



What Are the Ten Commandments?

Part 1

“See how much our heavenly Father loves us, for he allows us to be called his children, and we really are!” (1 John 3:1, NLT)

Four hundred years had passed since Joseph, a descendant of Abraham, had moved his family from Canaan to Egypt, a country of idol worshippers. When Joseph’s descendants increased to over two million people, the new Pharaoh, who did not know about Joseph and how he saved Egypt from famine, became concerned. He said, “There are so many of them that if we get in a war, they might fight with our enemies.” He decided to make them slaves.

As the hard years passed, the Israelites cried out to God for deliverance. God called Moses to free his people from slavery. Moses had grown up as an adopted son in Pharaoh’s palace but then lived in Midian as a shepherd. It took a series of terrible plagues, including the death of his son, to convince stubborn Pharaoh to let them go. As they fled Egypt, God miraculously opened up the Red Sea for their escape. God had a plan – a plan for them to become a great nation through whom his own Son would visit earth. (The exciting story of their deliverance is in the Old Testament, Exodus 1-11)

The purpose of the Law

After their deliverance, God guided them to Mount Sinai where he gave them the Ten Commandments. Why did God do this? He was forming a new nation. Just as our forefathers after the Revolutionary War needed a constitution with laws for us to live by, so did the Israelites. They needed guidance to learn to trust God, to know how to worship him and how to live to please him. They needed to know God’s character and know what was right and what was wrong in his eyes. God’s goal was to transform them into a holy (pure in thought, word and action) people. By obeying these laws, they would build strong families, a strong nation and be a witness of God’s love to the pagan nations around them. Because God saves everyone who believes by faith, obeying the law was never a ticket to heaven.

The giving of the Law

Think about the scariest experience you have ever had. For the millions of Israelites, it would probably be the giving of the Law. They saw God’s presence in the fire. They

heard his voice. They felt his power and authority. Surely, they would fear and obey him so that God would bless them and their children. Imagine yourself at this scene.

According to God's instruction to Moses, the Israelites cleansed themselves and their clothes and gathered at the foot of Mt. Sinai. Suddenly, there was a horrific thundering and lightening storm. A huge cloud covered the mountain. A long blast like a ram's horn penetrated the air, growing louder and louder. Smoke rose in the air as if from a furnace. Then Jehovah descended in the form of fire. The whole mountain shook with a powerful earthquake! Terrified, the people trembled in fear. (How does this compare with your most horrifying experience?) The terrified people told Moses, "*You tell us what God says and we will obey, but don't let God speak directly to us, or it will kill us.*" (Exodus 20:19, LB) (Read Exodus, chapters 19 and 20.) Then God began to speak, "*I am Jehovah.*" His first four laws of the covenant (agreement) reveal the love relationship God wants every believer to have with him.

Your relationship with God

"I am the Lord your God...do not worship any other gods besides me." (Exodus.20:3, NIV) Unless the Israelites learned that the God who led them out of Egypt and slavery was the one true God, they could not be his people. You too must learn that the God who delivered you from the "slavery of sin" is the one true God. If you love God, you will be loyal. God wants to be everything to you. God wants you to love him from your heart, not because of some rule! "*We love him because he first loved us.*" (1 John 4:19, NIV) Take pleasure in his love! Look into your heart. Is God is your first love?

"Do not make idols of any kind." (Exodus 20:4-6 NIV) The Israelites had just come from Egypt where they worshiped many idols, each representing a different part of a person's life. It would be easy just to add another "god." However, unless they got rid of the idols carved from silver, gold, wood, stone or metal, they could not be God's people. That's why God gave these two laws first. Today, you can allow certain things to become "gods" in your life. Is there anything that controls your thoughts, time and energy that has become an idol – work, video games, music, a sports car or a cell phone? Don't let any substitute steal your heart. Jesus said, "You cannot serve two masters!" If God holds central place in your heart, other things will not turn into gods.

"Do not misuse the name of the Lord your God." (Exodus 20:7, NIV) God's name is special. It is good, holy, and awesome, an expression of who he is. If you love God, you will be reverent! It is a serious offense to misuse God's name to curse, to express surprise or to fill in a gap in your speech. Saying his name in a thoughtless way or using it as a swear word, reveals your flippant attitude and true feelings toward him. If you misuse God's name, confess the sin. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you change that habit.

"Remember to observe the Sabbath [Saturday] day by keeping it holy." (Exodus 20:8, NIV) In Hebrew the word, Sabbath, means, "to stop" or "to rest from work." The word "holy", means, "to set apart." God wants his people to set aside a special time to worship him. This commandment is the only one not repeated in the New Testament. When

Jesus resurrected on Sunday, the early Christians changed their worship day to Sunday. This day of rest is God's gift to you. Better than anyone, your Creator knows that your body needs rest. However, by worshiping him, resting and changing your regular activities one day a week, it becomes your gift to him! Although every day belongs to the Lord, God set the pattern in the Garden of Eden. He rested from his creative work on the seventh day, blessed the day and declared it holy. (Genesis 2:2, 3a) Be careful that you do not turn it into a day of "rules" as the Jews did. It is a day to enjoy!

Jesus' one command

What did Jesus say about these first four commandments? He summarized them into **one** command! "*You must love the Lord God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind...*" (Matthew 22:37, NLT) In other words, if you truly love God with your entire being, you will fulfill all these four commandments!

Now read Part 2 of the Ten Commandments and "Should a Believer Obey the Ten Commandments?"

Attitude Check:

- If you had been an Israelite and witnessed all he/she did, what do you think your attitude would be toward God?

Explore:

- Read Romans 8:35-39 to learn how you can never be separated from God's love and 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 to see how God describes his love for you. Read, "God Is Loving and Just." (2 Peter 3:3-9) Write a letter to God and tell him why you love him.

Talking with God:

- Thank you, Father, for being a God of love. May my love for you grow deeper each day.