

## Lesson 57

# God Gives the Ten Commandments

God gave the Israelites laws that showed them their need for a Savior.

# Overview

## Lesson Focus

God gave the Ten Commandments to teach the Israelites how they should relate to him and to each other. These laws would govern the Israelites and teach them how to live. Because no one can keep the Ten Commandments perfectly, they also show us our sin and need for a Savior—Jesus.

## Key Passages

Exodus 20:1–4, 20:7–8, 20:11–17; Galatians 3:24

## Objectives

Students will be able to:

- List the Ten Commandments.

- Describe what the Ten Commandments show us.

## Memory Verse

Exodus 20:1–3 And God spoke all these words, saying, “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me.”

## Prepare to Share

### Scriptural Background

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the key passages for this lesson along with this background.

Within three months of leaving Egypt, the Israelites came to Mount Sinai in the wilderness of the Sinai Peninsula. It was here that God called to Moses and declared his covenant to his people (Exodus 19:1–5).

The Israelites’ encounter with God here in the wilderness was a time of terror for them. The people were warned of the severe consequence for anyone who would touch the mountain (Exodus 19:12–13). God’s presence on the mountain was evident by dramatic, supernatural events: the thick cloud that accompanied him (Exodus 19:9), the thunder and lightning and the blast of a trumpet (Exodus 19:16), and the smoke and fire as the mountain quaked (Exodus 19:18). These events all caused the people to tremble with the fear of the Lord. They were content to allow Moses to serve as mediator and spokesperson, saying, “Do not let God speak to us, lest we die” (Exodus 20:19).

Amid this commotion, as God revealed his holiness and power, he delivered the Ten Commandments to the people (Exodus 20). God also gave other laws (Exodus 21–23), which Moses told the people and then wrote down (Exodus 24:3–4).

The Ten Commandments, given in the center of God's glory, are a revelation to all men that God demands perfection. The Ten Commandments may be grouped into two broad categories. The first four commands relate to man's relationship to God, and the next six commands relate to man's relationship to the community. These commands may be summed up by the commands to love the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself (see Deuteronomy 6:4–9; Leviticus 19:18; Mark 12:29–31).

God's moral law works to reveal to us that we fall desperately short of the standard that God demands because of his absolute holiness. But as sinners, we see our own ways as right (Proverbs 21:2). We attempt to justify our sin by claiming to be better than others. This thinking can lead only to death and destruction. Our own deeds will never make us righteous before a holy God—they are like a polluted garment (Isaiah 64:6), and we are condemned as lawbreakers. That is the bad news.

But once we realize that we are condemned by the law, our mouths are stopped, and we have no defense (Romans 3:19). The law then acts as a guardian, or teacher, to bring us to Christ (Galatians 3:24). We realize that we fall short of God's holy standard and are subject to the judgment and wrath of God. This realization drives us to Christ, the perfect Lamb of God, who took the punishment for sinners. That is the good news! God has provided a way of salvation through Christ (John 3:16). It is by grace through faith received as a gift from God—not by works—that we receive forgiveness for our sins and eternal life (Ephesians 2:8–9).

## Historical/Apologetics Background

Many wonder whether or not the Old Testament law applies to New Testament believers. The answer is yes and no; it depends on what one means by "the law." One way to think about the laws is to divide it into three basic categories:

**Moral laws:** The Ten Commandments reflect God's moral laws. They are applicable to all people throughout all time. According to Romans 2:15, they are written in the hearts of all people. An example is the sixth commandment, "You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13 and Genesis 4:8–13).

**Civil laws:** These laws were given to the Israelites for necessary civil function; they regulated the life of the nation of Israel. Exodus 21:33–34 provides a good example of a civil law.

**Ceremonial laws:** These laws were also for a certain group of people for a certain time. Often these had to do with particular religious ceremonies and sacrifices, such as rules for the Passover and other holidays (Leviticus 23).

Some people fail to differentiate between these laws and make the mistake of thinking a command for a certain person or group should be applied universally (e.g., trying to sacrifice a lamb today as a sin offering). The New Testament makes it clear that the civil and ceremonial laws have been removed. For example, we are no longer held to the Jewish dietary requirements (see Acts 10:9–16). Neither are we still commanded to circumcise (see 1 Corinthians 7:17–19).

While God may have different civil or ceremonial requirements for specific times and generations, his moral laws are based on his own nature and thus will never change. But the Ten Commandments go even deeper than we might imagine. When Jesus spoke to the people about the Law, he focused their attention on the heart of the matter. For example, Jesus referred to the sixth commandment “You shall not murder” and pointed out that the root sin behind murder is anger (Matthew 5:21–22; Leviticus 19:17). Similarly, the root problem of lust is behind the sin of adultery, whether it is committed in the mind or the body (Matthew 5:27–28; Exodus 20:17). Truly, all have sinned and fall short of God’s glory (Romans 3:23).

### Christ Fulfilled the Law

Jesus said, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Matthew 5:17). What did Jesus mean when he said he came to fulfill the Law? The combination of “the Law” with “the Prophets” would seem to indicate that Christ is referring to the whole Old Testament. “The Law” often refers to the Pentateuch—the first five books of the Bible, which were written by Moses—and “the Prophets” refers to the major and minor prophets of the Old Testament. The same would be true in Luke 24:44, when Jesus told his disciples, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”

So we see that Christ fulfilled the whole Old Testament. This manifests itself in several ways. In a general sense, it means Jesus fulfilled all of the prophecies concerning the first coming of the Messiah. The Gospels are filled with statements like “to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet,” “as it is written of him,” and “that the Scripture might be fulfilled” (see Matthew 13:35; Mark 14:21; Luke 18:31; John 17:12; and many others).

In a more specific sense, the fulfillment of the Law means that Christ completed the sacrificial system that was necessary because of sin. In the Old Testament, men lived under the condemnation of the Law. Sacrifices were needed to continually atone for their sins (see Leviticus 4:35, 5:10). However, since Jesus gave himself as the ultimate sacrifice, we are no longer condemned.

“And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified” (Hebrews 10:11–14).

What an awesome truth! God no longer requires continual sacrifices for sin because Jesus has already atoned for all of our sins. Our lives should now be lived to please God out of thankfulness to him for what he has already done.

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