

TEN COMMANDMENTS – THE TEXT

By God’s Spoken Voice

The Ten Commandments were first given when God **spoke them** to the children of Israel assembled before Mt. Sinai. (Exodus 19:16-25 and 20:1-22) It was an event that Moses announced to the people in advance, but which exceeded everyone’s expectation. On the morning of God’s special appearance, “...there were thunderings and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain; and the sound of the trumpet was very loud, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled.” (Exodus 19:16 NKJV) It was a wake-up call that no one could ignore! But that was only the beginning: “And Moses brought the people out of the camp **to meet with God**, and they stood at the foot of the mountain.” (Exodus 19:17 NKJV) They did not actually see God, for no one can do so and live. (Exodus 33:20 and John 1:18) Instead, the people met with God by witnessing supernatural evidences of His presence in the fire descending on Mt. Sinai with its smoke ascending from the fire and enveloping the mountain in smoke. (Exodus 19:18) If all of this was not enough to get the attention of the assembly, “The whole mountain quaked greatly.” (Exodus 19:18 NKJV) David would later refer to this quaking in Psalm 68:8 (NKJV) by saying: “...Sinai itself was moved at the presence of God, the God of Israel.”

It was an overwhelming experience much like that of a child viewing his first fireworks display. The frightening sound and the sky filled with light is often just too much for a child to endure. But in this situation, even Moses (who knew God better and more closely than anyone else at the time of this event) reacted in this way: “And so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, ‘I am exceedingly afraid and trembling.’” (Hebrews 12:21 NKJV) Nevertheless, “Moses **drew near** the thick darkness where God was.” (Exodus 20:21 NKJV) The people also trembled as Moses did, but “stood **afar off**” from the mountain and thus from God. (Exodus 20:18, 21 NKJV) The people wanted to **remain** a “safe distance” from God, as is evident in their frightened words to Moses: “Then they said to Moses, ‘You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die.’” (Exodus 20:19 NKJV) The peoples’ panic to distance themselves from God with a mediator between God and themselves is explained as follows in Deuteronomy 5:27, where Moses wrote of their fears at that time: “You go near and hear all that the Lord our God may say, and tell us all that the Lord our God says to you, and we will hear and do it.” (Deuteronomy 5:27 NKJV)

By God’s Own Handwriting

All of the foregoing is an attempt to capture the unique setting in which God first delivered His Ten Commandments to mankind by His own **spoken voice**. But God wanted no changes or omissions in His commandments during the centuries that have followed – alterations that could occur purposely or accidentally but would change or dilute the impact of His Law. Therefore, God wanted a written record of permanence that would leave absolutely no room for changing what He had previously spoken about the Ten Commandments. He chose that permanent record to be written on two stone tablets, written by His own finger. (Exodus 31:18 and 32:16) God called Moses to come up the mountain in order to give the completed tablets to Moses, who would use them to teach the people His Law and commandments. (Exodus 24:12)

While Moses was with God atop the cloud-covered Mt. Sinai, he “was on the mountain forty days and forty nights.” (Exodus 24:18 NKJV) During that entire time, Moses neither ate nor drank water and received from God a very detailed verbal description of how God wanted the tabernacle to be built and what its priesthood should wear while performing its duties as well as how the priesthood should be consecrated to perform those duties. (Exodus Chapters 25 through 30) God also gave to Moses the names of skilled craftsmen who would have God’s wisdom to do all the work necessary to make all of the furnishings for the tabernacle, the garments for the priesthood and the specially formulated anointing oil and incense. (Exodus, chapter 31)

Moses was suddenly interrupted by God speaking to him: “And the Lord said to Moses, “Go, get down! For your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves.” (Exodus 32:7 NKJV) The manner of their self-corruption was in making and worshipping a golden calf. They had already broken the first two commandments after hearing them via God’s **own voice** not long before.

Moses (and Joshua) descended the mountain as God had commanded and found the people of God with the golden calf and dancing lewdly. (Exodus 32:17-19) Moses was so angered by what he saw that he threw the stone tablets that God had given him onto the ground and broke them. (Exodus 32:19) A little later, God told Moses: “....Cut two tablets of stone like the first ones, and I will write on these tablets the words that were on the first tablets which you broke.” (Exodus 34:1 NKJV) God also told Moses to “....come up in the morning to Mount Sinai and present yourself to Me there on the top of the mountain.” (Exodus 34:2 NKJV)

After Moses descended to the camp from being with God a second time on Mt. Sinai, “Moses did not know that the skin on his face shone while he talked with Him (with God).” (Exodus 34:29 NKJV) When the people saw this, they were afraid to be near Moses until he called to them and talked to them. (Exodus 34:30-31) “Afterward all the children of Israel came near and he gave them as commandments all that the Lord had spoken with him on Mount Sinai.” (Exodus 34:32 NKJV)

Moses spent forty days and forty nights with God on Mt. Sinai a second time, eating nothing, nor drinking water both times. (Exodus 34:28) It is quite apparent that being in the presence of God and His glory for a total of eighty days in two segments of 40 days each with only a little time between segments caused a divine energy in Moses that provided life to him and a countenance that reflected God’s glory.

Their Message

This has been a brief but factual Biblical account of how the Ten Commandments were given to mankind through Moses and the children of Israel. Their message has been preserved intact since that time, although men have made many attempts to suppress their message. Those who do not believe in God do not generally like the Ten Commandments because their message reveals God’s definition of sin, bringing unwanted discomfort to the consciences and habitual life styles of unbelievers.

The Ten Commandments can be understood more readily by assigning them to appropriate categories:

Our Individual Responsibility to God

1st Commandment – You shall have no other gods before Me.

2nd Commandment – You shall not make or bow down to any image or idol.

3rd Commandment – You shall not use the name of the Lord your God in vain.

4th commandment – Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy.

Our Individual Responsibility to Our Parents

5th Commandment – Honor your father and your mother.

Our Individual Responsibility to All Others

6th Commandment – You shall not murder.

7th Commandment – You shall not commit adultery.

8th Commandment – You shall not steal.

9th Commandment – You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

10th Commandment – You shall not covet anything belonging to your neighbor.

The complete Ten Commandments are listed twice in Scripture, in Exodus 20:3-17 and Deuteronomy 5:7-21. In addition, there are many Scriptures that have a direct relationship to one of the various Ten Commandments. These Scriptures are related to a commandment in such a way as to help explain that commandment in more detail. As an example, the 10th commandment, not to covet anything belonging to your neighbor, is explained in vivid detail by the account of the covetousness of a man named Achan – referred to in Joshua 7:1-26. A rich farmer was too covetous to share his bountiful crop but wanted it **all** for himself as recorded in Luke 12:13-21. The 6th commandment, not to murder, is redefined by Jesus in Matthew 5:21-22; and the 7th commandment, not to commit adultery, is also redefined by Jesus in Matthew 5:27-28, 31-32. Many other Scriptures and topics or sub-topics related to various commandments may be found in this web site under the title: “Ten Commandments – The Chart.” You will find at least 3 supplementary Scriptures pertaining to each commandment with the exception of the 8th commandment, which has only one related Scripture to date.

Finally, the message of the Law (the Ten Commandments in particular) is to **identify our sin**. But it is unable to bring us right standing with God: “For if there had been **a Law** given which could have given life, truly **righteousness would have been by the Law**.” (Galatians 3:21 NKJV) “But now the **righteousness of God apart from the Law** is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the prophets, even **the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ**, to all and on all who believe.” (Romans 3:21-22 NKJV) “But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the Law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore the Law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might **be justified by faith**.” (Galatians 3:23-24 NKJV) Despite our necessity for being justified by faith, we must be careful **not** to regard the Ten Commandments as null and void. They will continue to introduce multitudes to their sins and to their need to meet the demands and expectations of a holy God.

Their Present Location

God's instructions to Moses about overseeing the fabrication of the various tabernacle furnishings included a command to place the two tablets containing the Ten Commandments inside the Ark of the Covenant when it would be built later on. (Exodus 25:16) It is certain that Moses did as he was told because New Testament Scripture verifies "that the tablets of the covenant" were placed in the Ark along with two other items that were especially precious to God. (Hebrews 9:4 NKJV) The two tablets of the Ten Commandments were of great value to God because they represented the successful imposition of divine Law upon human kind.

But what happened to the Ark and its contents after all three items were placed in it? Many have searched for it – all unsuccessfully. Can it be found anywhere on earth? Scripture says "No." Revelation 11:19 (NKJV) tells us where it is: "Then the Temple of God was opened in heaven, and the Ark of His Covenant was seen in His Temple." So much for Harrison Ford and "The Raiders of the Lost Ark."