

# The Ten Commandments

WHAT ARE THE  
TEN COMMANDMENTS?

HOW DID THEY  
COME TO US?

ARE THEY RELEVANT  
FOR TODAY?



# THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

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# THE COMMANDMENTS: THEN AND NOW

The set of rules, the Ten Commandments, are the code of law given by God directly to Moses on Mount Sinai. After the exodus, when God delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, his chosen people almost immediately lost sight of God's power and goodness to them. They resented their hardships and began to complain. They became quarrelsome and difficult to govern. Moses sought God's help on Mount Sinai (Exodus 15–18).

## The Old Testament

God himself engraved his will for the people on two tablets of stone. The first group of commandments laid out the rules to protect the harmony between God and people. The second group was designed to maintain respect between people. It was vital to the stability of the forming tribal nation that everyone act in a trustworthy manner. Selfishness risked the community's survival. When a person broke a commandment, he had to pay a penalty, repay the person he had injured, and make a sacrifice to restore peace with God.

The law must be viewed as a great, gracious gift from the God of Israel to his people. Unlike all the other ancient near eastern gods, the Lord God revealed his will and made it very clear how to please him and how to properly conduct one's life in order to get along in society. Despite the gift of these divine commands for governing relationships, the people set up idols and worshiped them, they lied, and stole from one another. Many of their leaders were corrupt, and they refused to honor God. Over the next 1,400 years, the law was often forgotten and the worship of the true God was abandoned. God called to the people. Sometimes they would return to God and be restored. Other times, they would ignore him and suffer devastating hardships.

The Lord said that someday he would send a Savior and would have a new covenant with his people. The law would be written on their hearts, not just on stone tablets. They would do the right thing because they loved God (Jeremiah 31:31–33).

## The New Testament (New Covenant)

God sent a Savior, Jesus Christ, to live a perfect life and take the penalty for sin through his death on the cross. Through his sacrifice, he made forgiveness and friendship with God possible, and made us perfect in God's eyes through faith (Romans 3:20; Galatians 2:16; 3:9–14). Jesus came to fulfill the law, and taught that the spirit of the law was as important as the letter of the law (Matthew 23:23).

*“By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome.” —1 John 5:2–3 NASB*

THE PRINCIPLE ►

WHAT DOES IT MEAN? ►

IN THE BIBLE ►

JESUS' TEACHINGS ►

EXPLANATIONS ►

# 1

# NO OTHER GOD

THOU SHALT HAVE NO OTHER GODS BEFORE ME.

God is the creator and Lord of the universe. He deserves our first loyalty.

Put God first and give him our devotion. God should always be our highest priority, over everyone and everything. A god is anything a person allows to rule his or her life. Other gods could include: deities of other religions, superstitions, horoscopes, money, possessions, career, personal comfort, family, friends, addictions, fame, power, security, romance, sex, church, extreme patriotism—anything that comes before God.

- Abraham proved that God was his first priority by being willing to give up his own son (Genesis 22:1–14).
  - The people of Israel were worshiping other gods, so the prophet Elijah challenged the prophets of those gods to a contest. Elijah prayed that God would answer him so all would know that the Lord is God. The Lord answered and proved his superiority (1 Kings 18:20–40).
  - God commanded the prophet Hosea to marry a prostitute who was unfaithful to him, so that Hosea might understand how God feels when his people turn to other gods (Hosea 1–3).
  - Daniel and his three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, risked their lives because they remained devoted to the Lord as their only God (Daniel 1; 3; 6).
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- When asked, “Which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment” (Matthew 22:26–38).
  - In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money” (Matthew 6:24).
  - Jesus said, “Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only” (Luke 4:8).

Jesus said that all the commandments and rules in the Bible hang on two basic principles:

1. Loving God with all of your heart, mind, soul, and strength (first four commandments).
2. Loving your neighbor as yourself (next six commandments).

In the Old Testament, people were offering sacrifices to God because the law commanded them to do so. God wanted sacrifices and burnt offerings as an outward sign of a right heart attitude. God wants to be acknowledged, and he wants people to show mercy to others (Hosea 6:6). He wants us to obey the laws and rules he gives us because we treasure him and we want to serve him.

# 2

## NO IDOLS

THOU SHALT NOT MAKE UNTO THEE ANY GRAVEN IMAGE.

God is spirit and is bigger and more powerful than any representation.

Put faith in God only. Idol worship is worshiping or serving anything in the place of God. Idolatry can also include the worship of the true God *through* an idol. God does not forbid or condemn all representations of people and animals. God commanded that ornamental artwork be made in order to make things beautiful. When we worship something we can see, touch, or control, we miss the power and grandeur of God.

- The prophet Habakkuk wrote that idolatry is when man trusts his own creation more than he trusts God (Habakkuk 2:18–19).
- While Moses was receiving the Ten Commandments, the Israelites created a golden calf, bowed down, and sacrificed offerings to it. God became very angry with them (Exodus 32:1–24).
- Gideon made an idol, which became a snare for his family, because Israel worshiped the idol instead of God (Judges 8:26–27).
- The prophet Isaiah spoke of idol worship, saying a man will burn a tree for warmth or cooking while using the same tree to fashion an idol for worship (Isaiah 44:9–20).
- The apostle Paul associated idolatry with impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed (Colossians 3:5).

- Jesus said, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal” (Matthew 6:19).
- Jesus said, “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Matthew 23:12).
- When Jesus met the Samaritan woman at the well, she asked whether to worship God in Jerusalem or Samaria. He said, “Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23–24).

God instructed Moses to build a tabernacle that contained furniture overlaid with bronze or gold, a solid gold lampstand, and the ark of the covenant overlaid with gold (Exodus 25:1–27:21). Solomon had Hiram the Bronzeworker mold a bronze sea (basin) and had it placed upon twelve bronze oxen statues (1 Kings 7:23–26).

God gives many people the gift of craftsmanship and the abilities to make beautiful images. To sculpt, paint, or design something can bring glory to God. Yet, God is spirit and cannot be represented by any image crafted by human hands. To do so would be an insult to the very nature of God. God also desires that we worship him in spirit, and not through something we ourselves created (John 4:23–24).