

Parsha Ponders

Vaeschanan | July 22, 2021 | 13 Av 5781

The testimony of Shabbos¹

Remember the Shabbos day, to sanctify it ²	זכור את-יום השבת לקדשו	Safeguard the Shabbos day, to sanctify it... ³	שמור את-יום השבת לקדשו וגו'
Do not testify falsely regarding your fellow ⁴	לא תענה ברעך עד שקר	Do not testify in vain regarding your fellow ⁵	ולא-תענה ברעך עד שוא

In the Shabbos morning prayers, we declare: ושמנו לוחות אבנים הוריד בידו Moshe brought down from Mount Sinai two stone tables in his hand, וכתוב בהם שמירת שבת, and they are engraved with the obligation to observe Shabbos, ולא-תענה ברעך בני ישראל את השבת, and similarly it is written in Hashem's Torah⁶ that, "the Jewish people shall observe Shabbos". We can ask a few questions on this declaration. First of all, why do we need to support the observance of Shabbos by bringing a verse? If the stone tablets, which were written by G-d Himself⁷, command resting on Shabbos, what does a verse in the Torah add? Another question is with regards to the phrasing of the declaration. We say that *they*, the two stone tablets, are engraved with the obligation to observe Shabbos. At first glance this seems false. Only the first of the two tablets mentions Shabbos. How can we resolve these difficulties?

Perhaps an answer comes from a teaching of our Sages⁸. The two stone tablets contained the Ten Commandments which were uttered by Hashem to the entire Jewish people. Five were written on one, and five on the other. We are taught that each of the five on one tablet corresponded to the one of the commandments on the second tablet. The first of one to the first of the other, and the second of one to the second of the other, and so on.

If we look at what Shabbos corresponds to, we'll see it's the prohibition of giving false testimony. This is because observing Shabbos is testimony that Hashem created the Universe in six days and rested on the seventh day⁹. Desecrating Shabbos is akin to giving false testimony. The idea that Shabbos is considered testimony can be found in the above cited verse. "The Jewish people shall observe Shabbos...It is an eternal sign between Me and the Jewish people that Hashem created the heavens and the earth in six days and rested on the seventh".

With this we can answer the questions we started with. In fact, both of the stone tablets can be seen as referring to Shabbos. One explicitly, and one expressing the concept that Shabbos is testimony. With regards to the latter, we declare in our prayers: and similarly it is written in Hashem's Torah that, "the Jewish people shall observe Shabbos". Meaning, just like we see the concept of the testimony of

¹ Based on Derashos Chasam Sofer p. 110 col. 2 s.v. זכור את יום השבת

² Exodus 20:8

³ Deuteronomy 5:12

⁴ Exodus v. 13

⁵ Deuteronomy v. 17

⁶ Exodus 31:16

⁷ Ibid v. 18

⁸ Mechilta Masechta D'HaChodesh § 8 (to Exodus 20:13), brought in Yalkut Shimoni Yisro § 299 and Rashi to Song of Songs 4:5

⁹ Ibid

Shabbos in the stone tablets, there's a verse as well which attests to the testimony we provide when we properly observe Shabbos.

The Ten Commandments are in fact described twice in the Torah. If we analyze the two instances in which they appear, we'll notice a few anomalies. With regards to Shabbos, the first time the *mitzvah* is described¹⁰ as "remember the Shabbos day". The second time, it is described¹¹ as "safeguard the Shabbos day". Another discrepancy is with the *mitzvah* against giving false testimony. The first time it is described¹² as not giving *false* testimony. The second time, it is described¹³ as not giving testimony *in vain*. What can we learn from these changes in wording?

What's the difference between false testimony and testimony in vain? Our Sages tell us¹⁴ that calling something that was said "false" is appropriate when that statement isn't necessarily evident that it is false. Calling something that was said "in vain" is appropriate when it is obvious to all that it is false. The first description of the Ten Commandments says to remember Shabbos, which is interpreted¹⁵ to mean to sanctify Shabbos by reciting *kiddush* on wine. This recitation is declaring that Hashem created the Universe, fulfilling the concept that Shabbos is testimony. Someone who neglects to "remember" Shabbos, even though they properly observe the day, is simply failing to testify the truth. However, they aren't considered declaring something that is false. As such, it makes sense that corresponding to remembering Shabbos is the *mitzvah* against testifying falsely. This is because what this person is doing by neglecting to remember Shabbos isn't considered testifying something that is patently false.

The second time the Ten Commandments are described, we are commanded to safeguard Shabbos. This includes properly observing its laws and refraining from creative labor. Someone who actively transgresses Shabbos, thus failing to safeguard it, can't be referred to as someone testifying falsely. They are in fact denying that Hashem created the universe, something that is patently obvious to those who look carefully enough¹⁶. As such, they can be described as someone testifying in vain. By transgressing Shabbos, they are expressing something that everyone knows is false. It makes sense then that the corresponding *mitzvah* in the second tablet is the *mitzvah* against testifying in vain¹⁷.

Good Shabbos

¹⁰ [Exodus 20:8](#)

¹¹ [Deuteronomy 5:12](#)

¹² [Exodus v. 13](#)

¹³ [Deuteronomy v. 17](#)

¹⁴ [Shevuos 25b](#)

¹⁵ [Pesachim 106a](#)

¹⁶ The [Chasam Sofer](#) adds that this is why the second description of the tablets associates Shabbos with the Exodus. Through the Exodus, G-d's mastery over the universe, thus confirming He created it, was made known to the whole world. See [Ramban to Deuteronomy 5:15](#)

¹⁷ See a somewhat similar approach in [Chasam Sofer Shevuos 20b s.v. ומאי](#). See also [Be'er Yosef to Exodus 20:8-10](#)