

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS FROM EXODUS CHAPTER 20

After the Book of Genesis ends, the Children of Israel (the descendants of Jacob) spend many hundreds of years in Egypt. Eventually, they are enslaved by the Egyptian people. God raises a leader among them, a man named Moses, to lead them out of bondage. Through a series of miraculous plagues, Moses convinces Pharaoh to release the Hebrew people. The final miracle is the parting of the Red Sea, where the Hebrew people cross on dry land and the army of the unfaithful Pharaoh is crushed by the collapsing sea-walls. Once in the wilderness on the far side of the sea, God hands his law, written on stone tablets, down to Moses. This law is known as the Ten Commandments.

And God spake all these words, saying, "I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage."

Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image [idol], or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them, for I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me, and shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.

Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God. In it thou shalt not do any work—thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day. Wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.

Honour thy father and thy mother that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

Thou shalt not kill.

Thou shalt not commit adultery.

Thou shalt not steal.

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.

Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The Ten Commandments established God’s law among the Hebrews—giving them a standard of conduct and a measure of right and wrong. In order for a society to function, do the members of that society need to believe in the same concept of right and wrong? Explain.
2. What happens when a society has different ideas about what is right and what is wrong?
3. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew but since has been translated into many different languages. This passage is from the King James Bible, authorized by King James I of England in 1611, written in the formal English language of the time. How has English changed in the last 400 years?
4. Moses is sometimes called the Lawgiver. In addition to the Ten Commandments, there were many other laws for day-to-day living that Moses shared with the people. The Israelites would eventually travel into the Promised Land and develop their own country, yet they always abided by the Law of Moses. Why are laws important to a society?
5. Which of the Ten Commandments would be the hardest to follow? Explain.
6. Some translations of “Thou shalt not kill” say, “Thou shalt not *murder*.” What is the difference? Is it an important difference? Explain.
7. What does it mean to covet? What would be a modern translation of this word? Explain your choice.
8. Hundreds of years after the time of Moses, Jesus Christ taught concerning the Ten Commandments. When Jesus was asked which was the greatest commandment, he replied, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.” In your opinion does this sum up the main idea of the Ten Commandments?
9. Since the Ten Commandments have such an important influence on laws throughout the centuries, there are many monuments depicting them near courthouses in America. Some argue that since these monuments are on government-owned property, this violates the separation of church and state. Some of these critics have petitioned to have the Ten Commandments monuments removed. In your opinion should monuments depicting the Ten Commandments be allowed to exist on public property?
10. From the stories you have read about Moses, do you think he was a good leader? Explain. Think about the way he used his power.