

## Ten Commandments, Overview

A set of rules, commandments (must obeys), guidelines or suggestions, what are they, and why a study of the 'ten words'.

There is one thing which is clear in the world around us, that there is such ignorance (even amongst some Christians) about the Ten Commandments, yet at the same time, such an interest. A survey of over a thousand 15-35 year olds could not name more than two, and they were not too happy about some of the others when told of them. Despite this, there is an ever increasing interest to know more about them.

Whatever our view, to maintain order as a civilised society we must adhere to certain standards, rules or laws. We currently have about 33 million laws on our statute books, yet none of them can improve on the ten given by God.

When we look throughout history, we can see examples of law and order, such as the now well known code of Hammurabi, and others such as Sumerian, Babylonian, Assyrian, Hittite and Canaanite codes. The Code of Eshnunna dates back about five centuries earlier than the section of the Mosaid legislation commonly known as the Book of the Covenant (Ex. 20:23-23:19)

A number of documents from Babylonia, called Law Codes, have been recovered and these contain parallels with biblical and modern law. The documents in question are:

The Laws of Urukagina (Sumerian, 2350 BC),  
The Laws of Ur-Nammu (Sumerian, 2112-2095 BC),  
The Laws of Lipit-Ishtar (Sumerian 1934-1924 BC),  
The Laws of Eshnunna (Babylonian, 1900 BC),  
The Code of Hammurabi (Babylonian, 1792-1750 BC).  
The Hittite laws, (listing 200 laws) Hittite Empire (circa. 1650–1100 BCE).  
The laws of God (Mosaic, circa 1450 BC).

The ten laws given by God as guidelines for practical, fruitful, daily living, are part of a covenant between God and His people (Ex. 34:28; Deut. 4:13; 10:4). They are often called the *Decalogue*, from the Greek word which means "ten words." Jesus upheld them, calling them the "commandments" and listing five of them for the rich young ruler (Matt. 19:16-22). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus showed that His coming

had not cancelled the Commandments. He specifically mentions the laws against killing (Matt. 5:21) and committing adultery (Matt. 5:27), and He affirmed the law by declaring; "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill" (Matt. 5:17-19).

We were created for relationship with a) God and b) one another. The Ten Commandments are divided in this way. The first four address our relationship with God, commandments five to nine deal with our relationship with others, whilst the last deals with our inner thoughts.

I have chosen to start at number ten and work towards the first, because number ten fits nicely after the Christmas period, and so we can work our way towards the enormity of number one. We will round up with a look at the New Covenant for our final study in this series, before we break for the summer. Hence the title 'Ten to the Power of Two'. We cannot do justice to these even by studying one each group meeting, but can at least try to understand more of Gods' intention for us.

The Ten Commandments are not 'p.c.' they are absolute, not obsolete. Yet we have got rid of them in the name of freedom for a modern age, and created a vacuum of moral decline. We have replaced them with sets of suggestions and guides, with a choice to follow and adhere if we are so inclined. St. Augustine paraphrased Christian law as 'Love God, and do what you like'. Today's maxim appears to be simply 'do what you like', and we have become enslaved in its very freedom.

As you study these laws, consider them in their wider context, not as specific rules to obey, but a framework, a universal foundation, a series of principles to keep within. This is how God intended them so as to embrace all future generations in their application. Tents may now be 'semi's', the abacus a computer, the cart the latest fashion M.P.V. But we can see that human nature hasn't changed in the slightest over the last 4000 years. What remains the same is the reverence to God, and a respect for fellow man.

As with previous study notes, completing all the questions is not the aim, but to have a deeper understanding of what God is saying. Your route to this will be prayerful encouragement, and a closer walk with God.

*Shalom. Gareth*