THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

**Lesson 1 - An Introduction**

**Exodus 20:1-17**

**Introduction**: *The Gifts of the Jews* (Doubleday 1998) was a *New York Times* best-seller book. In the book, author Thomas Cahill writes of the Ten Commandments and says the following:

“The Ten Commandments require no justification, nor can they be argued away. They are not dependent upon circumstances, nor may they be set aside because of special considerations. They are not propositions for debate. They are not suggestions. They are not even “ten challenges” (as a recent book would have us imagine in the jargon of our day). They are exactly what they seem to be – and there is no getting around them or out from under them. But the only thing new about them is their articulation at this moment amid the terrifying fires of Sinai. They have been received by billions as reasonable, necessary, even unalterable because they are written on human hearts and always have been. They were always there in the inner core of the human person – in the deep silence that each of us carries within. They needed only to be spoken aloud.”

It is incredible how people sometimes speak of the Ten Commandments. “I don’t want to go to church and hear a lot of ‘Thou shalts’ and ‘Thou shalt nots’!” There can be no question that the Ten Commandments reveal the sin nature in man, because the human heart, beset by pride and related sin, does not want to be told what to do and what not to do. The greatest criticism of the Ten Commandments is that they are (for the most part) given in the negative. But surely we can see that this very characteristic says more about human nature than it says about God.

It is certainly a simple matter to justify a series of lessons, sermons, articles, and books (or any means of communication) on the Ten Commandments. One need only observe our society (not to mention the whole world) to see the fruits of ignoring the plain commands of God and instead following an outgrowth of the godless religion of humanism: situation ethics. In the 1960’s, an Episcopal bishop, Bishop Pike of New York, published an article that explained seven cases where adultery would be justified. The concept sent shockwaves across the continent. Fifty years later, thanks to weak pulpits, overall rejection of God’s authority, the influence of Hollywood, and countless other factors, situation ethics is as common as Coca-Cola. And so it is throughout society with regard to the plain commands of God.

As believers, we must continually return to the Word of God, lest our thinking and conduct be shaped and molded by the world. (Romans 12:1-2) Our purpose will be to better understand the Ten Commandments**.** If I understand them, I will be in a better position to obey them.

**I.** **EXODUS 20:1-2 THEY ORIGINATE FROM THE LOVING HEART OF GOD**

(**Note:** V1 tells us these are the words that God spoke. Pay particular attention to His words in V2.)

## V2a I am the Lord (Jehovah).

### He identifies Himself as the Self-Existent and Self-Sufficient One.

### He is the God Who is!

1. He identified Himself to Moses as “I AM.”

#### This means that He is who and what He is, depending upon nothing and no one to be.

#### He does not need me to be God; nor does He need you, nor any of His creation.

#### He was I AM before there was a creation.

## V2a I am Jehovah THY God (Elohim).

### Don’t miss this term or phrase of affection and love: “I, Jehovah, am your God.”

1. “*God*” comes from Hebrew “*Elohim*”. Elohim means He is of the power to make and carry out or keep His covenants.
2. A study of Exodus 19 reveals that God and Israel have entered into an agreement; a covenant, the terms of which will be revealed beginning in chapter 20 with the Ten Commandments.

## (Note: Now remember, it was Jehovah who chose and called Abraham; gave him and Sarah a miracle baby when they were 100 and 90 years old, respectively; made a covenant with him; and reconfirmed it in Isaac his son and Jacob, Isaac’s son. Jehovah created this race or nation of people and told them, “I will be thy God.” Now He enters into a further agreement and declares, “I AM THY GOD!” Can you see it? He loves this His people. He chose them, saved them, preserved them, and has purpose for them! Malachi 1:2, “I have loved you, saith the Lord!”)

**II. EXODUS 20:2 THE NECESSITY OF THE COMMANDMENTS**

## V2b Be mindful of what is taking place in the account.

### The Jews are delivered from Egyptian slavery; Jehovah God has brought them out!

### Free from Egypt, they will now become an independent nation. They will no longer live under the laws of Pharaoh and Egypt.

### Now they are under a theocracy. God would speak and Israel need only follow the voice of God, as He spoke to and through Moses and Aaron.

### Three months into their “freedom”, however, they are murmuring and complaining.

## See 19:3-9 This nation could not survive as a “*lawless*” people. They were rebellious and stubborn people; God gave the *law* (Ten Commandments) as the terms of the covenant.

### Who cannot understand the necessity of law?

### No people can survive without some “Thou shalts” and “Thou shalt nots.”

# III. EXODUS 31:18 GOD WRITES IN STONE WITH HIS FINGER WHAT WAS ALREADY WRITTEN IN THEIR CONSCIENCE AND IN theiR HEART

## The “law” divides easily into two parts.

### “Here then is the code which may be said to be the foundation of all social ethics, and certain facts stand out about it even at first sight. This code falls quite clearly into two sections. The first section deals with God, and the second section deals with man. The lonely supremacy of God is laid down. The impossibility of expressing God in any material form is stated. The reckless use of the name of God in promises and pledges is forbidden. The rights of God’s day are safeguarded. The code then moves on to the human side. Father and mother are to be honoured and thus there is a rampart round the home. Human life is sacred. Sexual purity and fidelity are demanded. The rights of human property are conserved. False and slanderous speaking about others is condemned. The desire for that which is not ours and which is not for us is branded as wrong. It may be said that this code inculcates two basic things – it demands reverence for God and respect for man.” (William Barclay)

### In Matthew 22:34-40, Jesus makes this division abundantly clear.

## Understanding the term “law.”

### Much of the time in Scripture,” *law* “refers to the Ten Commandments alone; and the Ten Commandments are the law of God.

### There is, however, more to the law given by God to Moses, called the “*Law of Moses.*”

#### Civil Law – concerning government, settling of disputes, dealing with land transactions, criminals, etc.

#### Ceremonial Law – concerning offerings, sacrifices, holy days, etc.

### Sometimes the whole of the Old Testament is referred to as the law.

**Conclusion**: Author Thomas Watson reminds us that God spoke the Ten Commandments, *the* *moral law*. And if/since God spoke all these words, then…

we must **HEAR** all these words

* we must **ATTEND** to them with reverence;
* we must **REMEMBER** them;
* we must **BELIEVE** them;
* we must **LOVE** them;
* we must **TEACH** them to our child*r*en;
* we must **OBEY** them.