

Exodus 20:1-21

God gives Israel the Ten Commandments

(The People's Bible, Exodus, white cover, pages 132-138; green cover, pages 119-126)

Look

Verse 1 *"And God spoke all these words."* The Ten Commandments are called "*words*." This is in distinction to the "*laws*," which follow in Exodus chapter 21. The words were a general summary of God's will, which the laws applied to specific problems and conditions in Israel. The two together form the Book of the Covenant (Exodus 24:3,7).

God also wrote the ten "*words*" on two tablets of stone (Exodus 31:18).

The numbering and arrangement of the Ten Commandments is not indicated. There are 11 "you shalls," and we know there are 10 commandments (Deuteronomy 4:13). Some churches divide them differently by making the first two "you shalls" into two commandments and combining the last two into one.

Verses 8-12 The Third and Fourth Commandments contain some elements of the laws God gave only to Israel. The Sabbath law was a ceremonial law. The promise that the Israelites would live long in the land if they kept the Fourth Commandment was also spoken to them, for they were the only ones who were promised the land. However, note Ephesians 6:3, where Paul quotes from Exodus chapter 20 and replaces "*in the land*" with "*on the earth*."

Discuss

1. In which of the commandments does God protect (1) our neighbor's property? (2) his institution of marriage? (3) our neighbor's life? (4) our neighbor's reputation? (5) God's holy name? (6) himself as the only true God?

Commandments 7, 6, 5, 8, 2, 1. Note that the Ninth and Tenth Commandments deal with sins of the heart. The Fourth Commandment is special. It refers to our relationship both with God and with our fellow human beings. God himself has established authorities over us, and they serve in his place.

2. What impression did all this have on the Israelites?

You might want to remind the class that the entire nation heard God speak the Ten Commandments. When the Israelites saw the signs and heard God's voice, they were afraid and asked that God not speak with them any longer. Note how Moses explains God's purpose in doing this. God wanted Israel to respect and honor him. Such respect and honor would inspire them to obey him.

Apply

3. Why is it vital even for New Testament Christians to have a healthy respect ("fear") for God?

Only when we realize that God is far above us and that he is holy and cannot live in company with sin or a sinner will we want to flee to his mediator, Jesus Christ, just as the Israelites fled to their mediator, Moses. Such contrition and faith instills in us the true fear of God.

God gave his ten "words" from Mount Sinai, telling the Israelites his will and impressing on them his power and holiness.