

# THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

EXODUS 20:1-21

---

## INTRODUCTION

**A. In Exodus 19**, God made a covenant with Israel.

**Exodus 19:3-6** – The LORD called to [Moses] out of the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.”

**B. In Exodus 20**, Israel receives the terms of God’s covenant with them.

**1.** These covenant-terms are called *The Ten Commandments*.

**2. Deuteronomy 4:12-14** – ... the LORD spoke to you out of the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of words, but saw no form; there was only a voice. And he declared to you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, that is, the Ten Commandments, and he wrote them on two tablets of stone. And the LORD commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and rules, that you might do them in the land that you are going over to possess.

**3.** This scene on Mount Sinai resembles a *wedding ceremony*.

**a.** God loves Israel, and He chose Israel to be His covenant bride.

**i. Isaiah 54:5** – ... your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is his name; and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called.

**ii. Jeremiah 2:2-3** – “I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown. Israel was holy to the LORD, the firstfruits of his harvest.

**b.** The Ten Commandments are the terms of the marriage-covenant made between God and Israel, much like the vows made between the groom and bride.

**i.** God’s Laws set Israel apart as *God’s special people* in the world.

**Deuteronomy 4:5-8** – See, I have taught you statutes and rules, as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do them in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’ For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? And what great nation is there,

that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?

**ii.** God's Laws are designed to *bless* us, not *burden* us.

**aa. Deuteronomy 11:26-27** – “See, I am setting before you today a blessing ... the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you today...”

**bb. 1 John 5:3** – This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.

**iii.** God's Laws display *God's goodness*, and they are designed for *our good*.

**Deuteronomy 10:12-13** – And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I am commanding you today for your good?

**c.** The giving of the Law is more than judicial; it is relational.

**i.** If failure and breaking the Law is merely *judicial*, then our understanding of salvation will be primarily *judicial*.

ii. The truth is – sin is a *relational* problem.

**Jeremiah 2:13** – ... my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.

iii. Therefore – *Redemption* is more than being *rescued* from Hell; it is primarily about being *reconciled* to God.

**1 Peter 3:18** – Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, *that he might bring us to God...*

---

## THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

Exodus 20:1-21

**20:1-2** <sup>1</sup>And God spoke all these words, saying, <sup>2</sup>“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

**A.** This opening statement is important; it sets the Ten Commandments in its proper context.

**B.** Listen to this helpful explanation of **Exodus 20:1-2**:

God introduces Himself as Israel’s Savior before giving the Ten Commandments to show that grace and rescue come first, and obedience comes second. The law is given to a people already

redeemed, so it becomes a response to His salvation, not the way to earn it.

Exodus 20 begins, *“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”* God reminds them He has already acted in mercy and power on their behalf before He ever says, *“You shall...”* This pattern shows that in God’s covenant dealings, His gracious initiative (deliverance) precedes the call to covenant obedience.

By stating what He has done, God is declaring who He is to them: *“the LORD your God”* and their Redeemer. The commandments then flow out of that relationship; they are not abstract moral rules, but the charter for a rescued people who now belong to Him. In other words, He is not saying, “Obey so I will be your God,” but “Because I am your God who saved you, this is how you now live.”

Because salvation came first, the Ten Commandments function as a gracious gift for the people’s good, not a ladder to climb into God’s favor. Several expositors describe them as God’s “constitution” for Israel, turning former slaves into a holy nation with a common way of life that leads to blessing and human flourishing. Obedience is presented as the path of freedom for redeemed people, not the price of redemption.

By giving the law to an already-rescued people, God also uses it to reveal their sin and their ongoing need for His mercy. The law functions like a mirror or tutor: it shows God’s holy standard, exposes their failure, and points them toward the deeper salvation ultimately

fulfilled in Christ. So even in Exodus, the pattern is consistent with the gospel: saved by grace, then called to walk in obedience.

Many Christian teachers summarize Exodus 20 this way: “Grace precedes obedience.” God first establishes the relationship by redeeming His people, then He gives them the commandments as the shape of life within that redeemed relationship. That is why the introduction of God’s saving act comes before the Ten Commandments: it keeps the law in its proper place—as the response of a rescued people, not the means of their rescue. <sup>1</sup>

**20:3** <sup>3</sup> “You shall have no other gods before me.

**A.** The Bible teaches us that there is only one true and living God. All other gods are false, counterfeit, and demonic.

**B.** In Israel’s covenant relationship with God, God must be exclusively the focus and recipient of their love and affection, faith and obedience, devotion and dedication, worship and praise.

**C.** In marriage covenant, the groom and bride promise each other, “...forsaking all others, to be faithful to you as long as we both shall live.”

**D.** In our covenant relationship with God in Christ, God must be the single, primary focus and recipient of our love and affection, faith and obedience, devotion and dedication, worship and praise.

---

<sup>1</sup> perplexity.ai

**20:4-6** <sup>4</sup>“You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. <sup>5</sup>You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, <sup>6</sup>but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

**A.** Imagine returning home from a long work-trip or scrolling through the Instagram feed of your spouse only to discover that there are photos framed and set-up and pics posted of old and new “lovers” – misters or mistresses – other partners who are not you.

- 1.** This would be shocking and shattering, angering and disheartening.
- 2.** This is a violation of the marriage-covenant.

**B.** This is idolatry.

- 1.** Idolatry is idol-worship, and idols are anything and everything that replaces God as the ultimate treasure and master passion of our lives.
- 2.** Idolatry is adultery against God.
- 3.** God’s proper response to idolatry – “I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, <sup>6</sup>but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.”

**a.** If God does not respond with *proper jealousy*, then He does not truly value His covenant-relationship with us. He is not passive – He responds with holy jealousy because He truly loves us.

**b.** His response towards us depends on our heart-posture towards Him – “those who hate me” and “those who love me and keep my commandments.”

### **C. APPLICATION:**

**1 John 5:21** – Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

**20:7** <sup>7</sup>“You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

**A.** In marriage, we should seek to esteem and honor our spouses in the presence of others. It is shameful and scandalous to slander our spouses and misrepresent their union with unkind and unseemly words and actions.

**B.** In Scripture, God’s *name* and *nature* are synonymous.

**Exodus 34:5-7** – The LORD came down in a cloud, stood with him there, and proclaimed his name, “the LORD.” The LORD passed in front of him and proclaimed: The LORD—the LORD is a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in faithful love and truth, maintaining faithful love to a thousand generations, forgiving iniquity, rebellion, and sin. But he will not leave the guilty unpunished, bringing

the consequences of the fathers' iniquity on the children and grandchildren to the third and fourth generation. <sup>CSB</sup>

**C.** Taking God's name in vain is more than saying, "Oh, God," it is dishonoring Him by misrepresenting Him to others by our words and actions.

**1.** "Vain" means, "Empty, worthless, or without truth."

**2.** Taking God's name in vain is *speaking God's name* and *representing God's nature* in a way that is empty, dishonest, or disrespectful, instead of honoring who He truly is.

**20:8-11** <sup>8</sup>"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. <sup>9</sup>Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, <sup>10</sup>but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. <sup>11</sup>For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

**A.** Long-term healthy marriages incorporate intentional, weekly Date-days and/or Date-nights.

**1.** These times are intended to be exclusively enjoyed by the married couple to foster a deeper, more meaningful relationship between them. These are moments for communion, communication, and comradery.

**2.** This is a deterrent for marriages declining from rote to rut to rot.

**3.** These special days reintroduces fun, fosters rekindled romance, and renews fresh “googly-eyes” for one each other.

**B.** God initiated the Sabbath Day to foster long-term, healthy relationship with Him and His people.

**1. HE MODELLED IT IN CREATION.**

**Genesis 2:1-3** – Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

**2. HE CODIFIED IT IN THE TEN COMMANDMENTS.**

**Exodus 20:8** – Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

**3. THE SABBATH DAY –**

**a.** It is time to enjoy fellowship with God.

**b.** It is time to be refreshed and renewed spiritually, mentally, emotionally, and physically.

**c.** It is time to be reminded that we are mortal and finite, and God is spirit and infinite – and our all in all.

**d.** It is time celebrate our true and ultimate Sabbath rest in Jesus the Messiah.

**i.** In Christ, we rest in His completed work on the cross. We do not labor for God's acceptance and approval; rather, we rest knowing we already have them by grace through faith in Jesus the Messiah.

**ii. Hebrews 4:4-11** – We know it is ready because of the place in the Scriptures where it mentions the seventh day: “On the seventh day God rested from all his work.” But in the other passage God said, “They will never enter my place of rest.”

So God's rest is there for people to enter, but those who first heard this good news failed to enter because they disobeyed God. So God set another time for entering his rest, and that time is today. God announced this through David much later in the words already quoted: “Today when you hear his voice, don't harden your hearts.”

Now if Joshua had succeeded in giving them this rest, God would not have spoken about another day of rest still to come. So there is a special rest still waiting for the people of God. For all who have entered into God's rest have rested from their labors, just as God did after creating the world. So let us do our best to enter that rest. But if we disobey God, as the people of Israel did, we will fall. <sup>NLT</sup>

**20:12-17** <sup>12</sup> “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

<sup>13</sup> “You shall not murder.

<sup>14</sup> “You shall not commit adultery.

<sup>15</sup> “You shall not steal.

<sup>16</sup> “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

<sup>17</sup> “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.”

**A. Exodus 20:3-11** are commands that relate to *us and God*.

**B. Exodus 20:12-17** are commands that relate to *us and other people*.

**1.** A right vertical relationship with God should be expressed in our right horizontal relationships with other people, especially “the household of God.”

**a.** Right relationship in *our children-parent relationships* – “Honor your father and your mother...”

**b.** Right relationship in *our husband-wife relationships* – “You shall not commit adultery.”

**c.** Right relationship in *our human-to-human relationships* – “You shall not murder ... you shall not steal ... you shall not lie about others ... you shall not covet other people’s property.”

**2.** The Ten Commandments are designed to bring health and wholeness to our relationships with one another.

**20:18-21** <sup>18</sup> Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off <sup>19</sup> and said to Moses, “You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die.”

<sup>20</sup> Moses said to the people, “Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin.” <sup>21</sup> The people stood far off, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.

Like Moses, we draw near to God – in Christ Jesus.

**Hebrews 10:19-23** – ... brothers and sisters, since we have boldness to enter the sanctuary through the blood of Jesus—he has inaugurated for us a new and living way through the curtain (that is, through his flesh)—and since we have a great high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed in pure water. Let us hold on to the confession of our hope without wavering, since he who promised is faithful. <sup>CSB</sup>

---

## **THE GOSPEL AND THE TEN COMMANDMENTS**

**A. FIRST – THE TEN COMMANDMENTS REVEALS OUR GUILT AND OUR NEED FOR JESUS THE MESSIAH.**

**1. Romans 7:7, 12** – ... if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. ... The law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.

**2. Galatians 3:22-26** – ... the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.

**B. SECOND – THE TEN COMMANDMENTS ARE WRITTEN ON OUR HEARTS BY GOD THE SPIRIT AND WE OBEY THEM BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD.**

**1. Jeremiah 31:33-34** – ... this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

**2. Ezekiel 36:25-27** – I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will

put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

**C. THIRD – THE TEN COMMANDMENTS ARE SUMMED-UP IN ONE WORD – LOVE.**

**Matthew 22:35-40** – ... a lawyer, asked [Jesus] a question to test him. “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” And he said to him, “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.”

**a. LOVE FOR GOD.**

**i.** This fulfills *Commands 1-4* of the Ten Commandments.

**ii.** By loving God with our whole being we will not have other gods – we will not make idols – we will not take God’s name in vain – we will observe the Sabbath as holy.

**b. LOVE FOR OTHERS.**

**i.** This fulfills *Commands 5-10* of the Ten Commandments.

**ii. Romans 13:8-10** – Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the

commandments, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

**D. SOLI DEO GLORIA.**