible to refer to the Lord God) and also in association with Ba'al worship. In addition, the word 'asherah' sometimes means a goddess and sometimes refers to an object used in the worship of various gods, and sexual connotation are never far from the use of this word. Scripture is utterly opposed to the worship of asherah as an abomination, and the association of this with Ba'al worship was therefore to be one of the main enemies of God's people Israel, as here.

## Going Deeper

### **What does this passage reveal about the 'awesome work' God will do for Israel (34:10-11)?**

One of the first things we read in this passage is that God says 'I am making a covenant before all your people ...'. This phrase links the people of Moses' day with the forefathers with whom God first made a covenant; but it also says that the covenant is something that evolves. God was in the process of making a covenant with people, and this process continued throughout the Old Testament. The covenant began with God's promise to Noah to be faithful and not destroy people because of sin (Genesis 6:8, 9:9f.). It was then extended with Abraham and his descendants (Gen 15:8, 17:2f. 21:7 etc) as God promised to raise a people through whom He would work in the world. What we are reading now in Exodus is the next phase of that covenant as God established the nation of Israel and its laws and governance (Exodus 20-23, 25-31). In later Old Testament passages we read about God's covenant with David (2 Sam 23:5, Psalm 25:14, 89:3 etc), and then finally, the major prophets tell us that God will renew His Covenant with His people when the Messiah comes (Isaiah 59:21, 61:8, Jeremiah 31:31f., Ezekiel 37:26).

The final purpose of the Covenant was that Jesus, the Messiah, would fulfil the requirements of the Covenant so that all people might have access to God the Father through faith in Him. However, God revealed this step by step in the history of His people Israel. The 'awesome work' (34:10) God said He would do referred to the entrance into Canaan and the conquering of the Promised Land, but God's plans were bigger; this was only a step in the road.

The people of Israel had already seen God do an 'awesome thing' in defeating the armies of Pharaoh in the Red Seas (Exodus 14,15), and this passage is God's promise that He would do yet another great and awesome deed for the people. He would drive out the inhabitants of the land of Canaan before Israel so that they could occupy their 'Promised Land'. The list of names of the nations to be driven out is standard and found in many places with a few variations (see Gen 13:7, Ex 3:8, Deut 20:17, Joshua 3:10 etc.).

It is worth recalling that this great promise of God was neither seen by those who heard it at Sinai (except Joshua), nor completely fulfilled when Israel finally reached the Promised Land. Firstly, the Israelites at Sinai did not have the courage to enter the Promised Land when they arrived there, condemning a generation to die in the wilderness over forty years before the final invasion could take place (Numbers 13,14). Then, when the people did invade the land, they did so with mixed success (see Judges 1), and they certainly did not drive out all these nations (see 1 Kings 9:20), with dire consequences. The truth is this; because of the sins of Israel, God's plans did not work out perfectly until Jesus came, so the covenant has been fulfilled in Him as God's Son rather than the people of Israel as a nation.

### **What are the dangers to Israelites from Canaanite religions?**

In verses 12 to 16 there is a stern warning, as well as the introduction to the other set of ten 'commandments' we saw in the review (see above). The Lord assumes that when the people enter the Promised Land, despite His awesome work they would fail to remove all those of other nations, and He prophesied that these nations would remain as a 'snare' (34:12). To minimise the threat, the Israelites were told to 'tear down their altars, break their pillars and cut down their sacred poles' (34:13). This is the first mention in the Old Testament of the 'Asherah' (see translation notes for verse 13), which were carved wooden poles depicting fertility rituals associated with the worship of Ba'al and his female consort, 'Asherah'. Throughout the Old Testament, there are references to the sexual nature of Ba'al worship. There is a large body of evidence in the Old Testament (e.g. see the story of Hosea) that prostitutes were used in Ba'al worship, and this is mentioned here in verses 15 and 16.

The last two verses (34:15,16) both concentrate on the dangers of sexual misadventure associated with intermarriage between Israelites and the other nations. The passage describes very realistically how temptation works to draw people into sin. The Lord anticipates that some of His own people will be attracted to the young people of the other nations, and they will intermarry. Then, as now, people might say 'what is wrong with that'? However, as the Lord says clearly, once god-fearing Israelites have been drawn into the

social life of people of differing beliefs, they will be invited to participate in the social occasions surrounding those beliefs, including the eating of food offered to other gods (34:15). Once integrated into the polite side of these religions, then they will be drawn into the seedier side of it (34:16), including prostitution as a means of worshipping gods of fertility. Evil always works through what seems reasonable to pull people into what is evil.

Several points can be made about this. Firstly, there are a number of places in the Old Testament where Scripture mourns the fact that the people of Israel fall for this exact temptation; Solomon fell for it (1 Kings 11:1-8), and Ezra was mortified that the returning exiles had polluted themselves in this way (Ezra 9,10). Secondly, the horror of eating meat offered to false idols became an issue in New Testament times; one that taxed Paul in his letters to the Romans (Rom.14:1f.) and the Corinthians (1 Cor 8:1f.). Although Paul believed that all things made by God were fit to eat if blessed, he was unwilling to condemn those who felt it improper to eat such meat; they had good scriptural reason for their concern, and Paul knew it.

### ***What does this passage mean by telling us that God's name is 'jealous' (34:14)?***

At the heart of the second paragraph are the words; 'You may worship no other god, because the Lord is named 'jealous'; He is a jealous God.' In other words, everything that the Lord said in this speech to Moses was a warning about keeping their allegiance to Him exclusive, in fulfilment of the first of the Ten Commandments. This is a reminder to us about the importance of the first commandment as it is first written in Exodus 20: 'I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you are to have no other gods before me' (20:2). In the Ten Commandments, the exclusive worship of God is linked to the awesome evidence of God's power to save, as evidenced in the past, but here in our passage the same commandment is discussed in the context of God's promises for the future; the commandment is the same, but its application is different.

When the Bible speaks of God as being named 'jealous', what it means is that this property of jealousy is essential to God's character; in other words, He guards His own nature and will not have it compromised. The trouble is that we regard jealousy as a rather trite and inappropriate sentiment, and fail to recall that it is an essential part of life. For example, it is entirely proper that two people in an exclusive relationship should jealously guard each other in love, and in this instance, jealousy is a positive force that binds two people together, and indeed, makes them safe. In the same way, God jealously guards Himself and His own character.

In reality, to accept that God is 'jealous' reveals more about us than about God. For if we imagine that God is not 'jealous', then we allow that there may be other gods worth our attention, and once we have taken this route, then we have begun to walk away from the exclusive truth of believing that one God made the world and everything in it. Either we accept that one God made the world, or we make gods according to our own likes and desires, and show ourselves unable to be submissive to the authority of the only God that truly exists.

## **Application**

One of the great truths about this passage is this; when we speak about God and our relationship with Him, our faith should be based on both what He has done for us in the past and what He has promised for us in the future. This balance is essential. When we offer testimony about what the Lord has done we fulfil one side of this balance, and there are few enough churches who provide people with the opportunity to do this. The challenge of this passage is to express faith that the Lord has something ahead of us, something for us to work for and to do, and also a hope that transcends this world. Part of our testimony can and should be that our God is not just a God of the past but of the future, and a testimony that declares what God requires of us for the future is powerful, and invites people to have confidence in the Lord for what is to come.

I would add one further comment to this, which is that in some churches people are coy about saying too much about the Lord's return, or that we have been saved for greater things after this life. Even the mention of these things can bring the accusation of having a spiritual 'pie in the sky' attitude, instead of being committed to what God requires of His people here and now. However, the Christian sees the future as an essential motivation for the present, and knowing one's eternal future in Christ is a powerful incentive to do the work of the Lord now, as Paul urged many of those to whom he wrote (e.g. 1 Thess 5:6f.).

Other parts of this passage warn us that we cannot compromise with other belief systems, and it remains a painful truth that those who marry across the divides of faith or 'belief system' will often find marriage is a compromise that draws them away from God. Not every Christian who marries someone who does not believe or who has another faith will struggle with the consequences, but it should be expected, and the Bible warns that there will be a constant temptation to walk away from true faith in God. Paul says the same when he urges Christian people not to be unequally 'yoked' (2 Corinthians 6:14). People smile at this and suggest they can cope with the issues in love, but they need to understand the long Biblical history of difficulty with such issues.

Despite the seriousness of these issues, the one heart-warming feature of this text is its vibrant assurance that whatever has gone wrong and whatever sins have coloured and destabilised our relationship with God, if we repent, then God will do everything possible to enable us to have a renewed experience of Him and of faith. We cannot begin again, but we can renew our 'covenant' with Him. I have long believed that the church could develop this theme to provide people with a means of 'moving on' after a crisis; covenant renewal is not a formula or a ritual, it is about the reality of life and our need to get on with it, in faith, and not remain stagnated.

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## Questions (for use in groups)

1. What awesome things has the Lord stored up for His people? And what has he stored up for you?
2. What belief systems and other religions pose a threat to Christian belief in today's world, and how should they be dealt with?
3. How should the church present this passage of scripture, and equivalent passages in the New Testament?

## Discipleship

### Personal comment:

*I find it hard to come to terms with the fact that I have met many clergy who do not believe in the uniqueness of God or of Jesus Christ our Saviour. They would not be able to hold to the concept of a 'jealous God'; indeed, I recall having an argument with some others about this, and feeling desperately disappointed that those who stand in pulpits to preach to people do not believe the essential truths of the Christian faith. I would be delighted if I could be proved wrong about what I say here, but it is a subject of prayer for me. I hardly get through a day or two without praying in my soul that the Lord will return His church to the purity and holiness of the Gospel; not as I see it, but as He sees it.*

### Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Explore your own thoughts about what the Lord has for you to do in the future. Think about what lies ahead and whether you believe that the Lord has any definite plans for you, and if so, what? Pray about these things and talk about them with others. You will find yourself blessed in so doing.*
- *Pray for those who are about to get married and who love each other, but are getting married across the divide of faith and secularism, or across the divides of different faiths. Seek their protection under God and the grace of Christ for the journey that lies ahead of them.*

## Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, You have shown us glimpses of our future, and promised that we will have a place within Your Kingdom. Give us the grace to live by the light of this promise, and conduct ourselves with holiness and godliness throughout our lives; we ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN

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