

The Book of Exodus

An Altar of Earth or Stone

Text: Exodus 20:18-26

Introduction:

1. After manifesting Himself in power on Mount Sinai, God delivered the Ten Commandments to the children of Israel.
2. These instructions formed the foundation of their lives and their society as the people of God.
3. Yet, upon seeing the power of God and hearing His voice, the people were afraid.

I. The Fear of the Israelites

(Exodus 20:18-21)

- A. Upon seeing this display of God's power and majesty, the people "removed."
 1. This Hebrew word means, "To waver, tremble, quiver, reel, wander, or move."
 2. The idea is that they trembled and stood far away from the mountain.
- B. In their fear, the people asked that Moses be allowed to speak to them in the place of God – and, they promised that they would hear (cf. Deut. 5:22-31).
 1. Implied in this statement is their commitment to hear and obey.
 2. This passage must be remembered when studying events to come in the history of the Israelites.
 3. Whenever they questioned, doubted, or disobeyed Moses, they were actually rejecting God and breaking their promise.
 4. When they sought to replace or kill Moses, they were rebelling against God.
 5. Remember, this was their request and voluntary promise.
- C. Moses encouraged them not to be afraid, but to submit to the authority of Jehovah.
- D. Thus, the people stayed far away and Moses drew closer to God upon the mountain.

II. Instructions for an Altar

(Exodus 20:22-26)

- A. Following the giving of the Ten Commandments, there were other instructions to be revealed by God.
 1. These would be written by Moses in the "Book of the Covenant" (24:7).
 2. They included the "words of the Lord" – moral, religious, and ceremonial law.
 3. And, they included the "judgments" – civil and criminal law.
- B. He began by teaching the manner in which He was to be worshipped.
- C. First, there was to be no making of idols of silver or gold.
- D. Instead, they were to make an altar of earth upon which they could offer their sacrifices.
- E. If they made an altar of stone, it was to be built of stones that had not be worked by man.
 1. There is a deliberate contrast between silver & gold and earth & stone.
 2. God desired simple altars to encourage the people away from idolatry.
- F. Finally, it was not to be approached by steps so that one did not immodestly expose himself.