

The Ten Commandments (Part 1)

Key Verse:
“Therefore, no-one will be declared righteous in His sight by observing the law, rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.”

Romans 3:20

Extra: Comment on the Key Verse.

Level 5 lesson 21

Read: Exodus 20 and Leviticus 26

Most people have probably heard of “the Ten Commandments.” These were ten specific laws written by God Himself and given to Moses on Mount Sinai. Most people would agree they are good and that the world would be a better place if “Everybody lived by the Ten Commandments.” However, many today wilfully ignore God’s Law and live in defiance of what God has commanded.

So what ARE the “Ten Commandments?” And what is their purpose? It is important that we know the answers to both those questions. Let’s spend some time looking at them.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

No. 1 - “You shall have no other Gods before me” (v3). This forbids idolatry or worshipping of any object, other than the living Creator God of Heaven and earth.

No. 2 - “You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in Heaven above... or in the earth or the sea...” (v4-6). This forbids designing and making any object so that it can be worshipped. The making is as equally forbidden as the worship.

No. 3 - “You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God” (v7). To use God’s Name for swearing or bad language is forbidden. Many people will have to answer to God Himself for doing this.

No. 4 - “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labour..., but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord...” (v8-11). One day a week is to be a day of rest. Our ordinary work is to be set aside, and the time devoted to the worship of God and to physical rest and rejuvenation.

No. 5 - “Honour your father and your mother so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you” (v12). Disrespect of any kind to parents is not allowed. Parents are honoured by God and therefore children must honour them also. Note the reward for doing this.

No. 6 - “You shall not murder” (v13). This forbids murder (killing an innocent human unlawfully). Human life is sacred, because only God can give life.

No. 7 - “You shall not commit adultery” (v14). This forbids all sex outside the marriage relationship. Before marriage we are to abstain from sexual relations, and while married we are to be faithful to our marriage partner.

No. 8 - “You shall not steal” (v15). This forbids theft (taking another person’s property without permission). There are many ways people break this law and many reasons why, but it’s always wrong in God’s eyes.

No. 9 - “You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour” (v16). Telling lies about other people is forbidden. While society may only judge some types of lying in the courts, God tells us that all lying about people or things is sin.

No. 10 - “You shall not covet your neighbour’s house, wife, servant, animal...” (v17). This prohibits any lustful desire for other people’s property, etc. These selfish desires are sinful and can lead to further sins of the mind and body (through actions and behaviour).

So you see - just as our Key Verse explains - the law makes us aware of ‘sin.’ It does not make us sinners, but it does show us that we ARE sinners! It is like a mirror that shows us we are dirty. “That’s alright,” you may say, “but why is that so important? Why do I need to know that?”

The answer is simple: until each one of us sees our NEED of a Saviour, we will never ask to be SAVED! Just like a person swimming only calls for help when they realise they are drowning, so God’s Holy Law helps us realise our true status before Him. All unsaved sinners are not simply “swimming,” they are actually doomed to drown, unless a Saviour rescues them! When you understand your own sinful state, and see the futility of your own effort, you too can call out to Jesus to save you from the death penalty of sin.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. What does the first law of God forbid? Why?	.....
2. What does it mean to “misuse the name of the Lord”?	.....
3. What does it mean “to covet” something?	.....
4. What knowledge does the law of God give us?	.....
5. Why is this knowledge so important?	.....

My Name is Age

The Ten Commandments (Part 2)

Key Verse:

“So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good.”

Romans 7:12

Extra: Compare God’s demands and God’s provision.

Level 5 Lesson 22

Read Exodus 20:1-26 and Exodus 24:12-18

Let’s continue looking a little closer at the Ten Commandments. We see in Exodus 24:12 that God Himself wrote the Ten Commandments on two stone tablets and gave them to Moses. This divided the Ten Commandments into two sections; but while there are differing opinions about the divisions, an interesting observation can still be made. The first section contains those commandments dealing specifically with our duty towards God: the second contains those which deal with our duty towards other humans.

A strong principle is instituted here, which we find repeated right throughout Scripture. Our relationship to God should always have an outward, practical response in our relationships with, and treatment of, other people. So let’s take a look at the first section again.

GOD’S DEMANDS OF US: Undoubtedly, the first four belong on tablet one. God alone is worthy of our worship, honour, love, and devotion: after all, He is the all-knowing, Almighty God, our Creator! The first four commands reflect the correct response to this fact, both in attitude and action. Then, in view of the fact that parents are responsible to teach their children about God and, in a sense represent God to them, parents are also to be honoured by their children; in this way, God is also honoured. So it would seem that the fifth commandment also belongs on the first tablet: notice also, in each case, there is the expression “the Lord your God”, which further binds these commandments together.

As we mentioned earlier, the second five commandments are connected in a similar way, describing our subsequent duty towards our fellow-man. We must regard our neighbour’s life as sacred; his marriage relationship as holy. We must recognise his legal property rights; we must not try to ruin his reputation in any way; we must not secretly long for his goods or possessions.

These five commandments would seem to belong on the second tablet. In Mathew 22:35-40, the Lord Jesus reduced these two tablets of the Law with their five commandments each, to two great commandments: by firstly saying, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind”; and secondly, “Love your neighbour as yourself.”

GOD’S PROVISION FOR US: So finally it comes down to this: to keep the law of God we must completely and fully and continually love God. We must love Him all the time, more than we love ourselves. And as for our neighbour, we must love him equally with ourselves. It must never be “me first,” but treating our neighbour the same as ourselves. That’s what the Law of God demands.

I’m sure, if you honestly measure yourselves by this holy standard, you will agree that you are sinful and unable to keep the law of God. Israel couldn’t keep it, neither can any of us! The law is holy, just, and good, but we are sinful, weak, and helpless. We clearly need Jesus Christ the Saviour, to save us from our sins and the penalty of breaking God’s holy and righteous law.

Look at the people on the day the Law was given: they stood a long way away (v18). “Don’t let God speak to us or we will die,” they said to Moses. They could observe from Mount Sinai at that time, thunder and lightning, fierce rumbling noises and smoke - all signs which made the people tremble! So don’t expect to find salvation in law-keeping; there is only failure and condemnation there. (Galatians 3:10) Look instead to Calvary and see the Saviour on the Cross, shedding His precious blood so that sinners might be redeemed from the curse of the Law; for it is written “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree” (see Galatians 3:13).

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. What do the tablets of the Law show us?

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2. Why is it important to keep the Law of God?

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3. What did our Lord say the first tablet demanded? (See Matthew 22:35-40)

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4. The Law of God is good, but how can we keep it?

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5. Where can we find salvation, at Mt Sinai or at Calvary? Give a reason for your answer.

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Israel's Idolatry

Key Verse:
“Do not be idolaters, as some of them were.”

1 Corinthians 10:7a

Read Exodus 32 & 34

A SAD EVENT: While Moses was on the Mount receiving the Law and other instructions concerning the Tabernacle and the Priesthood, dreadful things were happening in the Camp below. Moses had been away for over five weeks and the people began to wonder what had happened to him. Despite their solemn promises (Exodus 24:3) and all they had experienced of God's loving care and provision since leaving Egypt, they now wanted Aaron to build them a "god" (or idol) to worship!

Aaron knew it wasn't right, but the people pressured him, so he ordered them to bring him their golden earrings and bracelets. He melted them down and made a calf idol. This was the chief Egyptian god with which they were all familiar. Aaron had a bad conscience about what he had done, so he announced a feast to Jehovah, perhaps hoping it would make things not so bad!

However, the people were soon dancing around this lifeless piece of metal, worshipping it as the god which brought them out of Egypt! How foolish and ungrateful! These are the same people who promised to keep the law of God which taught that God alone should be worshipped. What a terrible failure by God's people!

As always, the Lord was aware of what was going on in the Israelite camp. He said to Moses, "Go down because your people whom you brought up out of Egypt have become corrupt" (v7). "I have seen these people, and they are a stiff-necked people; now leave Me alone so that My anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them!" (v10)

God proposed to replace these wicked, ungrateful people with others, but Moses pleaded with the Lord to turn from His anger, change His mind and not consume them. Moses reminded the Lord that these Children of Israel were His people; and he asked what the Egyptians would say if they were destroyed. Then he claimed the promises made to Abraham, Isaac and Israel (Jacob). Graciously God listened to Moses' pleas, and held back the threatened judgement.

AN IMPORTANT DECISION: Moses went down from Mt Sinai carrying the two tablets on which were written the Ten Commandments. He was joined by Joshua, and as they got nearer the camp they heard the noise of shouting and singing. Coming into the camp, they saw the calf and the people dancing round it. Moses was furious with them and threw the tablets onto the ground, smashing them to pieces! He quickly stopped their idolatrous behaviour. He then destroyed the calf, ground it to powder, mixed it in water, and made the children of Israel drink the mixture.

Moses then asked Aaron why he had permitted such evil to be done. What a pathetic answer Aaron gave! Instead of admitting his sin, he blamed others, saying they had practically compelled him to use their gold for this evil purpose. Then as if to deny all responsibility, he finished his plea with the lying words, "out came this calf!" Moses then faced the people with an important decision "Who is on the Lord's side?" he cried, "Let him come to me!" (v26)

A NECESSARY PUNISHMENT: The Levites came and joined with Moses, so he ordered them to complete a terrible but necessary punishment. They were to go throughout the camp and kill the rebellious ones with their swords. That day about 3000 men were executed (v28). The next day, Moses called the people together and solemnly said to them, "You have committed a great sin."

Moses then told them he would go up to the Lord and seek His forgiveness for them. He asked God to forgive them, "and if not," he said, "blot me (instead of them) out of the book which you have written." What wonderful love Moses had for these unlovely people! Willing to die for them if need be. God said, "No, the ones that have sinned must perish, but you Moses, go and lead the people to the place (Canaan) I spoke of" (v34).

Extra: What can you find out about idolatry today?

Level 5 Lesson 23

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. Why did the people demand a calf to be made?	.....
2. What did the Lord propose to do to the people and for Moses?	.....
3. What do you think about Aaron's excuse?	.....
4. What decision does Moses ask the people to make?	.....
5. How did Moses show his great love for the people?	.....

At Kadesh Barnea

Key Verse:
 "...Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion..."

Hebrews 3:7-8

Extra: What can we do about the "giants" we face in our lives today?

Level 5 Lesson 24

Read Numbers 13 and Deuteronomy 1:19-26

Finally, the Children of Israel arrived at the place called Kadesh-Barnea, on the southern border of Canaan. They were almost at their journey's end. There in front of them lay the 'Promised Land', a land "flowing with milk and honey" which Jehovah God had promised them years before.

After all their years of wandering in the desert, God's hand was at work caring and providing for them, and showing the pillars of cloud guiding by day and fire by night. Here at last was their destination, their new home! With God's promised victory and visible presence with them, surely all that remained for them was to go forward and conquer the land. Let's consider what happened next as they approached this great occasion.

SPYING OUT THE LAND: In answer to the people's request, and because it also seemed a wise precaution to Moses (Deuteronomy 1:22-23), the Lord allowed him to send 12 men into the land of Canaan. There was to be a leader from each tribe to make up this special group. Among the names chosen, we see two men who we will hear a lot more about: Caleb (v6) and Hoshea (or Joshua, v8). This elite group were to go on a highly dangerous spy mission, to find out all they could about this new land and bring back a report of their discoveries.

Their specific instructions were to go first to the north and then turn west, up into the hills, from where they could view the land and its inhabitants. They were to note whether it was fertile or barren, whether it had lots of forests and trees, and bring back some samples of its fruits. They were also to observe the enemy: how many were there? Were they strong or weak? What sort of towns and villages did they live in? Did they have high walls around them?

So off they went into the land, and for forty days they stealthily observed the land and its people. They roamed secretly around, looking at the villages and towns, seeing what sort of people were there and how they lived.

They even managed to pick some huge clusters of grapes from near the brook Eshkol, as well as some other fruit, and then they returned safely to the Israelite camp.

REPORTING TO THE PEOPLE: Moses and Aaron called all the people together, to listen to the spies' report. We can imagine their eager interest, and possible anxiety, as they waited to hear the reports. Was it really as good as God had promised them?

The spies began first to describe the land; they said it truly was "a land flowing with milk and honey!" It was fertile and productive, with an abundance of good crops and fruit. They displayed the huge clusters of grapes they had brought back, so big it took two men to carry each bunch! At this good news the people were no doubt excited and happy, but when the spies began to describe the enemy, their hearts sank!

They reported that there were many people and they were strong, with large, well-fortified, walled cities. Many fierce, warlike tribes lived there - Amalekites, Hittites, Jebusites and Amorites - but perhaps worst of all, they had seen giants, the children of Anak! The spies told how they felt like grasshoppers when they saw these people. Sadly, they said there was no way the Israelites could ever defeat them, as they were simply too strong.

However one spy, Caleb, disagreed. He stood up and spoke to the upset and frightened crowd, "We should go up and take possession of the land at once, for we can certainly do it!" He was not scared of the opposition. Why? Because it didn't exist? No! Because he believed that the Lord who was with the Israelites was far stronger. His advice was based on his faith in God.

However, except for Joshua (we know from chapter 14 that Joshua agreed with Caleb), the other spies did not share Caleb's faith in God and saw only the opposition. They shouted at Caleb, "No! No! We should not go in to the land: we are not able to beat them" So because there were ten against two, the people became extremely upset, disappointed, and angry that Moses had brought them into this position. What would happen next?

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. What did the people request, which God allowed them to do?

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2. What were the spies to find out about their enemies?

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3. What report did they bring back about the land?

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4. What effect did their report about the enemy have on the Israelites?

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5. What did Caleb say, showing his faith in God?

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