



The Ten Commandments

Exodus 19 - 20



God called Moses into His presence, and there God gave him the Ten Commandments. These rules showed the Israelites more about God's character and taught them how God wanted them to live. And through these laws, we all see how helpless we really are.

Day #1: Sacred Ground

Imagine your parents came to you and said they wanted to tell you something. You probably wouldn't think that it was a big deal. But what if they called the whole family together and said they had a very big announcement? Now, you would be curious. Then your aunts and uncles, cousins, and grandparents started to arrive because your parents had called an *extended* family meeting. You would probably have butterflies in your stomach at that point. And what if, when your whole family was gathered together, your parents told everyone that the announcement was so important that you all had to wait three days just to be ready to hear it? Wow! That would be an exciting three days, and whatever the announcement turned out to be, one thing is sure - you would never forget it! God had such an announcement for His people.

Exactly three months after the Israelites were delivered out of Egypt, God led them to the Desert of Sinai (Exodus 19:1). This was the same place where God had spoken to Moses in the burning bush (Exodus 3:1; Exodus 3:12). God had some very important things to tell the Israelites. God made a promise to His people. It was an "if, then" promise. God told Moses to tell the people:

You have seen for yourselves what I did to Egypt. You saw how I carried you on the wings of eagles and brought you to Myself. Now obey Me completely. Keep My covenant. If you do, then out of all of the nations you will be My special treasure. The whole earth is Mine. But you will be a kingdom of priests to serve Me. You will be My holy nation. - Exodus 19:4-6

This was a conditional promise. God promised to make the Israelites a holy nation that would serve God in a special way, if they would obey His commands. God wanted His people to be a reflection of His holiness for other nations to see. The Israelites accepted this promise before even hearing the commandments (Exodus 19:8). God was about to give them very specific rules to follow. The rules were so important, that the people had to get themselves ready to hear them. The people were instructed to wash their clothes and be ready in three days. God told Moses He would come to the mountain in a thick cloud to speak to Moses so the Israelites would always trust Moses. The people were not allowed even to touch the mountain where God would appear. This was a show of respect for God's holiness. If anyone touched the mountain, he would have to die!

On the third day, God brought thunder and lightning, and a thick cloud came over the mountain. The Lord came in fire to speak to Moses. Tomorrow we will read God's important message for His people.

All of God's words are holy (2 Timothy 3:16). We should always be ready to **listen**. And we should always treat our time in the Bible and our time with God in prayer with the greatest of respect.

Day #2: The Commandments

God gave Moses ten rules that we call "The Ten Commandments." These ten rules are the essence, or the heart, of God's law. Then God gave many specific, very detailed rules after that. God's commandments reveal a lot about His character.

Before giving the law, God established His authority to give these commands by stating Who He was and what He had done.

Here are all of the words God spoke. He said, "I am the Lord your God. I brought you out of Egypt. That is the land where you were slaves." - Exodus 20:1-2

Then God gave **Rule #1**: *Do not put any other gods in place of Me.* - Exodus 20:3

The Israelites had lived 400 years in Egypt where the people worshipped many false gods. The One true God would not allow His people to worship in falsehood. First of all, God deserves all worship (Psalm 96:4). Also, when someone worships a false god, he is on a path to destruction (Deuteronomy 11:16-17).

Rule #2: *Do not make statues of gods that look like anything in the sky or on the earth or in the waters. Do not bow down to them or worship them.* - Exodus 20:4-5a

These statues are called **idols**. These are things made by man - a "representation" of a god. It would certainly have to take the form of some part of creation. It might look like the sun, a bull, or a person. God wants His people to worship the Creator, not what He created. And God is a Spirit. It is even wrong to worship a statue of Him. We should worship the living God, not anything made by our hands.

Rule #3: *Do not misuse the name of the Lord your God.* - Exodus 20:7

God's name is holy - above all other names. Many people use God's name in joking or even in cursing. God's name should not be used lightly. It is only right to use God's name if you are speaking **to Him** (prayer) or **about Him** (telling others about Him).

Worshipping false gods seems like something we would never do in our day and age. But that is not the case. We all have a system of values. We value our friends, we value our family, and we value our things. In each of our hearts, something is **most valuable** to us. Only you know what is most valuable to you. If it is not God, then you have made a god out of something. Ask God to draw you to Himself (John 6:44) so that you will love and adore Him more than anything else.

Day #3: More Commandments

God wanted the Israelites to be set apart from all other nations. Using the Ten Commandments as a standard for their behavior would certainly accomplish that. The people around them did not follow any such laws, nor did they worship the one, true God. God continued to give His laws to Moses on Mt. Sinai.

Rule #4: *Remember to keep the Sabbath day holy. Do all of your work in six days. But the seventh day is a Sabbath in honor of the Lord your God. Do not do any work on that day.* - Exodus 20:8-10a

The first time that the Israelites had been told to observe a Sabbath day (a holy day of rest) was in Exodus 16, when God provided manna, or bread from heaven, for the Israelites. They were only allowed to get as much as

Day #3 continued:

they needed to eat each day. Leftover manna rotted. But, on the sixth day, God told them to collect twice as much manna as they needed and save half for the next day. On the seventh day, they were instructed to rest. This was a symbol of when God rested on the seventh day, after creating the world and everything in it. Now, in the fourth rule, God told His people to remember the Sabbath. What should they remember on that day? They should remember that God is the Creator of all things and that He, alone, provides for all of our needs.

Rule #5: Honor your father and mother. - Exodus 20:12

God provided a safety net for children by placing them in the care of their parents. Showing respect and honor toward one's parents is also a way to show respect toward the One who provided those parents. And when we obey our parents, God makes us a promise. We will have a long life, and things will go well for us (Deuteronomy 5:16).

Rule #6: Do not commit murder. - Exodus 20:13

God is the Giver of life (Genesis 2:7). We have no right to take anyone's life away. It is completely wrong to think we know better than God who should live and who should die. God wants us to love others - even our enemies, and those who treat us badly (Matthew 5:44).

Rule #7: Do not commit adultery. - Exodus 20:14

A husband or a wife is a gift from God (Proverbs 19:14). When a person gets married, they take a vow in front of God. They promise to have romantic feelings and actions only for the person they marry. It is wrong to break that vow. Being unfaithful to a husband or wife is like telling God that His choice was not right. It also breaks the heart of the husband or wife.



Think of a way to show honor and respect for your parents. Remember, they are God's provision for you. If you have been disrespectful, ask your parents for forgiveness, and ask God to help you change in this area. Remember God's promises if you obey this rule.

Day #4: Final Commandments



The Commandments continued with **Rule #8:** Do not steal. - Exodus 20:15

Stealing is taking anything that does not belong to you. When someone steals from someone else, he is, in essence, saying that he does not trust that God will provide for his needs. And sometimes, people steal things because they are greedy and they want much more than they need. By stealing, they are telling God that what He has provided is not good enough. Furthermore, it does not show love to others to steal from them.

Rule #9: Do not give false witness against your neighbor. - Exodus 20:16

This means do not lie. Hebrews 6:18 tells us, "It is impossible for God to lie." And in John 14:6, Jesus calls Himself, "the Truth." Just the opposite, the Bible calls Satan "the father of lies," (John 8:44). When we lie, we are not showing godly character. People lie to get out of trouble, to make people think they are different than they really are, and to get what they want. Lying tells God we do not trust Him to take care of things, or that we are not satisfied with the way He made us or how He provides for us. And it shows great disrespect to others to lie to them or about them.

Rule #10: Do not long for anything that belongs to your neighbor. Do not long for your neighbor's house, wife, male or female servant, ox, or donkey. - Exodus 20:17

Longing for (or wanting) what someone else has is called **coveting** in the Bible. This is very similar to the attitude of the person that steals. When we really want what someone else has, it is like telling God that we are not satisfied with what He has given us. God knows what we can and cannot handle, and we should TRUST His judgment. We also find it hard to show love to people when we are jealous of what they have.

Day #4 continued:

What can we see about the character of God from these ten important rules? Jesus summed up the law of God this way:

Jesus replied, " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. Love Him with all your mind.' This is the first and most important commandment. And the second is like it. 'Love your neighbor as you love yourself.' Everything that is written in the Law and the Prophets is based on these two commandments." - Matthew 22:37-40

More than anything else, God wants us to love Him completely. And then, God wants us to love others. Simply put, God is love (1 John 4:16). All of God's rules point to this truth. He wants us to love Him and love each other. Although it may seem that the rules tell us many things **not** to do, they are really instructing us to love. Yet, even broken down as simply as this, we find we are unable to follow God's rules. Tomorrow we will look at God's provision to His people who cannot meet His requirement.



Jesus said that the way we treat other people is directly linked to how we treat Him (Matthew 25:34-40). If we show love and generosity to others, it is the same as treating Jesus that way. If we ignore the needs of others or treat them badly, it is also as if we are doing that to our Savior. Ask God to reveal the needs of others around you. Pray for them and do what you can to help them. Always strive to treat others with love and respect.

Day #5: Pointing to Jesus

Someone once said, "Pain is our best friend." How can that statement be true? Pain is our warning sign that something is wrong with our body. What if you had a terrible disease, but you did not know you had it? You would not go to the doctor to get treatment. You would not know you needed help, and your condition would get worse and worse. Does the pain, itself, make you well? No, pain helps us see we have a physical need, so we can seek treatment.

In a similar way, God gave the laws so His people could see they had a spiritual need. When we see God's commandments, we see we fall short of being perfect. God did not give the law because He expected anyone to keep all of it. He gave it so that **we could see that we could not keep it.**

God's laws govern every part of us - right down to our thoughts and attitudes. Any time we do not keep God's law, we are sinning. Our sin separates us from God (Isaiah 59:2). The Bible tells us that every one of us is a sinner (Romans 3:23). There is **no way** for us to make ourselves pure once we have sinned.

Remember, the covenant God made to Moses was an "if, then" promise. **If** the people obeyed, **then** they would be set apart and used by God. Because God knew the people could not do their part, He promised a new covenant. It would not be an "if, then" promise. It would be an eternal promise (Jeremiah 31:31-34). God promised to send someone who would take away the sins of His people (Romans 11:26-27).

Jesus, God's own Son, was the answer to that promise. Jesus came to live on earth in a human body. He faced all the things that other people face, but He never sinned. He was perfect. Because He was perfect, He could die in our place as our substitution. In John 1:29, the Bible calls Jesus, *"the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"* Because we can't keep God's perfect law, **we need Jesus** (Galatians 3:24).



But now God has shown us how to become right with Him. The Law and the Prophets give witness to this. It has nothing to do with obeying the law. We are made right with God by putting our faith in Jesus Christ. - Romans 3:21-22a



Just as pain is a warning sign for physical need, the law is the warning sign for spiritual need. If you had the cure for a horrible, life-threatening disease, wouldn't you tell everyone you know about it? Those of us who know the truth of the Lamb of God must make it known to a world that is separated from God because of sin (Acts 1:8).