

# Exodus 20 - The Ten Commandments; The Mosaic Covenant

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(2) Covenant text (Ex 20:1—23:33)

## **Background to the Law**

Note Rom 2-7 and Matt 5-7. If you think that the 10 Commandments are tough, wait until the Lord Jesus explains them to you. Any misconception that you might think about them will be blown away when you realize what the Lord is saying. One of the several purposes of the Law is to show us God's righteousness. If it were possible for you and I to keep these laws, then Jesus Christ died in vain! We are seeing God's righteousness in order to understand the price He had to pay for us to be deemed righteous for us to be in His presence. This basis will help us understand why it took the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to make this possible.

## **Mosaic Covenant (Ex 20:1—Deut 28:68)**

The parties involved in this pact were God and Israel. The covenant was made with Israel and not merely with Moses acting as a representative of Israel. This is clearly brought out in Ex 19:3-8. The covenant was not made with the Gentiles or the Church, but with Israel only, a point also made in Deut 4:7-8; Ps 147:19-20; Mal 4:4. See [Covenant, Mosaic](#) and [8 Covenants of the Bible](#) for more details on the provisions of this conditional covenant.

The key provision of the Mosaic Covenant was the Law of Moses, which contained a total of 613 commandments. Involved in these provisions of the Law were blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. It was signed and sealed by the Shekinah Glory in Ex 24:1-11, but signed in such a way that rendered the covenant conditional. So in essence, there are 613 provisions of the covenant, too many to be individually listed here. Instead, seven observations will be made concerning the provisions of the Mosaic Covenant:

- The Totality of the Law - 613 specific commandments: 365 negative commandments; 248 positive commandments.
- The Blessings and Judgments of the Law - since this was a conditional covenant, there would be blessings for obedience and judgment for disobedience (Ex 15:26; 19:3-8).
- The Blood Sacrifice Added - the key element of the entire Mosaic Law was the blood sacrifice (Lev 17:11).
- The Diet Restrictions Imposed - it restricted some of the provisions of the Noahic Covenant.
- The Death Penalty Expanded - for the Jews, it added the death penalty for other sins (idolatry, adultery, etc.)
- The Sign of the Covenant - it reaffirmed the practice of circumcision (Lev 12:3), but not for the same reasons.
- The Token of the Covenant - the token or sign of the Mosaic Covenant was the Sabbath. Concerning the Sabbath, five specific observations can be made:
  - Being the token of the Mosaic Covenant, it was a sign between God and Israel
  - The Sabbath was not a Creation ordinance; it began only with Moses
  - The Sabbath was a day of rest, not a day of corporate worship
  - The Sabbath as the token or sign of the Mosaic Covenant is that it was intended only for Israel, not the Church
  - As a sign of the Mosaic Covenant, it is in force as long as the Mosaic Covenant is in force

### **Current Status of the Mosaic Covenant**

The Mosaic Covenant was the basis for the Dispensation of Law. It was the one Jewish covenant that was conditional and ultimately came to an end with the death of the Messiah (Rom 10:4; 2 Cor 3:3-11; Gal 3:19-29; Eph 2:11-18; Heb 7:11-12,18). Hence, the Mosaic Law is no longer in effect. Prophetically, it was already considered broken even before the

Messiah died to free the Jew from the penalty of the Law (Jer 31:32). The status of the Mosaic Covenant will be discussed on seven points.

## **Exodus 20**

(A) Decalogue (20:1-21)

(a) Preamble (20:1-2)

1 Then God spoke all these words, saying,

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1 And God spake all these words, saying,

**2 "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.**

2 "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

2 "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt—from the house of slavery.

2 I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

- The Israelites were to obey God on the basis of two things:

1. "...I am the LORD your God" - who He is
2. "...who brought you out of the land of Egypt" - what He had done for them

(b) Enumeration (20:3-17)

(i) No other gods (v3)

3 "You shall have no other gods before Me.

3 "You shall have no other gods before Me.

3 You are to have no other gods as a substitute for me.

3 Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

- An absolute. No other authority is to be regarded, He is the only appropriate object of worship.

— He was not just to be the first among several, since He is the only God

*The purpose of this commandment is that the Lord wills alone to be pre-eminent among his people, and to exercise complete authority over them. To effect this, he enjoins us to put far from us all impiety and superstition, which either diminish or obscure the glory of his divinity. For the same reason he commands us to worship and adore him with true and zealous godliness. The very simplicity of the words well-nigh expresses this. For we cannot*

*'have' God without at the same time embracing the things that are his. Therefore, in forbidding us to have strange gods, he means that we are not to transfer to another what belongs to him. [Calvin]*

(ii) No graven images (v4-6)

4 "You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath, or in the water under the earth.

4 "You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth.

4 "You are not to craft for yourselves an idol or anything resembling what is in the skies above, or on earth beneath, or in the water sources under the earth.

4 Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth:

- First commandment tells us Who to worship, the second commandment tells us how

— The first commandment forbids any association with other gods to those who belong to Yahweh; the second commandment and the two that follow set special dimensions of their relationship with Him

— Any likeness of God demeans Him and hinders, rather than advances, His worship

— By making an image to worship, people put themselves in a position of sovereignty over the thing represented by the image. God wanted His people to accept their place as the creatures of the Creator. Creating an image or idol reverses roles, making the creature (us) the creator, and the Creator the creature.

— We aren't to make images of God because He has already done so! We are His images and in His likeness. This is why God values people so much.

— The use of images would infringe on the freedom of Yahweh to manifest Himself when and how He sovereignly determined. By prohibiting the one means by which the gods of the people around Israel supposedly manifested themselves, Israel was protected from the assimilation of foreign religious values, and the prohibition of images played a significant role in the successful survival of Israel's religion.

— It seems clear that the prohibition of images both in practice and in its theological basis is but another example of the fundamentally different religious value-system that distinguished Israel from her ancient Near Eastern contemporaries.

5 You shall not worship them nor serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a **jealous God, inflicting the punishment of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations** of those who hate Me,

5 You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of

those who hate Me,

5 You are not to bow down to them in worship or serve them, because I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the guilt of parents on children, to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me,

5 Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me;

- "...jealous" - Yahweh's jealousy is a part of his holiness (Cf. 34:14) and is demanded by what He is. It is justified by the fact that it comes only upon those who, having promised to have no god but Him, have gone back on that promise.

- "...inflicting the punishment of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations" - this phrase is used by some to justify the doctrine of generational sin. Whatever sins are committed by the father/parents, the consequence/punishment for it is dealt to them, as well as their children, even to "the third and the fourth generations."

— However that is a misinterpretation of this passage (as well as 34:7; Num 14:18). What this verse (and 34:7; Num 14:18) emphasize is that the judgment for sin extends through multiple generations, not because of the father's/parent's sins, but because their descendants persist in committing the same sins.

— A good example of this is the sin, and resulting consequences, on the nation of Israel. When Israel rejected her Messiah in the 1st century, judgment was placed on them. That judgment includes the "partial blinding" of their eyes to spiritual things (Cf. Rom 11:25), subsequent dispersion (the *Diaspora*), and the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. However, Israel's continued judgment throughout history since that time, up through and including today, are not God's punishment for the sins of 1st century Israel, but rather punishment continued over the past 2000 years because Israel has continued in the same sin: rejection of their Messiah.

— In Ezek 18 God deals with generational sin, namely the idea that the descendants are punished for the sins of their forefathers. God is clear, speaking through Ezekiel to the exiled Israelites in Babylon, who believed they were being punished in exile for the sins of their forefathers, that punishing the sins of the descendants for the sins of the parents is outside of God's character.

6 but showing favor to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

6 but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

6 but showing gracious love to the thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

6 And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.

- ...however obedience to it would result in blessing for limitless generations

(iii) Lord's name in vain (v7)

**7** "You shall not **take the name of the LORD your God in vain**, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain.

**7** "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain.

**7** "You are not to misuse the name of the LORD your God, because the LORD will not leave unpunished the one who misuses his name.

**7** Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

- "...take the name of the LORD your God in vain" - means using the name of God in an empty, careless, profane, common manner

— The name of God represents the Person of God, thus Israel was to show respect for the Person of God by their use of His name

— It includes saying something false about God or using His name to curse others

(iv) Sabbath (v8-11)

**8** "**Remember** the **Sabbath day**, to keep it holy.

**8** "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.

**8** "Remember the Sabbath day, maintaining its holiness.

**8** Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.

- "Remember" - not only to recall it from memory but to act appropriately in view of the significance of the day

- "...Sabbath day" - Saturday, the 7th day of the week

— The day was to be a day of rest for the Israelites because God ceased from His creation activity on the 7th day (v11; Gen 2:3)

— If the miracle of creation was not finished within six literal 24-hour days, there is no foundation for keeping the fourth commandment

**9** For six days you shall labor and do all your work,

**9** Six days you shall labor and do all your work,

**9** Six days you are to labor and do all your work,

**9** Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work:

**10** but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the LORD your God; *on it* you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male slave or your female slave, or your cattle, or your resident who stays with you.

10 but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; *in it* you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you.

10 but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. You are not to do any work—neither you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your livestock, nor any foreigner who lives among you—

10 But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates:

- Who must observe the Sabbath day? the husband, the children, all slaves, cattle and visitors/guests

— What about the wife? The wife is not mentioned because she is one with her husband.

11 **For** in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and everything that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day; for that reason the LORD **blessed** the Sabbath day and **made it holy**.

11 For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy.

11 because the LORD made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything that is in them in six days. Then he rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

11 For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.

- "For" - because; God rested on the 7th Day, not because He was tired, but because He was setting up a pattern, an example, for mankind to pattern their lives after

- "...blessed...made it holy" - God blessed the Sabbath in that He made it special and different from the other days of the week for Israel

(v) Honor father and mother (v12)

**12 "Honor your father and your mother**, so that **your days may be prolonged** on the land which the LORD your God gives you.

**12 "Honor your father and your mother**, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you.

12 "Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

12 Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.

- "Honor your father and your mother" - all Israelites were to honor their parents because parents are God's representatives to their children in God's administrative order of society
- The application is that we should look up to and respect (honor) those whom God has placed over us, treating them with honor (21:17; Lev 20:9; Prov 20:20), obedience (Deut 21:18-21; Eph 6:1-3; Col 3:20), and gratefulness (Matt 15:4-6)
- It follows from this that we are forbidden to detract from their dignity either by contempt, by stubbornness, or ungratefulness
- "...your days may be prolonged" - this commandment has a specific promise attached to it
- This is not a personal promise, but a promised blessing for a people to possess a land under God's rule
- Paul repeated this responsibility as binding on the church in Eph 6:1-3, but changed "Honor" to "obey"; he changed the promise as well (Cf. Matt 15:3-4; Col 3:20)

(vi) Murder (v13)

- 13** "You shall not **murder**."
- 13** "You shall not murder."
- 13 "You are not to commit murder."
- 13 Thou shalt not kill.
- "...murder" - *rāsah*, refers specifically to murder, not simply killing
- God did not forbid all killing...He commanded capital punishment (Gen 9:5-6) and some war

(vii) Adultery (v14)

- 14** "You shall not commit **adultery**."
- 14** "You shall not commit adultery."
- 14 "You are not to commit adultery."
- 14 Thou shalt not commit adultery.
- "...adultery" - sex when one or both partners are married (or engaged, under Israelite law, Cf. Deut 22:23-29) to someone else
- Adultery destroys marriage and the home, the foundations of society (Matt 5:27-28; 1 Cor 6:9-20)
- Adultery is an act, not a state; people commit adultery, they do not "live" adultery except in the sense that they may continually practice it

(viii) Theft (v15)

- 15** "You shall not steal."
- 15** "You shall not steal."

15 "You are not to steal.

15 Thou shalt not steal.

- This law encompasses all that would be regarded as stealing: robbery, embezzlement, defrauding et al

— This commandment also makes it clear that God endorses private ownership of goods and land (2 Cor 8:21)

— Have you considered that you can steal someone's...time? reputation? good name?

— With this commandment, we also must consider that what every man possesses has not come to him by chance, but by the distribution of the Lord. For this reason we cannot deprive anyone of his possessions without fraudulently disregarding God's provision for them.

#### (ix) Bear false witness (v16)

**16** "You shall not **give false testimony** against your neighbor.

**16** "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

16 "You are not to give false testimony against your neighbor.

16 Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.

- "...give false testimony" - includes passing on a story about someone else without checking it out? Hearsay evidence?

— Note that this commandment is not dealing with lying, but with false witness

— This includes if you stand by while another is being slandered

— It also includes misrepresenting or shading the truth to your advantage

— Has your silence ever left anyone with the wrong impression?

#### (x) Covetousness (v17)

**17** "You shall not **covet** your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male slave, or his female slave, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

**17** "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

17 "You are not to desire your neighbor's house, nor your neighbor's wife, his male or female servant, his ox, his donkey, nor anything else that pertains to your neighbor."

17 Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's.

- "...covet" - an obsessive desire to have what belongs to another

— Coveting is a root attitude of the heart, from which spring many sins in word and deed against a neighbor (Cf. Eph 5:3)

— No system of law has ever had a statute on the books that deals with intent. There is no way to enforce this commandment. This one is strictly in the heart (Luke 12:15); one exception (1 Cor 12:31).

(c) Fearful reaction (20:18-21)

**18** And all the people were watching *and hearing* the thunder and the lightning flashes, and the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw *it all*, they trembled and stood at a distance.

**18** All the people perceived the thunder and the lightning flashes and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw *it*, they trembled and stood at a distance.

**18** All the people experienced the thunder and lightning, the sound of the ram's horn, and the smoking mountain. And as the people experienced it, they trembled and stood at a distance.

**18** And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off.

19 Then they said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but do not have God speak to us, or we will die!"

19 Then they said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, or we will die."

19 They told Moses, "You speak to us and we will listen, but don't let God speak with us, or we may die.

19 And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die.

20 However, Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid; for God has come in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may remain with you, so that you will not sin."

20 Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid; for God has come in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may remain with you, so that you may not sin."

20 Moses told the people, "Don't be afraid, for God has come to test you, so that you may fear him in order that you don't sin."

**20** And Moses said unto the people, Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not.

21 So **the people stood at a distance**, while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was.

21 So the people stood at a distance, while Moses approached the thick cloud where God was.

21 Then the people stood at a distance, and Moses approached the thick cloud where God was.

21 And the people stood afar off, and Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was.

- "...the people stood at a distance" - we can see the basis being laid within the narrative for the need of the tabernacle (Ex 25—31). The people who are 'afar off' must be brought near to God.

### **Decalogue vs Book of the Covenant**

#### **Decalogue (20:1-21)**

Covenant text

Foundation

Shorter

General

Apodictic

#### **Book of the Covenant (Ex 20:22—23:33)**

Book of the Covenant

Applies to all areas of life

Longer

Specific

Casuistic

### **Book of the Covenant Applies to All Areas of Life**

- Idolatry (20:22-26)
- Slavery (21:1-11)
- Bodily injuries (21:12-36)
- Property rights (22:1-17)
- Moral and civil obligations (22:18—23:9)
- Sabbath and feasts (23:10-19)
- Impending conquests (23:20-33)

(B) Book of the covenant supplementing the Decalogue (Ex 20:22—23:33)

(a) Laws involving idolatry (20:22-26)

**22** Then the LORD said to Moses, "This is what you shall say to the sons of Israel: 'You yourselves have seen that I have spoken to you from heaven.'

**22** Then the LORD said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'You yourselves have seen that I have spoken to you from heaven.'

**22** The LORD told Moses, "This is what you are to say to the Israelis, 'You have seen for yourselves that I spoke to you from heaven.'

**22** And the LORD said unto Moses, Thus thou shalt say unto the children of Israel, Ye have seen that I have talked with you from heaven.

23 You shall not make *other gods* besides Me; gods of silver or gods of gold, you shall not make for yourselves.

23 You shall not make *other gods* besides Me; gods of silver or gods of gold, you shall not make for yourselves.

23 You are not to make gods of silver alongside me, nor are you to make for yourselves gods of gold.

23 Ye shall not make with me gods of silver, neither shall ye make unto you gods of gold.

24 You shall make an altar of earth for Me, and you shall sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen; in every place where I cause My name to be remembered, I will come to you and bless you.

24 You shall make an altar of earth for Me, and you shall sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen; in every place where I cause My name to be remembered, I will come to you and bless you.

24 You are to make an altar of earth for me, and you are to sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and peace offerings, your sheep, and your cattle. Everywhere I cause my name to be remembered, I'll come to you and bless you.

24 An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings, and thy peace offerings, thy sheep, and thine oxen: in all places where I record my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee.

- God did not just condemn forms of worship that were inappropriate, but He instructed the Israelites positively on how they were to worship Him

- Yahweh permitted His people to build commemorative worship altars at the locations where He granted special theophanies, that is, manifestations of His presence. These were in addition to the altars at Israel's central sanctuary (the tabernacle and later the temple (Cf. Judges 6:25-27; 13:15-20; 1 Sam 9:11-14; 16:1-5; 1 Kings 18:30-40).

— They were to build these special altars—both for formal worship and for special occasions (Cf. Joshua 8:30; Judges 6:25-26)—out of earth or uncut stone

— The Canaanites used cut or dressed stones for their altars, and it was probably to distinguish the two that God directed Israel as He did

25 And if you make an altar of stone for Me, you shall not build it of cut stones, for if you wield your chisel on it, you will profane it.

25 If you make an altar of stone for Me, you shall not build it of cut stones, for if you wield your tool on it, you will profane it.

25 If you make an altar of stone for me, you must not build it of cut stones, because if you strike it with your chisel, you will profane it.

25 And if thou wilt make me an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stone: for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it.

- "Hewn stone" - not to use "dressed" stones (not to be shaped nor fitted), they are to use raw stone.

- While stone craftsmen's work is to be admired (just look at the stones used for the Temple Mount), God does not want man polluting His altar

- The stones are to be natural, not to be marred by man's works. The altar is a place of faith, not works (i.e. Cain and Abel).

- Jesus is described as a "stone not cut with hands" (Dan 2:34-35)

26 And you shall not go up by steps to My altar, so that your nakedness will not be exposed on it.'

26 And you shall not go up by steps to My altar, so that your nakedness will not be exposed on it.'

26 You are not to ascend to my altar on steps, so that your nakedness may not be exposed on it.'"

26 Neither shalt thou go up by steps unto mine altar, that thy nakedness be not discovered thereon.

- Israel's altars were not to have steps, as many Canaanite altars did, so that the naked flesh of the priests would not be exposed as they mounted them to make their offerings

— One interpretation is that later on God allowed altars with steps to be built (Lev 9:22; Ezek 43:13-17), and the priests were instructed to wear linen undergarments (Ex 28:40-42; Ezek 44:18)