

“Thou Shalt Not Steal”: Its Spirit, Depth, and Understanding

Out of the smoke and fire of Sinai, the eighth decree cut through human greed, establishing an absolute protective boundary around personal property, stewardship, and economic justice. Having safeguarded life and the family structure, the Sovereign of the universe positioned Himself as the ultimate guarantor of honest labor and fair distribution. The eighth commandment is a direct declaration that everything in the cosmos belongs to God, and human beings are required to respect the boundaries of stewardship He has assigned to others.

“Thou shalt not steal.” — Exodus 20:15

To the casual reader, this commandment is easily dismissed as a law meant only for shoplifters, thieves, and burglars. Yet, in its spirit, depth, and understanding, the Eighth Commandment (lo tignov in Hebrew) hits much deeper. It dismantles the entire psychology of entitlement. The spirit of this law establishes that theft is not merely the physical grabbing of an object; it is any action that deprives another human being of what is rightfully theirs—whether through deceptive business practices, underpaying workers, structural inflation, withholding tithes from God, or wasting time that belongs to an employer.

Faithful Stewardship: How Respecting God’s Ownership Makes Him Your God

To have God as your God means you recognize that He is the ultimate Owner of all wealth, land, and resources. Human beings are merely stewards. When you respect the property and labor of your neighbor, you are actively validating God's sovereign distribution. To keep this commandment in spirit is to walk in absolute economic integrity, trusting that the Creator will provide for your needs through honest labor without you needing to exploit, deceive, or shortchange others.

“Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in meteyard, in weight, or in measure. Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin, shall ye have: I am the Lord your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt.” — Leviticus 19:35–36

“Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbour, neither rob him: the wages of him that is hired shall not abide with thee all night until the morning.” — Leviticus 19:13

The Systemic Fraud: How Man-Made Economic Exploitation Serves Another God

The ultimate violation of the eighth commandment occurs when human societies, corporations, or governments create laws, financial systems, and cultural traditions that legalise theft and institutionalise fraud. When a government uses fiat manipulation, unfair taxation, or deceptive statutes to strip citizens of their purchasing power and assets, they are committing systemic theft. They have replaced the righteous weights and measures of God with the fraudulent structures of men.

On an individual level, if we manipulate corporate hours, skip out on our debts, or use deceptive marketing to maximize profit at the expense of the vulnerable, we are breaking this law. We are serving the god of Mammon (wealth) and self-interest. The prophets fiercely indicted the elites of Israel for using man-made financial laws and crooked balances to enrich themselves while legally robbing the poor:

“Are there yet the treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked, and the scant measure that is abominable? Shall I count them pure with the wicked balances, and with the bag of deceitful weights?” — Micah 6:10–11

“Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation.” — Malachi 3:8–9

“Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.” — Ephesians 4:28

Conclusion: Faithful Stewardship

The spiritual depth of the Eighth Commandment establishes that our financial transactions are a direct reflection of our spiritual allegiance. You cannot serve both God and fraudulent gain. When we participate in underhanded business, adapt to the corrupt economic standards of human society, or withhold from God and our neighbors what is rightfully theirs, we break the covenant. We serve the god of greed. To fully honor this commandment, we must align our businesses, our jobs, and our pocketbooks with the absolute integrity of scripture, trusting the provision of the Most High and walking as honest stewards of His creation.