

Exodus 20

The theme of the Bible is: the salvation of man through Jesus Christ to the glory of God. In order to bring Jesus into the world, God chose Israel to be the conduit. To that purpose, God called Israel out of Egypt to be His “special people, a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:5-6). The Law was designed to accomplish those goals and the “Ten Commandments” are the core of that Law. Those commandments are found in the first seventeen verses.

The phrase “Ten Commandments” is not found here, but it is found in three texts in the Bible: Exodus 34:28; Deut. 4:13; 10:4. In those passages, the word “commandments” is not found; rather, it is the Hebrew word: “words.” That idea gives the “Ten Commandments” another designation: Decalogue in the LXX (the Greek translation of the OT), which literally means “Ten Words.” The method of counting the Ten Commandments might vary from group to group, but there are “Ten Commandments” nevertheless. The commandments were written on two tablets of stone by the finger of God (31:18; 32:16; 34:1, 28; Deut. 5:22). We do not know how they were written on the two tablets: were all ten written on *each* tablet? were they divided five on one, five on the other? (The length of the tablets are not even.) were they divided with perhaps four on one and six on the other? We do not know. Finally, a copy of the law was saved in the Ark of the Testimony (Exo. 25:16, 21; 40:20; Deut. 10:4-5).

TRANSLATION - 20:1-17:

1 God spoke all these words, saying, **2** “I [am] your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery.

3 “Let there not be to you other gods before My face.

4 “You must not make for yourself an image or any form which [is] in heaven above or which [is] on earth below or which [is] in the waters below the earth. **5** You will not worship them or serve them because I [am] Jehovah your God, a jealous God, visiting the wickedness of the fathers on the sons, on the third [generation] and on the fourth [generation] of those hating Me. **6** And doing loving loyalty to thousands to those loving Me and keeping My commandments.

7 “You must not lift up the name of Jehovah your God for vanity because Jehovah will not consider blameless who lifts up His name for vanity.

8 “Remember the Sabbath day to sanctify it. **9** Six days you will serve and you will do all your work. **10** The seventh day [will be] a Sabbath to Jehovah your God. You will not do any work - you and your son and your daughter and your servant and your maid and your animal and your stranger who [stays] in your dwelling. **11** Because six days Jehovah made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all which [are] in them and He rested the seventh day. Therefore Jehovah blessed the seventh day and sanctified it.

12 “Honor your father and your mother so that your days may be prolonged on the land which Jehovah your God is giving to you.

13 “You must not kill.

14 “You must not commit adultery.

15 “You must not steal.

16 “You must not answer against your neighbor a witness of falsehood.

17 “You must not covet the house of your neighbor; you must not covet the wife of your neighbor or his servant or his maid or his ox or his donkey or anything which [belongs] to your neighbor.”

HEBREW WORDS:

“House” (ver. 2) was used earlier at 1:1, 21. “Slavery” is more literally “slaves;” the plural here suggests intensity: “slavery.” The word was used earlier at 4:10. The phrase “house of slavery” was used earlier at 3:13-14. This is its last use in Exodus. It will be used a total of 11

times. "Image" (ver. 4) is used 31 times; only here in Exodus. "Form" is used 10 times, only here in Exodus. "To worship" (ver. 5) was used earlier at 4:31. "To serve" was used earlier at 1:13-14. "Jealous" is used infrequently, 6 times: Exo. 20:5; 34:14; Deut. 4:24; 5:9; 6:15. "To visit" was used earlier at 3:16; 4:31. "Wickedness" is used 233 times; in Exodus, at 20:5; 28:38, 43; 34:7, 9. It is seen in the village name "Beth-Haven," which means "House of wickedness." "To hate" was used earlier at 1:10; 18:21. "Loving loyalty" (ver. 6) was seen earlier at 15:13. This is the first use of the verb "to love" in the OT; it is used 217 times, only here in Exodus. "To keep" is used only here in Exodus, out of 469 times in the OT. "Commandments" was used earlier at 15:26; 16:28.

"To lift up" (ver. 7) was used earlier at 6:8; 10:13, 17, 19. "Name" was used earlier at 1:1, 15. "Vanity" is used 54 times. It will be used here in Exodus and at 23:1. "To consider blameless" is used 44 times; it also means "to be without guilt" or "to be innocent." The verb is used 44 times. In Exodus, it is used at 20:7; 21:19; 34:7. "To remember" (ver. 8) was used earlier at 2:24; 6:5. "Sabbath" was used earlier at 16:23, 25-26, 29. "To sanctify" was used earlier at 13:2; 19:10, 14, 22-23. "To serve" was used earlier at 1:13-14. "Work" was used earlier at 12:16. "Servant" (ver. 10) was used earlier at 4:10. "Maid" was used earlier at 2:5. "Animal" was used earlier at 8:13-14. "Stranger" was used earlier at 2:22; 12:19, 48-49. "To rest" (ver. 11) was used earlier at 10:14; 17:11. "To bless" was used earlier at 12:32. "To sanctify" or "to make holy" was used earlier at 13:2; 19:10, 14, 22-23.

"To honor" (ver. 12) was used earlier at 5:9; 8:11, 28. "To prolong" is used only here in Exodus. It is used 34 times in the OT. "To kill" (ver. 13) is used 47 times in the OT. This is its only use in Exodus. "To commit adultery" (ver. 14) is used only here in Exodus; it is used 31 times in the OT. "To steal" (ver. 15) is used 6 times in Exodus: 20:15; 21:16, 37; 22:6, 11. It is used 40 times in the OT. "To answer" (ver. 16) was used earlier at 4:1. "Neighbor" was used earlier at 2:13; 11:2. "Witness" is used 69 times in the OT; it is used in Exodus at 20:16; 22:12; 23:1. "Falsehood" was used earlier at 5:9. "To covet" (ver. 17) or, less strongly "to desire," is used here and 34:24 in Exodus. It is used 21 times in the OT. "Ox" is used extensively in Exodus, 24 times, out of 79 times in the OT. "Donkey" was used earlier at 4:20; 9:3.

HEBREW GRAMMAR:

The commands are in an emphatic form in the Hebrew language: „You will not“ or „You must not...”

REFERENCES (REFERIRI) AND ALLUSIONS TO GENESIS:

False gods were found in Genesis 31:30; 35:2. Ham did not honor his father (Gen. 9:18-27). Cain was a murderer (Gen. 4:10-12). Sodom was guilty of homosexuality (Gen. 19:24-25). Rachel was a thief (Gen. 31:19-32). Abraham was a liar on more than one occasion (Gen. 12; 20). Clearly humanity - at least those through whom Jesus would come - needed guidance!

ARCHAEOLOGY:

The law on the Sabbath (20.8-11) was unique among Ancient Near Eastern societies.

COMMENTARY:

The first two verses serve as an introduction to the Commandments. Verse 1 notes that these commandments come from Jehovah God. He is the authority behind the commandments. Verse 2 notes that God is "Jehovah your God," so that He has the interest in having a relationship with Israel (see 3:14-15) and the right to expect these behaviors from them. The expression "Lord your God" is found 447 times in the Bible, only 7 of which are found in the NT: Matt. 4:7, 10; 22:37; Mark 12:30; Luke 4:8, 12; 10:27. All of these are quotations from the OT. It is interesting to note that when Jesus decides to give the most important commandment or the second most important commandment, He does not quote any of the Ten. He quotes from Deuteronomy 6:5 (Matt. 22:37; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27) and Leviticus 19:18.

Jehovah God is the God who brought Israel out of Egypt, out of the “house of slavery.” At the beginning of this event, as Israel assembled at Mount Sinai (19:4), God reminded Israel that He is the One who brought them out of Egypt. The expression “house of slavery” is used 11 times in the OT; it was used earlier at 13:3, 14. The expression “out of the land of Egypt” is used 41 times in the OT. Due to His redemption of Israel (see Exo. 6:6; 13:13, 15; 15:13), He has the right to require obedience from Israel.

Command #1 - The first command is found in verse 3: “Let there not be to you other gods before My face.” The fundamental theology of the Israelite religion is monotheism (see Deut. 6:4): there is only one God and He alone deserves to be worshipped. This command relates to the first point: there is only one God. There is to be no other being in whom Israel places its highest trust and offers its deepest allegiance or devotion.

Command #2 (verses 4-6) — The second commandment relates to the second half of Deuteronomy 6:4-5: He alone deserves to be worshipped. The ten plagues on Egypt, as we have endeavored to show, revealed that no other “gods” can stand before Jehovah God. No other gods deserve service; no other gods deserve worship. Man is to make no image or any form of anything in God’s universe for the purpose of offering worship to it. That which is “in heaven above, or which [is] on earth below or which [is] in the waters below the earth” is comprehensive. Neither angels (Rev. 19:9-10) nor man (Acts 10:25-26) deserves worship.

Israel is not to worship any object, man, angel, animal, or inanimate object nor is he to serve them. The reason is stated in verse 5: Jehovah God is a jealous God. Jealousy is a result of pure love. God loves mankind, having created it in His image and after His likeness (Gen. 1:27-28). He designed mankind to receive salvation (1 Thess. 5:9). Hell was originally designed for Satan and his angels (Matt. 25:41). God does not want anyone to be condemned to hell with Satan because they reject His offer of salvation (1 Tim. 2:3-4; 2 Peter 3:9). God is jealous of His human creation because He wants His human creation in heaven with Him.

Another result of God’s love is that He punishes wickedness as a matter of discipline, either to discipline the individual who committed the wickedness or to discipline the community in which the wickedness was committed. Consequently, Jehovah God will “visit” or exact vengeance on a wicked man’s son *if* that son - to the third or fourth generation - is also guilty of the same wickedness. The Bible is also emphatic that God will not punish a man *for* his dad’s wickedness (Deut. 24:16; Eze. 18:20). Thus, the concept popularized by John Calvin that babies are born sinful and therefore need to be baptized is false. Observe this vengeance is poured out on those “hating Me” (ver. 5), which shows that God punishes the individual who actually commits the sin.

The counterpart of God’s justice is God’s “loving loyalty” (ver. 6), which God will show to “thousands” of those “loving Me and keeping My commandments.” God will be committed, faithfully committed, to those who strive to serve Him and that commitment will be shown toward “thousands.” But there are two conditions which have to be met in order to receive that commitment from God: love toward God and obedience to His commandments (see 19:5). It is absolutely impossible to deny the fact that God requires obedience to His commands in order to be saved. That does not mean anyone ever *deserves* salvation; but if God requires obedience, man cannot argue with Him. Secondly, the Bible never disparages the idea of keeping commandments. Never. Man is foolish who minimizes the need to obey God’s commandments.

Command #3 - God’s name has been revealed to be important (3:14-15) so that here (ver. 7), God requires Israel to respect His name. His name reveals His character, His nature. That name, then, must be held in the highest respect. Here, God tells Israel not to “lift up” the name of God for vanity. The immediate application of this command would seem to be making oaths in the courts of justice. Man must not make an oath by God without making every effort to fulfill that oath; if he does, then he has “lifted up” the name of God for vanity. Yet the broader application of this command is that man ought to always use God’s name in the most reverent and respectful way possible. It is not a word that man should utter when he hits his thumb with a hammer!

A punishment will be implemented on one who does not respect God's name: He will not consider that individual "blameless" who "lifts up His name for vanity." In other words, God will absolutely punish such an individual. "Jehovah" is mentioned 6,828 times in the OT; "God" (sometimes referring to false gods, or idols) is used 2,600 times. This illustrates how important God's name is.

Command #4 - Concluding the first four commands which relate Israel to Jehovah God, the fourth command requires Israel to observe the Sabbath (verses 8-11). This command is the most comprehensive of the ten, taking up four verses. We have discussed the Sabbath day law in comments at chapter 16; see comments there. "Remember" is a strong imperative. Israel is to "sanctify" the Sabbath day, setting it aside as distinct from the other six days of the week.

The seven-day week, with the seventh day being devoted to rest, is based on the week of creation. For six days, Israel is supposed to work and they are to accomplish everything they need to accomplish for the week, in those six days. The last day of the week, the "Sabbath" day (which is related to the word "rest") is supposed to be devoted to Jehovah God. No one is allowed to work on the Sabbath day: neither man nor his children nor his servants (male or female) nor his animals nor any strangers living among Israel.

The reason, given in verse 11, is that God created the world, the heavens and the earth, in six days, including the sea (where evolutionists claim life started), and everything in it. God rested on the seventh, sanctified it, and thereby created a pattern which He expected Israel to follow. It is simply impossible to deny the fact that the Bible teaches God created the world and everything in it in six, literal, 24-hour days. Man might trust a scientist in a white lab coat over God's revealed word, but man cannot squeeze billions of years into God's mouth.

Command #5 - At the head of the list of commandments which relate Israel to their community is the command (ver. 12) to honor father and mother. Observe that God did not say "obey" but to honor. "Honor" would include obedience, but it is broader than simple obedience. It involves respect and care in old age. God required Israel to honor their parents so that their time in the land of Canaan will be as long as possible. As God frequently did in Genesis, here He reminds Israel that Canaan was His gift to them. Psychologists recognize today that our view of God often begins or is affected by our view of our parents. Parents are to train their children to honor them so that they will honor God. If Israel honors his parents, then he should live long in Canaan. If he fails to honor his parents, he frequently then fails to honor God, and he will forfeit his privilege of living in the Promised Land.

It is significant from the perspective of Ancient Near Eastern religions that God, through Moses, includes "mothers" in this command for honor from children. This fact also belies the criticism of modern feminists that the Bible is misogynistic.

Command #6 - The next three commands are brief; each is composed of only two words. The sixth command is: "You must not kill" (ver. 13). The Hebrew word for "kill" is distinguished only from the perspective of motivation. While in English there is understood to be a difference between "killing" (which can be justified) and "murder" (which is taking innocent human life, which is forbidden), there is no such difference in Hebrew words. The distinction is solely based on context and the motivation for the killing. Life belongs to God (Lev. 17:11; Gen. 9:6).

As soon as Noah and his family left the ark, God gave mankind the responsibility to put to death ("kill") fellow human beings who murdered ("killing" without justification) others (Gen. 9:6). The whole Bible supports the position that the death penalty for certain crimes is acceptable to God; in fact, God required Israel to implement the death penalty for about 30 different crimes or sins. God destroyed human life through the flood (Gen. 6-9). God destroyed human life in Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19). God destroyed the sons of Judah (Gen. 38:7, 10). God destroyed the Egyptian army in Exodus 14:26-29.

Subsequently, we may draw the conclusion that killing, even war or serving as a policeman, is justified if the killing would be sanctioned by God, under the auspices of the civil government. The civil government is put into place as a "servant of God" in order to keep peace in human society: Romans 13:1-4. Eight centurions are mentioned in the NT, all of whom

are spoken about positively and none of whom are commanded to leave their job. In fact, the Roman army was immersed both in pagan rituals and pagan symbols all around them. Yet, Christians served in that army (while not engaging in those false religious practices). For more thoughts on God's killing of human life, see comments on chapter twelve, the tenth plague.

Command #7 - The next command, again found in only two words, is to not commit adultery (ver. 14). God is a God of truth; therefore, when man (or woman) promises to be devoted to their spouse "until death separates" them, God expects him or her to stay true to their word. Subsequently, the violation of that oath in an impure sexual relationship with someone else is adultery. Israel is to avoid adultery. It is, in fact, one of the crimes or sins which required the death penalty (for both the guilty man and the guilty woman) under the law of Moses (see below under "Moses' contemporaries").

Command #8 - The command found in verse 15 is also limited to two words: "You will not steal." God accepts the concept of private ownership. There are certain items that belong to the individual and no one is to steal that item.

Command #9 - Again, God is a God of truth so that He requires man to speak truth (ver. 16). As with the command against using God's name in vain in oaths (command #3), this command appears to have had its immediate application in the court of law. Man could not "answer a witness of falsehood" in the court of law. If man was called to testify in the court of law, he was to tell the truth. That concept would also, however, apply outside of the court of law. The simple fact of the matter is that the Bible *never* condones lying for any reason. Man likes to justify his lying, but the Bible states emphatically, "lying lips are an abomination to the Lord" (Prov. 12:22) and the Bible gives no exceptions to that command.

Command #10 - The final commandment, found in verse 17, also relates to truth. Israel was not to "covet" anything that belonged to his neighbor: his wife, his servant, his maid, his livestock, or anything else which belonged to his neighbor. Observe that the prohibition does not relate to the *behavior* such as stealing, which is prohibited by command #8. Coveting could motivate someone to steal; it could also consume someone's mind until he or she becomes unproductive in their lives; or it could motivate a person to put so much effort into work to have what he covets that he replaces God in his heart with the object of his coveting. Therefore, this command prohibits the *thought* in the mind or the *desire* in the heart. In that sense, it is unique among the Ten Commandments.

APPLICATION:

Moses' contemporaries -

Command #1 - Compare the repetition of the laws in Deuteronomy 5:7 and 4:12, 15-19.

Command #2 - For more laws on idols, see: Exodus 23:13; 34:17; Deut. 13; Lev. 19:4, 26; 20:1-6, 27, 31; 26:1; Deut. 4:9-12, 16, 23, 25; 5:8-10; 12:2-5; 31; 18:10; 27:15. For more on the jealousy of God, see Exo. 34:14; Deut. 4:24; 5:9; 6:15.

Command #3 - For more on Jehovah God's name, see: Exodus 33:18-34:8; Lev. 19:12; 20:3; 24:16; Numbers 6:27; Deut. 6:13; 10:8, 20; 11:26; 12:5, 11; 16:2, 6, 11; 18:19. For more on swearing an oath in Jehovah's name, see Lev. 6:3-5; 19:12. See our comments at 3:14-15 relative to the name and pronunciation of God's name "Jehovah."

Command #4 - For more on the Sabbath day in the Law, see: Exo. 31:12-17; 34:21; 35:1-3; Lev. 19:3; 23:3; 25:1-7; 26:2; Num. 15:32-36; Deut. 15:1-18. Already in the Law of Moses, God was giving some significance to the *first* day of the week. The "eighth day" (which would be the first day of the week) was a part of the celebration (Lev. 23:15-16, 35-36, 39). That day will be called "Pentecost" by the NT times. For more on this commandment, see Deut. 5:12-15. There was also a so-called "Sabbath year" under the law of Moses: Deut. 15:1-18; Lev. 25:8-55.

Command #5 - "Mother" is mentioned before "father" in the text from Leviticus 19:3. This is significant in a world dominated by males. Exodus 21:15-17 also relates to

honoring one's parents. For more on this command in the Law, see Exo. 21:15-17; Lev. 20:9; Deut. 5:16; 21:18-21; 27:16. Parents were not to be worshipped: Deut. 18:11; Lev. 19:31.

Command #6 - For more on the motivation behind killing, see Exodus 21:12-15; Num. 35:31; Lev. 19:15-18; Deut. 21:1-9. See also the law in Deut. 5:17; 19:11-13. Cities of refuge were set up to defend the rights of one who killed accidentally: Num. 35:22-28; Deut. 4:41-42; 19:1-10 (Josh. 20:3). On the killing of the Canaanites, see Deut. 20:1-18. God required the punishment for a crime to be proportionate to the crime; thus the concept of "an eye for an eye" (Exo. 21:22-25).

Command #7 - Adultery was considered a sin against Jehovah God (Gen. 20:9; 39:9). See also Deut. 5:18; 22:22; Lev. 18:20; 20:10. There were other forms of sexual misbehavior which were also forbidden: Lev. 18:1-30; 20:10-23; Deut. 22:23-29.

Command #8 - For more on the topic of stealing, see Exodus 22:1-4; Deut. 5:19. One who stole would have to make restitution: Exo. 22:7.

Command #9 - The law will require that in cases of false testimony, the accuser was to be punished with the punishment he had hoped to implement on the accused (Deut. 19:16-21). Since this was the law, when the Sanhedrin, in the trial of Jesus, found false witnesses against Jesus (Matt. 26:59-60; Mark 14:56-57) and accepted it, they should have been killed in place of Jesus. See also Deut. 5:20; Lev. 19:11-16. For more laws on God's view of justice, see: Exo. 23:1-9; Lev. 19:15; Deut. 13:6-11.

Command #10 - For more on this commandment in the Law, see Exo. 22:25-26; Deut. 5:21; Lev. 19:11-14; 25:36-37.

Later Jewish writers -

Command #1 - Compare the thoughts of the psalmist (81:9-10) and Jeremiah's teachings (7:4, 8-11).

Command #2 - Idols were worshipped in Israel, according to Judges 8:27; 17:4; 1 Sam. 19:13. Relative to God's jealousy, see: Zech. 1:14-16; Isa. 42:8-17. For more on the jealousy of God, see Joshua 24:19; Nahum 1:2.

Command #3 - For more on Jehovah's name in later Jewish history, see: 2 Sam. 6:18; 2 Kings 2:24; Psa. 69:31; 72:19; 105:3; Prov. 30:9; Isa. 50:10; Jer. 11:21; Eze. 43:8; Zeph. 3:12. The expression "as the Lord lives" is found 35 times in the OT; it is an oath. Relative to the use of Jehovah's name among the prophets, see: Amos 5:21-24; Isa. 1:11-17.

Command #4 - Amos will criticize Israelite businessmen for desiring the Sabbath to be over quickly so they could do their business (8:4-8).

Command #5 - The wiseman will encourage respect and obedience to one's parents: Prov. 4:1-27; 10:1; 13:1; 15:5; 19:18. See also Ezekiel 22:7.

Command #7 - Jeremiah also considered adultery a sin against God (Jer. 3:1). The prophets will also use "adultery" as a metaphor for unfaithfulness to God, specifically as it was expressed in idolatry: Isa. 57:1-13; Jer. 3:6-9; 23:10; Eze. 18:10-13; 23:36-49; Hosea 4:2; Mal. 3:5. The wiseman warned against adultery in Prov. 5:1-23; 6:23-35; 7:7-27.

Command #8 - Malachi will accuse Israel of robbing God by not giving their tithes to Him as He commanded (3:8). For thoughts on stealing, see Psa. 50:16-18; Prov. 29:24; 30:9; Isa. 1:10-23; Zech. 5:3-4.

Command #9 - A egregious example of false witness is the account of Nadab, Jezebel, and Naboth's vineyard in 1 Kings 21. See also Amos 5:10-15; Isa. 5:23-24; 10:1-2; Hosea 4:1-3; Jer. 5:1, 26-28; 7:5-10. On sharing a "false report," see Psalm 5:8-10; 15:2-3; 27:12-14; 50:19-22. God cannot lie: 1 Sam. 15:29.

NT writers -

Command #1 - Only Jesus is the way to heaven and only He can give spiritual life: John 14:6. See also Acts 4:12. Paul warns against worshipping and serving the created rather than the Creator: Rom. 1:18-32.

Command #2 - Jesus is also jealous of His people and requires us to obey His commandments: John 14:15; 1 John 5:3. John forbid idolatry: 1 John 5:21. Jesus is the only “image” of God which deserves to be worshipped: Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3. While this law would not prohibit images of people in the Bible or images of plants and animals, it does prohibit engaging in acts of *worship* directed at any and all images. Such acts of worship would include, but are not limited to: praying, kissing, and giving gifts.

Command #3 - For Jesus’ view on taking oaths, see Matthew 5:33-37. Mankind is to sanctify the name of God and His Son: Matt. 6:9.

Command #4 - Christians are not required to keep the seventh day of the week (Sabbath), but rather the first day of the week. See our comments in Exodus 16. Jesus will state that the Sabbath law was designed for man (Mark 2:23-3:5; Matt. 12:1-13; Luke 6:1-10). The Hebrew writer will write in 4:1-11 that Christians will have a “Sabbath” rest in Jesus Christ, in heaven.

Command #5 - Paul teaches that Christians are to respect their parents: Eph. 6:1-4; Col. 3:20-21. Paul (naturally) condemned those who killed their parents (1 Tim. 1:9). Jesus supports the principle of the fifth commandment, in Matthew 15:4 and Mark 7:9-13.

Command #6 - For teachings of Jesus relative to this command, see Matthew 5:21-26, 38-47.

Command #7 - Jesus taught that adultery was sinful and marrying someone divorced for some reason besides sexual immorality was also adultery (Matt. 5:27-28, 31-32; 19:1-9). The marriage bed is to be honored by avoiding both adultery and fornication: Hebrews 13:4.

Command #8 - Jesus told the rich young ruler to sell his possessions because they were ruling his heart: Matt. 19:21. Paul emphatically commands Christians not to steal (Eph. 4:28).

Command #9 - Jesus requires Christians to tell the truth, in court and out of court: Matt. 5:33-37. Christians are required to speak the truth: Colossians 3:9; Eph. 4:22-25; Revelation 21:8. James warns against the improper use of the tongue: 3:1-18; 4:11-12. See also 1 Peter 3:10. God is truth and cannot lie (John 17:17; Heb. 6:18; Titus 1:2); therefore, He requires humanity to speak the truth.

Command #10 - Coveting is used as an illustration in Romans 7 (7:7-8) of the ability of the Law to define sin. In that same context, Paul teaches that Jews, being married to Christ, are no longer married to the Law (Rom. 7:1-4). Paul will condemn coveting in Ephesians 5:5 and Colossians 3:5. Consider the point Jesus makes in Mark 10:17-22 and Luke 12:15. See also Jesus’ sermon on the mount: Matt. 5:21-30 and Mark 7:21-22. Jesus’ brother will condemn coveting: James 4:3.

It is important to point out that Jesus came to bring righteousness to which the Law of Moses pointed: Matt. 3:15. Subsequently, He fulfilled the law, bring it to its proper conclusion: Matt. 5:17. In this way, He removed the Law of Moses as a law for the Jews and unites both Jew and non-Jew into one body, the church: Matthew 3:15; 5:17-18; Romans 7:1-4; 2 Corinthians 3:4-14; Galatians 3:22-25; 5:1-4; Ephesians 2:13-18; Philippians 3:7-11; Colossians 2:13-15, 16-19; Hebrews 7:11-14; 8:6-13.

Some people, such as those who believe Christians should keep the Sabbath, try to divide the Law of Moses into a “ceremonial” law, a “civil” law, and a “moral” law. They want to say that the “moral” law (the Ten Commandments) is permanently binding while the ceremonial laws (such as sacrificing animals) and civil laws have been fulfilled in Christ. The problem with that position, however, is that the Bible never makes such a distinction between given laws. All the laws are part of the “Law of Moses,” which was cancelled at the cross. Additionally, in Romans 7, Paul uses one of the commandments, “you will not covet” (7:7), to illustrate the Law that is no longer in effect (7:1-4). Finally, specifically related to the Sabbath day, Paul teaches in Colossians 2 that it was a shadow of Christ, who is the fulfillment.

TRANSLATION - 20:18-21:

18 And all the people were seeing the sounds and the torches and the sound of the ram's horn and the mountain of smoke and the people saw and they trembled and stood at a distance. **19** And they said to Moses, "Speak yourself with us and we will listen but let not God speak with us lest we die."

20 So Moses said to the people, "Do not fear because for the sake to test you all, God came and for the sake that if fear of Him will be with you; you will not sin."

21 The people stood at a distance and Moses approached the darkness where there [was] God.

HEBREW WORDS:

"Torches" (ver. 18) is used 14 times in the OT, only here in Exodus. Here, it refers to the lightning. "Smoke" was used earlier at 19:18. "To tremble" is used only here in Exodus. It is used 42 times in the OT. "To listen" in verse 19 is often translated "to obey." "To die" was used at 1:16. "To fear" (ver. 20) was used earlier at 1:17, 21. "To test" was used earlier at 15:25; 16:4. "To sin" was used earlier at 9:27, 34. "To approach" (ver. 21) was used earlier at 19:15, 22. "Darkness" is used only here in Exodus; it is used 15 times in the OT.

COMMENTARY:

As a reflection of the "storm" around Mount Sinai from 19:18-19, again the atmosphere and the mountain react to God giving the Law to Israel. In verse 18, the people "see" (or "experience," but the Hebrew word is "to see") the sounds, the "torches" (lightning and / or fire) and the sound of the ram's horn blowing, with the mountain covered in smoke. According to Moses' words from Deuteronomy 4:12, 15-18, 36, Israel heard but did not see any distinguishable form in God. The people then tremble and kept their distance. In verse 19, Israel calls on Moses to be their intermediary: "Speak yourself with us and we will listen but let not God speak with us lest we die." This concept illustrates the need that mankind has with a mediator, who is Jesus Christ (1 Tim. 2:5).

Subsequently, Moses tells Israel in verse 20 not to fear. The visible and auditory signs which they were experiencing were to test Israel, to impress on their minds and hearts the need to take God's commands seriously and to obey them with all their heart, soul, and mind (see Deut. 6:5). They would be motivated out of fear to obey God and subsequently, they would not sin against Him.

Again, Moses notes (ver. 21) that Israel stood at a distance while Moses approached God, or rather the darkness (cloud) which enshrouded God to protect Moses from the divine glory.

APPLICATION:

Moses' contemporaries - Moses has been established as a prophet of Jehovah God: Deut. 5:23-28; 18:15-22.

NT writers - Compare the writer of Hebrews, 12:19-20.

TRANSLATION - 20:22-26:

22 Then Jehovah said to Moses, "Thus you will say to the sons of Israel, 'You all saw that from the heavens, I spoke with you. **23** You will not make with Me gods of silver and gods of gold you will not make for yourselves. **24** An altar of land you will make for Me and you will sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your flock and your cattle in every place where I will make mention My name, I will come to you and I will bless you. **25** And if an altar of stones you will make for Me, you will not build them of cut stones because your tool you will present on it will profane it. **26** And you will not go up by steps on My altar so you will not reveal your nakedness on it.'"

HEBREW WORDS:

“Altar” (ver. 24) was used earlier at 17:15. “To sacrifice” was used earlier at 3:18. “Burnt offerings” was used at 10:25; 18:12. “Peace offerings” is used here, 24:5, 29:28 and 32:6 in Exodus, out of 87 times. This is its first mention in the Bible. “To make mention” is the verb “to remember” or to “make someone remember.” It was used earlier at 2:24. “Name” was used earlier at verse 7. “To bless” was used earlier at verse 11. “Stones” (ver. 25) was used earlier at 1:16; 7:19. “Cut stones” is used only here in Exodus, out of 11 uses in the OT. The word translated “tool” is literally “sword,” which doesn’t fit this context. The word was used earlier at 5:3, 21. “To present” is used 34 times, in Exodus here, 29:24, 26-27; 35:22. “To profane” is used only here and 31:14 in Exodus. The verb is used 135 times. “By steps” (ver. 26) is used only here in Exodus; the word is used 49 times in the OT. “To reveal” is used only here in Exodus, out of 187 times. “Nakedness” is used here and 28:42 in Exodus, out of 54 times.

COMMENTARY:

Jehovah God spoke to Moses again. The things which they experienced with their signs were evidence that Jehovah God had spoken to them from heaven (ver. 22). God reiterates the need for them to be monotheistic (ver. 23). Relative to worship, Israel was to make their altars of “land” or “dirt” (ver. 24), on which they would offer their burnt offerings (consumed completely on the altar) and their peace offerings (part of which was burned and part of which was eaten). Verse 24 also notes that Israel was to offer these sacrifices wherever God made known His name; there He will bless them. The tent of worship will be moved from place to place, ultimately being located in the permanent temple built by King Solomon in Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 3-7). This promise is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, through Whom mankind now meets God (Col. 2:9).

If Israel were to make an altar of stones (ver. 25), they were to not use cut stones; this would profane the altar. Scholars suggest that such an altar would be similar to pagan altars, which God was avoiding. The more Israel decorated their altar, the more likely they would to venerate the altar. Relative to pagan worship, in verse 26, God did not want the altar to have steps on it so that priests would not expose their nakedness as they ascended the steps. Consequently, God required priests to wear undergarments (Exo. 28:42). As with the command from 19:15 (see comments there), God wanted all sexual connotations to be separated and avoided during worship services, in contrast to pagan worship.

APPLICATION:

Moses’ contemporaries - Relative to the place where God would place His name for the purpose of Israel worshipping Him, see: Deut. 12:5, 11, 14, 18, 21, 26; 14:23-25; 15:20; 16:2, 6-7, 11, 15-16; 17:8, 10; 18:6; 26:2; 31:11. Moses will make a reference to Mount Sinai and God speaking to Israel, in Deuteronomy 4:12. For more on the nature of the altar, see Deut. 27:5-7.

Later Jewish writers - An altar of “uncut stones” was built in the days of Joshua (8:30-31) according to the Law of Moses. Joshua 9:27 refers to the place where God chose to put His name. Israel will renew their covenant with God at: Josh. 8:30-35; chapter 24; and 2 Kings 23:1-3. See also Josh. 6:24; 1 Sam. 14:34. When Solomon built the temple, no sound was heard at the construction site: 1 Kings 6:7.

NT writers - The name of God has been placed on His Son, Jesus Christ (Matt. 1:23), which is now transferred to His people, the “church of God:” Acts 20:28; 1 Cor. 1:2; 10:32; 11:16, 22; 15:9; 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:13; 1 Thess. 2:14; 2 Thess. 1:4; 1 Tim. 3:5.