



LESSON 24

God gives the Ten Commandments

EXODUS 20:1-21



God gave the law to show His standard and expose human sin.



“Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin” (Exod 20:20).

Supporting Truths

1. God gave the Ten Commandments.
2. God's law is holy.
3. God's law reveals sin.
4. God's law is good.
5. God's law shows the need for a Savior.

Objectives

1. State that the Ten Commandments were spoken by God. List them in order.
2. Consider how various commandments protect true worship of God.
3. Compare one's own life with the Ten Commandments.
4. Consider how various commandments protect God's people.
5. Explain how a person can escape the law's condemnation.

STUDY THE BIBLE LESSON

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Lesson Summary

When God rescued Israel from Egypt, He became their new ruler. He promised to make them His treasured people, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, on the condition that they obey His voice and keep His covenant. The people said that they would do this, so God gave them the law, starting with the Ten Commandments. These laws guarded a right relationship with God and with other people, and they showed Israel just what it means to be holy.

Spotlight on the Gospel

God's law was never intended to be a way to earn salvation. The purpose of the law is to reveal sin so that a person will see his need of a Savior. Jesus Christ alone perfectly satisfied God's law, so that by His death He could atone for the sins of all who believe. Those who believe are no longer condemned by the law, but they live in a way that pleases God and gives Him glory.

LAST WEEK



**God prepares Israel for
the covenant**
Exodus 19:1–25

THIS WEEK



**God gives the Ten
Commandments**
Exodus 20:1–21

NEXT WEEK



**God ordains the
tabernacle**
*Exodus 25:1–27:19;
30:1–10*

DELIVERANCE

Lesson Commentary

God gave the law to show His standard and expose human sin.

The LORD had given Israel a precious promise: if they listened and obeyed, they would become God's special people, "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod 19:6). But to be a kingdom of priests serving God, and to be a holy nation, Israel needed a standard of holiness. So God gave them the law, starting with the Ten Commandments (Deut 4:13).



THINK ABOUT IT

God's commands are never burdensome to the person who has experienced God's grace.

The setting of the Ten Commandments (20:1–2, 18–21)

The Ten Commandments were spoken by God Himself, based on His own authority (20:1). Because He had rescued Israel from slavery in Egypt (20:2), He demanded

that the people now serve Him. Pharaoh had been their ruler, but now God was to be their ruler, and they were to follow His commands. All those who are delivered by God, whether from slavery to Pharaoh or from slavery to sin, are required to submit to God as their ruler (Rom 6:22; 2 Cor 5:14–15). To some this sounds harsh, but God's commands come in the context of grace, in the context of God's deliverance of sinners who do not deserve it.



THINK ABOUT IT

The gaze of God is upon the one who is humble and contrite in heart and trembles at His Word (Isa 66:2).

God spoke the Ten Commandments out of the raging storm that covered the mountain, with thunder, lightning, a trumpet blast, and smoke (20:18). The people were so afraid they trembled and begged Moses to speak to them for God

instead of having God speak to them directly (20:19). Moses told them not to be afraid, but He also said God came to test them so that they would fear Him (20:20). How were they not to be afraid but also to

fear? The first kind of fear, the kind that the believer is free from, is fear of power that is cruel or unfair or intends to harm. It is the fear of a slave for a master who may lash out at any time and for any reason (Rom 8:15). But the second kind is how a son **fears** a good father (Rom 8:15). The son loves and respects the strength of his father, and he trembles at the displeasure and discipline of his father when he disobeys (Heb 12:7). So Israel had no reason to fear God in the first sense; God was not cruel or unfair and had no plans to harm them. They were to fear God in the second sense: God displayed His powerful holiness out of love, so that their fear would lead them to keep His commandments and live (Prov 4:4).

Four commandments about man's relationship to God (20:3–11)

The commandments have a logical order to them. The first four focus on man's

relationship with God, which can be summed up by the greatest commandment: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matt 22:37). The last six focus on man's relationship with others, as summed up by the second greatest commandment: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt 22:39). But all ten gradually spread out from the center, beginning with commands describing the worship of God and continuing on to commands describing man's relationship to other men.

The first command was that Israel should have no other gods (Exod 20:3). Other nations worshiped many gods, but Israel was to worship no other god alongside Yahweh (the one true God). Believing in one God includes loving God with heart, soul, mind, and strength, so that nothing distracts the worship of His people (Deut 6:4–6). Not only is this what the one true God deserves, but it also unites God's people. When Israel was faithful to God, they lived

THINK ABOUT IT

A right relationship with God serves as the launching pad for a right relationship with others.



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in unity with each other (Ps 133:1). But when they were not devoted to God, they fought among themselves (Judges 12:4).

The second commandment says that no image should be made to be worshiped (Exod 20:4–6). It is not wrong to make images, since the tabernacle itself was filled with carved images (25:18). But it is wrong to make an image that represents the true God or of anything else for the purpose of worshiping the image. The reason for this is that God is a jealous God. He is not jealous in the sense of being unloving or rude, like a child upset that someone else got a better snack. He is jealous like a good father who does not allow someone to lead his children astray. God's jealousy means that He demands exclusive devotion (34:14), He fiercely opposes those who oppose Him (Deut 29:20), and He fights to protect and prosper His people (Isa 9:7; 37:32). It is good for God to be jealous, because He alone is worthy of worship.

The third commandment is not to take the name of the Lord in vain (20:7). This literally means to speak God's name or to speak of His character in an empty way. This includes falsely taking a promise on God's name, but it also includes any irreverent or thoughtless speech concerning God's name or character.

The last of these four commands was to keep the Sabbath (20:8). **Sabbath** literally means "to cease." It was a day to stop working as a way to remember God's rest after creation (20:9–11) and the coming rest in the day of the Messiah (Jer 50:34; Heb 4:9). It taught them how to worship, and it reminded them that their sustenance depended ultimately upon God rather than on human effort (Exod 16:5). While the principle of resting in the Lord remains (Isa 30:15), the specific Sabbath law has been fulfilled in the Messiah and so is no longer required (Col 2:17).

Six commandments about man's relationships to other men (20:12–17)

The commandments continue to broaden out from God Himself at the center, showing that a right relationship with God requires right relationships with others (1 John 4:20). The link between the first four and the last six commands is the fifth: honor your father and mother (20:12). This shows how critical the family and parental authority is: God designed parents to teach their children about faith in God (12:26–27; Deut 6:7). If children do not honor their parents, then the picture of God as our Father is distorted, the right worship explained by the first four commands is not passed on, and the commands against murder, adultery, theft, deceit, and coveting are sure to be violated as well.

What exactly does the fifth commandment mean? The word "**honor**" means that children are to respect and obey their parents, but also value them highly and care for them with true affection. There is no age limit included in this verse: even though a man and a woman leave their parents' authority when they become married (Gen 2:24), the honor due to a parent remains for life. If parental honor is not upheld, the next generation is not likely to respect any kind of authority, even God's authority.

The sixth commandment forbids **murder** (20:13). This is specifically about killing that results from intentional violence, but even accidental killing required a person to flee to a city of refuge (Deut 19:5). This shows just how precious life is to God. Man is specially made in God's image (Gen 1:27). So it is wrong to take a life because human life belongs not to man but to God (Ezek 18:4). Thus suicide is also forbidden by this command, since not even a person's

THINK ABOUT IT

Every human being bears God's image and thus every human life is precious.



own life is his own. The commandment against murder honors God by honoring life, and it guards the worship of God from being cut short by violence and death.

The seventh commandment forbids adultery (20:14). “**Adultery**” specifically refers to unfaithfulness of married people, although the principle of sexual purity applies to all. Jesus explained that even the lustful thought is already adultery (Matt 5:27–28). Faithfulness in marriage is necessary for true worship because marriage was made by God (Gen 2:21–24), because God ordained marriage as the means of filling the earth (Gen 1:28), and because

marriage is meant to illustrate the loyal love between Christ and His people (Eph 5:22–33). A man cannot be in a right relationship with God if he is not in a right relationship with his wife (1 Pet 3:7).

THINK ABOUT IT

The man that says he loves God but hates his brother is liar (1 John 4:20).

The eighth commandment forbids **stealing**, or taking what belongs to someone else (20:15). Private property must be respected because ultimately all property belongs to God, who gives it to each person as He pleases (Ps 24:1). So ends do not justify the means: it is still stealing even if property is taken from a rich person to give it to a poor person. Theft must be prohibited in order to honor God’s providence and to allow each person the opportunity to give freely (2 Cor 9:7).

The ninth commandment forbids bearing **false witness** (20:16). This specifically refers to lying in court, but it includes the principle that lying in general is wrong (Hos 4:2). All deceit despises God because God’s character is truth (Deut 32:4; John 14:6). Deceit is so deadly to a society that one ancient law code gave the death penalty for anyone who made a false accusation. The Mosaic Law punished a false witness by giving him the penalty he intended for the person he was accusing (Deut 19:19). Thus the ninth commandment honors God’s character and preserves the community of God’s people.

The tenth commandment forbids coveting (20:17). **Coveting** means to have a strong desire for something that belongs to

someone else. This prevented the Israelites from thinking of God’s commands as merely outward. God looks at the heart (1 Sam 16:7), and sin starts with a person’s thoughts and desires (Matt 15:19; Jas 1:13–15). Someone might not give in to murder, adultery, stealing, or lying, but even the desire that led to these crimes was prohibited.

God had at least four purposes in giving the Ten Commandments. The first was to reveal His holiness and the standard of holiness required to be His people (Lev. 19:2). The law is “holy and righteous and good” (Rom 7:12), and all the commandments are commanded again in the New Testament, except for the Sabbath which was fulfilled in Christ. Because sin separates from God (Isa 59:2), and because God’s people were called to bring glory to His name (1 Pet 2:9), God’s people must be holy people (1 Pet 1:16).

Second, the Ten Commandments reveal God’s kingship over Israel, and the repetition of these commands in the New Testament show that God’s right to rule extends over all people (Ps 145:13). God’s people ought to think in terms of obligation, not in terms of rights. They should think in terms of their duty to God and to others, not in terms of what they think they deserve from God or from others (Phil 2:3–4). A community—whether a church or a nation—will begin to crumble when it begins to think in terms of rights rather than in terms of duty.

Third, the Ten Commandments were given to preserve the nation. They promoted unity (20:3–7), humility (20:8–11), family and authority (20:12), life (20:13), marriage (20:14), private property (20:15), justice (20:16), and love for others (20:17). These commands come from love and are necessary for a nation to survive.

THINK ABOUT IT
Right worship requires a right heart.



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Fourth, the Ten Commandments reveal sin and show the need for a Savior (Rom 3:20). They were never intended as a way to earn salvation (Gal 3:11). Old Testament believers were justified by faith (Gen 15:6; Hab 2:4), so when the law came, they were to obey the law as an act of faith in God's Word. Through faith they were justified by the blood of Christ, not by the law itself (Rom 3:24–25), for all fall short of God's perfect standard (Rom 3:23; Jas 2:10). Today, Christians are not under the law (Rom 6:14–15), because believers in Jesus are no longer condemned by the law (Rom 8:1). However, Christians do want to please God by the way they live their lives and treat others.

Lesson Outline

God gave the law to show His standard and expose human sin.

AGES 3–5 LESSON OUTLINE



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|--|---|------------------------------------|
| 1. Do not have any other gods (20:3). | 4. Keep the Sabbath day holy (20:8–11). | 7. Do not commit adultery (20:14). |
| 2. Do not worship images (20:4–6). | 5. Honor your father and your mother (20:12). | 8. Do not steal (20:15). |
| 3. Do not speak God's name disrespectfully (20:7). | 6. Do not murder (20:13). | 9. Do not lie (20:16). |
| | | 10. Do not covet (20:17). |

AGES 6–11 LESSON OUTLINE



1. **The setting of the Ten Commandments (20:1–2, 18–21).**
 - God Himself spoke the Ten Commandments (20:1).
 - The LORD's commands must be obeyed because He is our God and deliverer (20:2).
 - God's voice caused the people to tremble with fear (20:18–19).
 - Moses encourages the right kind of fear of God (20:20–21).
2. **Four Commandments about man's relationship to God (20:3–11).**
 - Do not have any other gods (20:3).
 - Do not worship images (20:4–6).
 - Do not take the name of the LORD in vain (20:7)
 - Keep the Sabbath day holy (20:8–11).
3. **Six Commandments about man's relationship to other men (20:12–17).**
 - Honor your father and your mother (20:12).
 - Do not murder (20:13).
 - Do not commit adultery (20:14).
 - Do not steal (20:15).
 - Do not bear false witness (20:16).
 - Do not covet (20:17).



TEACH THE BIBLE LESSON

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Lesson Questions

Use these questions to teach or to review this week's lesson.



Ages 3–5 Lesson Questions

1. **Who spoke the Ten Commandments?**
God did.
2. **Can you list the Ten Commandments?**
See the Ages 3–5 outline.
3. **Why did God give Israel the Ten Commandments?**
To teach them what it means to be His holy people.
4. **Have you kept all the Ten Commandments?**
No. This shows us that we need Jesus to save us.



Ages 6–11 Lesson Questions

1. **Why is it important that God spoke the Ten Commandments?**
This shows that God is the law-giver. He decides what is right and wrong. People do not get to decide this.
2. **Can you list the Ten Commandments?**
See the Ages 3–5 outline.
3. **Why did God give the Ten Commandments?**
To teach Israel and us what it means to be His holy people.
4. **What are the first four commandments about?**
They are about our relationship with God. They show that we must love God with heart, soul, mind, and strength.
5. **What are the last six commandments about?**
They are about our relationship with other people. They show that to be God's people, we must love our neighbor as ourself.
6. **Why is _____ (pick a commandment) so important for being God's holy people?**
See the commentary for the chosen commandment.
7. **Have you kept all the Ten Commandments?**
No. The Ten Commandments show that you are a sinner.
8. **How can you escape condemnation?**
Jesus lived a perfect life and died for sins. If you repent and put your trust in Him, He will rescue you from the condemnation of the law.

Lesson Activities

Choose from the following ideas to introduce, illustrate, and apply this week's lesson.

AGES 3–5



INTRODUCE

NUMBER ACTIVITIES

Bring 10 pieces of cereal, buttons, beans, or coins. Help the children count the items. “God is going to give 10 rules for right living. Listen for this number in the Bible lesson. I wonder what those rules will say. Can you think of what some of them might be?”

OBEY PARENTS

Using a puppet, introduce the fifth commandment: Honor your father and mother. Ask the children if they know what it means to “honor” someone. Explain that “honoring” someone includes obeying them. Ask the children to tell you some of the ways that they can obey their parents. Use the puppet to talk about how obedience is more than just doing the right thing—it also includes have the right attitude.



ILLUSTRATE

TEN-COMMANDMENT TABLETS

Cut out two 9 x 12-inch tablets from large foam sheets. Print out two sheets, with all the commandments on each. Glue one on each tablet. Use these during the lesson to show what God commanded.

TEN COMMANDMENTS IN TWO

The Ten Commandments can be summarized by two commands: 1) Love God (Matt 22:37) and 2) Love others (Matt 22:39). During the lesson, use the following hand motions to help the children learn how each one of the Ten Commandments fits into one of these two categories: Hands folded (like praying) for the first four commandments and hands stretched out away from sides for the last six commandments. Lead the children in these motions as each commandment is introduced. You may also test the children after the lesson by reciting a command and asking them to show you if the command refers to loving God or loving others by giving the correct hand motion.



APPLY

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

See Year 1 Craft Book, Book 1.

Materials: Craft sheets, black construction paper, tan and green cardstock, scissors, and glue.

Directions: Before class, print the template that has the two stone tablets onto tan cardstock and cut them out. Print the list of the Ten Commandments from the craft sheet onto green cardstock and cut them out. During class, have the students glue each command to the tablets as you discuss them. Then glue the tablets to the black construction paper.



*The Ten Commandments
See Year 1 Craft Book, Book 1*

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AGES 6–8



CLASSROOM COMMANDMENTS

Review the rules you have established for the classroom. Ask the children why we need rules such as these? Do the teachers want the children to obey the rules because they want the children's time in class to be miserable or because they love them and want everyone to get along? Ask the children who made the classroom rules? Were they given by the children or the teachers? Did the children get to vote on them? Explain that rules teach us about the person who gave them. We will learn more about this in today's lesson.

THE IMPOSSIBLE JUMP

Form a line with tape. Place a rope parallel to the tape line. Set the lines close enough together so that the children can easily jump across both lines. Then pull the rope back so far that no one can make it. Explain that this is what it is like to try to make it to heaven by perfectly obeying the Ten Commandments. It is impossible. The Ten Commandments are God's holy rules that show us our sinfulness. We are unable to obey them perfectly, and we need a savior. In today's lesson, we will learn about these rules.



LOVE GOD AND OTHERS

The Ten Commandments can be summed up in two commandments—loving God and loving others. All the rest of the laws in the Pentateuch fit under these two as well. As you teach through the each of the commandments, ask the children to tell you which ones show love directly for God and which ones show love for other people. After the lesson, test the children's knowledge by reading a command (out of order) and asking them if it shows love for God or love for other people.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS REVEAL SIN

The purpose of the Ten Commandments is to reveal sin. Read the following verses to the children: Romans 3:20; 7:7. Explain that the Ten Commandments are not like a set of steps that lead to heaven but are like a measuring tape that shows us that we could never reach heaven on our own.



TEN COMMANDMENTS NECKLACE

See Year 1 Craft Book, Book 1.

Materials: Craft sheet, multicolor cardstock, white yarn, beads, scissors, and a hole punch.

Directions: Print the Ten Commandment tablets from the craft sheet onto various colors of cardstock (or print it on white and have the children color them various colors in class). Have the children cut out the Ten Commandment tablets and punch holes in the black circles. Thread the yarn through the ten tablets in order with two colored beads in between each one. Tie the two ends of the yarn together to form a necklace.



*Ten Commandments Necklace
See Year 1 Craft Book, Book 1.*

AGES 9–11

**INTRODUCE****A LAND WITHOUT LAW**

In today's Bible lesson, God gives His people the first set of laws. He gave the Israelites these laws for their benefit, not to make their lives miserable. Laws protect our relationships with others. God's laws also protect our relationship with Him. Ask the children to name some laws (city, state, or national). Discuss how these laws protect our relationships with others. What would life be like without any laws or rules?

**TEN COMMANDMENTS
SOUND-OFF**

Write the Ten Commandments on the board. Give 10 children each a slip of paper with one of the Ten Commandments (without the number of the commandment). Have the child with the first commandment stand up and read it out loud. As soon as the first person is done, the person with the second commandment should stand up and read it out loud. Repeat this until all commandments have been read. Erase the board. Do this again and time the children, seeing how quickly they can recite the commandments. Record their time and allow another group of 10 children to try and beat their time (or have the original group try to beat their own time).

**ILLUSTRATE****THE HEART OF THE TEN
COMMANDMENTS**

The Ten Commandments cover more than just outward actions. The tenth commandment, which forbids coveting (Exod 20:17), prevented the Israelites from thinking of God's commands as merely addressing outward sinful actions. Use the following sword drills to show the children that God looks at the heart (1 Sam 16:7), and that sin starts with a person's thoughts and desires (Matt 15:19; Jas 1:13–15). Someone might not give in to murder, adultery, stealing, or lying, but even the desire that led to these crimes was prohibited.

**THE OUTWARD RIPPLE OF THE
TEN COMMANDMENTS**

The commandments have a logical order to them. They begin with God and gradually move outward to describe our relationships with other men, showing that a right relationship with God requires right relationships with others (1 John 4:20). Help the children picture this by dropping a rock into a bucket of still water and observing how the waves begin in the center and gradually move outwards. The commands governing our relationships with other men begin with our relationship with God and move out from there like the ripple of waves in water.

**APPLY****THE PURPOSE OF THE TEN
COMMANDMENTS**

Read the account of the Rich Young Ruler with the class (Matt 19:16–25). This passage reveals the purpose of the Ten Commandments—to reveal the sinfulness of man and the utter impossibility of keeping the law perfectly. The young man asked what he needed to do to obtain eternal life (19:16), but Jesus cited five of the commandments in order to teach the young man both the high standard of God and the absolute impossibility of obtaining salvation by his own effort (19:17–19). Jesus was not teaching salvation by law. He was using the law to show the young man that he was a sinner. However, the young man refused to acknowledge his sin and left Jesus without receiving eternal life (19:22). In contrast, the disciples asked Jesus the right question (19:25). They understood that man was powerless to do anything that merited eternal life. It is only by the power of God that men obtain eternal life.