



10

The Ten Commandments

Key Themes

- God demands obedience and trust.
- God sees all men as sinners in need of salvation.

Key Passages

- Exodus 19:1–6, 19:16–20, 20:1–21, 24:3–8, 31:18;
Matthew 22:34–40; Galatians 3:21–26; Romans 3:19–26

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Describe what the Ten Commandments show us.
- Connect the use of the Law to proclaiming the gospel.



Lesson Overview



Come On In

Write on the board, “What is the connection between the Law and the gospel?”
Students will use bookmarks to mark Exodus 20:1, Galatians 3:21, and Romans 3:19 in their Bibles.



Studying God’s Word

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God gave the Ten Commandments to the Israelites at Mt. Sinai. These commandments show us God’s standard for righteous living. The Law was given to point us to the only one who did obey the Law perfectly—the only one who could make atonement for sins—Jesus Christ.

- Study the Prepare to Share section.
- Go Before the Throne.



Activity: Breaking the Law

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Students will examine the Ten Commandments in light of the behavior of the Israelites and their own lives.

- Print one Breaking the Law worksheet from the Resource DVD-ROM for each student. Keep the answer key for your use.



Prepare to Share

SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

As you prepare your heart to teach this week, read Exodus 19–20, 24, 34; Galatians 3:24; Romans 3:19–26.

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 thick cloud that accompanied Him (Exodus 19:9), the warning and severe consequence—even death—to anyone who touched the mountain (Exodus 19:12–13), the thunderings and lightnings, the cloud, the sound of the trumpet (Exodus 19:16), and the smoke and fire at the mountain as it quaked greatly (Exodus 19:18) all caused the people to tremble with the fear of the Lord. They were content to allow Moses to serve as mediator and spokesperson: “Let not God speak with us, lest we die” (Exodus 20:19).

Amidst all of this commotion, as God revealed His holiness, anger, and justice, He delivered the Ten Commandments to the people (Exodus 20). God also spoke the Ten Commandments and other laws to Moses (Exodus 24:3), and later they were written down and read to the people (Exodus 24:4), who affirmed them.

God then summoned Moses to the mountain—the first of two 40-day trips Moses was to make. Here Moses was confronted with the astounding glory of the Lord (Exodus 24:16–18). What an experience for Moses, communing with the Holy God and receiving instructions for the Tabernacle that would soon house the glory Moses was witnessing. At the culmination of this meeting Moses was given the two stone tablets of the Testimony, containing the Ten Commandments written with the finger of God (Exodus 31:18).

Moses returned from the mountaintop experience of God's glory to a devastating display of pagan idolatry. In 40 short days, the Israelites had

turned from the Creator God who had demonstrated His power so vividly to the worship of an idol in the form of a golden calf (Exodus 32:4).

Moses's anger was aroused at the sight, and he broke the precious tablets at the foot of the mountain (Exodus 32:19). This led to Moses's second 40-day encounter with God, where new tablets were made—inscribed with the Law of the Lord. Here we are presented with a testimony that reveals the mercy, grace, patience, goodness, truth, forgiveness, and faithfulness of God (Exodus 34:6–7).

What an account! God revealed His holiness, which terrified the people; His commandments, which displayed His moral will for them; and His amazing character, which gave them hope in the face of their sin.

We are reminded of all of these revelations as we read the book of Exodus. This Law, given in the center of God's glory, is a revelation to all men that God demands perfection. This Law reveals to us that we fall desperately short of the standard God must demand because of who He is. This Law acts as a tutor, a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ (Galatians 3:24).

As sinners we are set on proclaiming our own goodness (Proverbs 20:6). We attempt to justify our sin by claiming to be better than others. This thinking can only lead to death and destruction. Our own deeds will never make us righteous before a holy God—they are like filthy rags to Him (Isaiah 64:6). That is the bad news.

But there is 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).

APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND

Mount Sinai is mentioned several times in the Bible and given two different names. It is referred to as Mount Sinai and Mount Horeb, but its actual location is not known for sure. We certainly know it is a peak in the southern part of the Sinai Peninsula. Based on what

we know from Scripture and history, there are several places it could be. Some suggest it is at Jebel Musa. Although we aren't sure of the exact location, we know that it was the mountain where God's glory and holiness were revealed to Moses. We can be sure of this because we trust the historical record found in Exodus and the rest of the Bible.

Many deny the truth of the Bible because of the lack of "evidence" regarding the exact locations of biblical places and events. However, God has allowed us to make numerous archaeological discoveries that do confirm the history recorded in His Word. As Christians, we do not depend on "proof" but walk by faith in God. Because we know He is perfect, true, and faithful we know we can confidently trust the record He has given us.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Throughout history, mankind has been made righteous in the eyes of God by one means—Christ's atoning sacrifice (John 14:6). Many ask about the Old Testament saints. How could they have been saved? The answer is the same. They were saved through faith in Jesus Christ, but their faith wasn't the same as ours. Their faith was based on the future—knowing that the promised Messiah would come to redeem His people.

As early as the Garden of Eden, when sin first entered the world, God promised freedom from the Curse through the seed that was to come from the woman (Genesis 3:15). Jesus Christ is that seed, the promised Messiah. In speaking of the Old Testament saints, the author of Hebrews explains, "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (Hebrews 11:13). These saints had hope in what was to come. They looked to the future for their salvation while we look to the past to find ours.

We know that Christ has accomplished His finished work on the Cross to give us our hope of sal-

vation. Unfortunately, people throughout history have looked to their own works in the hopes of pleasing the gods and meriting life after death. From the Garden of Eden, to the pagan cultures that were flourishing across the globe at the time of the Exodus, to the works-righteousness religious systems of today, man has tried to get himself into heaven. Proud man is convinced that he can work his way to God, and he believes that his works are good, pure, and worthy enough to reach and satisfy the eternal, holy, omniscient Creator of the universe. But that is not the case according to God's Word. The truth is that it is only through Jesus Christ that we can be saved and declared the children of God (John 1:12).

For more information on this topic, see the Online Resource Page.



BEFORE THE THRONE

Dear Lord, as I begin to prepare this lesson, I am reminded of the wonder of the gospel. I thank you for your Law. I thank you that in your wisdom you knew that showing me the Law—your standard for excellence—would reveal how sinful my heart really is. And that would drive me to discover the wonder of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on my behalf. Help me this week, Lord, to teach these truths clearly to my students. And please open their hearts to see that you are a God to be feared—one who must punish all sin. But you are also gracious and merciful. And because of that you made a way of salvation through Jesus Christ—the only one who could obey all the Law perfectly—the one who was willing to die to take the punishment of the sin of those who would turn to Him in repentance and faith. Open their hearts, Lord, to this truth and bring them to everlasting life in you.

► **Pace your lesson!** You can use the provided clocks to indicate the time each section should be completed to keep the lesson on schedule. While teaching, you can compare your anticipated times with the actual time and shorten or drop sections as necessary.



Review

Last time we learned about the Exodus—when God led the Israelites out of their bondage to the Egyptians.

? What attribute of God was displayed constantly during the Exodus? *Faithful.*

God had promised to send Abraham's descendants into slavery and then to free them. After 400 years, He had shown Himself to be faithful to His promises.

Despite the constant provision of food and water, the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron for leading them out of their pleasant conditions in Egypt. They fondly remembered how they ate all the meat and bread they

wanted, but they forgot their beatings, the murder of their children, and their forced labor. It is amazing how quickly they slid into an attitude of complaining about their circumstances—they focused on themselves rather than on God and His attributes.

Sadly, we can see that same attitude in our own lives. God gives us every breath and every heartbeat and we get caught up in our circumstances and complain against about traffic and slow Internet connections. We fall into the same pit the Israelites did when we fail to recognize that God is faithful to fulfill His promises.



► Write on the board, "What is the connection between the Law and the gospel?"

► Students should turn to page 73 in their Student Guides.



Studying God's Word

READ THE WORD

We are going to look at Exodus 19 and go through the basic timeline of the arrival of the children of Israel at Mount Sinai. If you have ever watched movies portraying these events, this section of Scripture might sound funny. But we have to keep the Bible as our authority . . . even above Hollywood (*meant in jest*). I am going to ask several of you to read small sections and I will describe the information between the passages. This will give us a quick flyover of the events.

Let us remember, as we read Exodus 19:1–6, that the Israelites left Egypt on the tenth day of the first month. *Have someone read the passage.*

(*Summarize 19:7–15.*) In verses 7–9, Moses comes back from the mountain and reports God's words to the elders. They agree and Moses returns to the mountain with the affirmation and in verses 10–13 God commands that any creature that touches the mountain should be put to death. God tells Moses to consecrate the people for three days in preparation of hearing from God.

Let's have someone read 19:16–20 where we find out what happened after the three days of consecration. *Assign a reader.*

Exodus 19:1–6

Exodus 19:16–20

In the remainder of the chapter, God sent Moses back down the mountain to warn the people again about approaching the mountain. At this point God spoke to the people and delivered what is known as the Ten Commandments directly to the people.

Most of chapter 20 is the delivery of the Ten Commandments, and we will get back to that section after we finish our overview. Will someone please read Exodus 20:18–21? *Assign a reader.*

Exodus 20:18–21

After this, Moses again returned to the mountain and God delivered to him the civil laws recorded from Exodus 21:22 clear to Chapter 24. Look at Chapter 24 and I will read verses 3 through 8. *Read the passage.*

Exodus 24:3–8

So Moses recorded all of the things God had told him on the mountain, explained them to the people, offered a sacrifice, and affirmed the covenant with the Israelites by sprinkling them with the blood from the sacrifices. After this, Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and 70 elders went part way up the mountain, where they saw God in a limited revelation and ate the covenant meal in His presence.

After this, God called Moses back to the mountain and told him he would be given tablets of stone with the Commandments and Law. This was the first 40-day stay on the mountain for Moses. While he was there, he received all of the instructions for building the Tabernacle. Chapters 25 through 31 describe these details, but we'll have to wait for next week to look at those more closely.

? Who knows what happens next? *The Israelites built the calf and worshipped it.*

At this point God delivered the tablets to Moses. Will someone please read Exodus 31:18. *Assign a reader.*

Exodus 31:18

God told Moses to go back down to the people and He threatens to consume them. Moses interceded on their behalf and God relented from His plan to kill them. As Moses came to the camp he broke the tablets in anger. Moses met with God in his tent and later went back to the mountain for the second of his 40-day stays on the mountain. He returned to the camp with the two new tablets, which were later placed in the Ark of the Covenant.

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

? How much time had passed between the Exodus and the receiving of the Law? *They left on the 14th of the first month and arrived at the mountain in the third month (19:1). The date of the delivery of the Law in Exodus 20 is placed 50 days after the Passover and is known as Pentecost in the New Testament.*

? Where did all of these events take place? *Near a mountain named Sinai (also called Horeb) in the Sinai Peninsula. The exact location and identity of this mountain are not clear, though there are several likely candidates.*

- ? **What misconceptions did you recognize as false as we went through this overview?** *Discuss student answers. It is likely that movies like The Ten Commandments (old and new), Prince of Egypt, and others have distorted their understanding of the actual history.*
- ? **When the Israelites were worshipping the golden calf as the god that delivered them from Egypt, did they know it was wrong to worship an idol?** *Absolutely! Not only had they just received the Ten Commandments directly from God, but idol worship in Egypt was condemned by God.*
- ? **In what forms did God reveal Himself to the Israelites?** *As a pillar of cloud and fire, through the stormy cloud that covered the mountain, speaking directly to the people, and through the words and writings of Moses.*

Discover the Truth

God had led the Children out of their bondage in Egypt to the base of Mount Sinai. There He delivered the ordinances for the nation of Israel—and the people affirmed their obedience to God. As we saw before, it wasn't long until the people were in rebellion against God and worshipping a golden calf. The sad thing is they knew better.



Breaking the Law

MATERIALS

- Breaking the Law worksheet for each student
- Breaking the Law answer key

INSTRUCTIONS

Have the students read the Ten Commandments from Exodus 20 and complete the worksheet.

- ? **How many of you can name all of the Ten Commandments?**

The Israelites had heard God's commands and a matter of days later . . . well, I'll let you find out what happened. Use this worksheet to think about each of the commandments in Exodus 20. Read over the section and then think about what we have seen with the Israelites from the return of Moses to Egypt up to the second set of tablets (chapter 34). Record how they broke

the commands and we will discuss them in a few minutes.

CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

- ? **What are the commands that the Israelites had not broken?** *There is no mention of stealing or murder and no direct reference to violating a Sabbath. Whether or not they had been adulterous depends on our understanding of the phrase "rose up to play."*

It is interesting that all of the commands except coveting carried the death penalty in certain circumstances as explained in the later writings of Moses. God was not giving a set of suggestions, but a framework of holiness. God's perfect and holy character was the standard they were to meet.

Was it possible for the Israelites to obey the Law? *No, they all had a sin nature inherited from Adam and could not help sinning.*



READ THE WORD

If we think about the Ten Commandments, the first four are directed at honoring God and the last six are directed at honoring others. There is a vertical and a horizontal set of commands.

As we've seen, it was impossible for the Israelites to keep the Ten Commandments. What about us? Can any of us keep them? *Allow discussion.*

Let's quickly look at each of the Commandments to see.

Exodus 20:1–17

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

- ? What is God telling us in the first command? Exodus 20:1–3. *Do not have any other gods. Do not make anything more important than Him. Do not worship anything but Him.*

If anything is more important to us than God, we have broken this commandment.

- ? What about the second command? Exodus 20:4–6. *We should not make any idol. We should not bow down or pray to statues.*

Idols are not just statues. Anything we worship or value more than God—money, sports, people, or anything else—is an idol.

- ? And the third? Exodus 20:7 *Be careful how we use God's name.*

We aren't to use His name as an exclamation or like a swear word, but rather say His name with love and respect.

- ? And the fourth commandment? Exodus 20:8–11. *We are to make time each week to worship and honor God.*

Each of these first four commandments tells us something about how we are to relate to and honor God. If we're honest, we've all broken each of these, at least from time to time. The rest of the commandments give instructions on how to treat other people.

- ? I'm sure your parents have reminded you of the fifth commandment. What is that commandment? Exodus 20:12. *Honor your mother and father.*

I'm certain that all of us have broken this one!

- ? What about this sixth commandment? Exodus 20:13. *You shall not murder.*

You may feel like you are home free on this one because you haven't murdered anyone. But what this commandment tells us is that God places a very high value on human life. In fact, Jesus said that if we are even angry with another person—we are guilty of breaking this commandment.

- ? And what of the seventh commandment? Genesis 20:14. *You shall not commit adultery.*

This command tells us that once we are married, we must stay married. Husbands and wives must love each other—and only each other—for the rest of their lives. God thinks marriage is very important.

- ? What about the eighth commandment? Genesis 20:15? *You shall not steal.*
- ? Can any of us honestly say we've never stolen anything? *No.*
- ? Can anyone explain what the ninth commandment means? Genesis 20:16. *"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." Not to lie about anyone; to tell the truth.*

None of us can say we've never lied. If we do, we'd be lying!

The tenth commandment is about possessions. We all have things we would like to have, but when we want them really badly or think we need them to make us happy, then we are coveting. We all covet from time to time.

Discover the Truth

After looking at the commandments more closely, can anyone honestly say they've kept all ten all the time? *No.*

Matthew 22:34–40

Let's move to the New Testament now. Look at Matthew 22:34–40. Would someone read that for me, please? *Assign a reader.*

- ? When Jesus was asked which of the commands was the greatest, how did He respond? *He said to love God with your whole being was the first, and the second was to love others as you love yourself.*

So Jesus affirms the idea that there is a vertical and a horizontal component to the commands. In essence, all of the commands of Scripture are summed up in perfectly loving God and others—that's all there is to being righteous in God's eyes.



READ THE WORD

Our last idea for the day is to understand the function of the Ten Commandments for us today. We are going to look at two passages to help us.

Galatians 3:21–26;
Romans 3:19–26

Let's read Galatians 3:21–26 and then Romans 3:19–26 together to understand the role of the Law under the New Covenant. *Have someone read the passages aloud.*

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

- ? According to Galatians 3:21, could the Law make someone righteous? *No, and this is clearly stated in Galatians 2:21.*

- ? In verses 23 and 24, what was the role of the Law before Christ came? *It was our guard and tutor to bring us to Christ so we would understand our need for a Savior.*
- ? What justifies us, or, makes us righteous in God’s eyes? *Faith.*
Keep your finger there and flip back to Romans 3.
- ? In verse 19, what is the function of the Law? *The Law is to stop the mouth and show people they are guilty according to God’s standard of righteousness.*

Verse 20 tells us another function of the Law. It gives knowledge of sin. In Romans 7:7, Paul says that he “would not have known sin except through the Law,” and then quotes Exodus 20:17 to demonstrate how he knew coveting was wrong.
- ? What does verse 20 confirm about righteousness and the Law? *No one will be justified by obeying the Law.*
- ? The Law cannot make someone righteous, but what can according to this passage? *Exercising faith in Jesus Christ and His sacrifice on the Cross by the grace of God.*
- ? What percentage of the world’s population has sinned? *100%—Jesus is the only exception.*
- ? How does Paul connect the Law to the gospel in these passages? *The Law shows us how sinful we are so that we will turn to Christ and receive His righteousness through faith.*

Discover the Truth

These passages make it clear that the Law was not put in place so that people could obey it perfectly and be made righteous. The Law shows us how far short of God’s standard we fall. It should make us call out to God for mercy when we realize how much we have sinned against God.

- ? If the Law was given to show us our sinful condition, can we present the good news of the gospel apart from the bad news of our failure to meet God’s standard? *No. Allow discussion.*

Jesus Christ is the only person to ever walk this planet while perfectly fulfilling the Law of God. He never stole anything; He perfectly loved God; He never looked at a woman with lust; and He never coveted what was not His. He lived a life pure in thought, word, and deed.

Just as Adam’s sin was credited to our accounts, when we look to Christ in faith, repenting of breaking God’s Law, He not only justifies us, declaring us not guilty, but He also credits the perfect obedience of Christ’s life to our account. What a glorious thought—that we lawbreakers can be seen as righteous because of what Jesus has done on our behalf!





Applying God's Word

WHAT YOU HEARD IN THE WORD

As we have looked at the account of the delivery of the Law, we have seen three basic ideas. First, we often have misconceptions about the text. These can come from movies or previous teaching we have heard, but we need to make every effort to examine the text carefully to understand what it really says.

Second, the Ten Commandments, and the rest of the laws given to Israel, were never intended to make them righteous. The Law was put in place to show how far short of God's standard of perfection we fall. Apart from the grace of God, we can never expect to obey God. We must remember that God is holy and just. Because every person has violated His holy Law, His justice demands payment, which is death and separation from God.

Finally, the Law shows us our need for a Savior. Because it shows us our sinfulness and cannot make us righteous, we must look to Christ to be justified. It is faith in Christ that allows us to be free from the consequences of our sin and seen as righteous in God's eyes. Because Jesus lived in perfect obedience, we can rest in His work on our behalf.

The Law should point us to Christ and to reliance on Him to fulfill all righteousness on our behalf. By His grace we will be transformed more into His image every day and be more and more obedient to God—loving Him with all of our being and others as ourselves.

GOD'S WORD IN THE REAL WORLD

- ? Many people claim that Israel borrowed a law code from the surrounding nations. Based on what we have learned today, how would you respond to a claim like this? *We must take them to the text and show them that God revealed these things directly to the Israelites and then gave Moses the details to record and relate to the rest of the people. We can support this with historical information, but we must look to Scripture as the authority on the topic.*

- ? **What have you learned about the influence that culture (e.g., movies, music, books) has on how we understand the historical accounts in Scripture?** *We must be careful not to let someone's interpretation of the events be the only source of information on a topic. There is a danger in condensing accounts, but it can be done in a way that is still faithful to the text, even if it leaves out a few details.*
- ? **How could you use the Ten Commandments as a way to occasionally examine your heart and confess your sins to God?** *You could read through the list, confessing your failure in each area and ask God for forgiveness as well as strength to put those sins to death.*
- ? **Why is it important for us to understand that obeying the Law can never make us righteous in God's eyes?** *Trying to keep a list of commands can become purely legalistic. It is not wrong to obey God's commands, but if we think that God loves us more or that we are holier because of the things we have done, we have missed the message of the gospel. It is only by Christ's merits, His perfect obedience, that we can claim any goodness in us. We can use the Law to expose sin and bring conviction, but we must wholly lean on Christ for our justification before a holy God.*
- ? **In the past, we have talked about sharing the gospel using a bad news/good news approach. How could you use the Ten Commandments, or other commands of God, to relate the bad news of sin in a person's life?** *The commandments help people understand how far short of God's standard of perfection they fall. Paul describes the Law as a tutor that shows us our need for a Savior.*
- ? **Rather than allowing us to compare ourselves to others, what does the Law force us to recognize?** *People tend to justify themselves by comparing themselves to people like Hitler or Osama bin Laden. The Law helps us point to the true standard—God's holiness. No one has ever been morally perfect except for Jesus. We can help people understand their need for God's grace by pointing them to the proper standard rather than a standard they have made up in their own minds.*



MEMORY VERSE

Exodus 20:1–5a 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 bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them."



GROUP PRAYER TIME

Be sure to pray with your class before you dismiss them.

- Praise God for His holiness and justice.
- Thank God for providing a remedy for our sinfulness.
- Ask God for boldness in proclaiming the gospel to others.

