

# EXODUS

## Chapter 20

### *The Ten Commandments*

**And God spoke 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. 3 “You shall have no other gods before me. 4 “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or 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. 5 You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, 6 but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. 7 “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain. 8 “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. 11 For in six days the LORD made heaven and 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. 12 “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. 13 “You shall not murder. 14 “You shall not commit adultery. 15 “You shall not steal. 16 “You shall not bear false witness against 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 is your neighbor's.” 18 Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off 19 and said to Moses, “You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die.” 20 Moses said to the people, “Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin.” 21 The people stood far off, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.**

**20:1–17** See Dt 5:6–21; see also Mt 5:21, 27; 19:17–19; Mk 10:19; Lk 18:20; Ro 13:9; Eph 6:2–3. (CSB)

**20:1** *words*. A technical term for “(covenant) stipulations” in the ancient Near East (e.g., among the Hittites; see also 24:3, 8; 34:28). The basic code in Israel’s divine law is found in vv. 2–17, elsewhere called the “Ten Commandments” (34:28; Dt 4:13; 10:4), the Hebrew words for which mean lit. “Ten Words.” “Decalogue,” a term of Greek origin often used as a synonym for the Ten Commandments, also means lit. “Ten Words.” (CSB)

a *word*; by implication a *matter* (as *spoken* of) of *thing*; adverbially a *cause*:—act, advice, affair, answer, X any such (thing). (QV)

Only these words were spoken by God from Mount Sinai directly to the Israelites, without the mediation of Moses. After God spoke these words the people trembled and asked Moses to serve as God’s spokesman and mediator (vv 18-19), which he did from then on. Only these words were written down on the two stone tablets (Deut 5:22). (LL)

By proclaiming the ten commandments to the Israelites Himself, and in circumstances of awful solemnity, God showed their fundamental importance, and took a course adapted to impress upon all men their obligations perfectly to obey them. (CB)

The Bible makes a distinction between the “words” given us in chapter 20 (the Ten Commandments) and the “laws” (the rules and regulation pertaining to the conduct of Israel as a nation), which are summarized for us in chapter 21 to chapter 23:19. (PBC)

**20:2** *I ... you.* The Lord directly addresses each individual of Israel. (TLSB)

*your God.* The God who established a covenant with Abraham and Moses (cf 3:14) and who holds authority over these people. (TLSB)

*I am the LORD your God, who brought you out.*† The Decalogue reflects the structure of the contemporary royal treaties (see note on Ge 15:7). On the basis of (1) a preamble, in which the great king identified himself (“I am the LORD your God”), and (2) a historical prologue, in which he sketched his previous gracious acts toward the subject king or people (“who brought you out ...”), he then set forth (3) the treaty (covenant) stipulations (see Dt 5:1–3, 7–21) to be obeyed (in this case, ten in number: vv. 3–17). Use of this ancient royal treaty pattern shows that the Lord is here formally acknowledged as Israel’s King and that Israel is his subject people. Reminded of their complete dependence on God’s redemptive mercy and his proved power, his covenant people are to render complete submission, allegiance and obedience to him out of gratitude for his mercies, reverence for his sovereignty, and trust in his continuing care. See chart on “Major Covenants in the OT”. (CSB)

Deliverance from bondage is a great and precious blessing, and special praises should be rendered to God by those who enjoy it. (CB)

*self Existent* or eternal; *Jehovah*, Jewish national name of God:—Jehovah, the Lord. (QV) – This is the personal and covenant name of God, emphasizing his role as Israel’s Redeemer and covenant Lord. (Gen. 2:4 Note – CSB) – It means “He is” or “He will be” and is the third-person form of the verb translated “I will be” or “I am”. When God speaks of himself he says, “I am,” and when we speak of him we say, “He is.” Ex. 3:15 note – CSB) – Basically it is an assertion of authority.

This is not the first time Yahweh had spoken this name in the Exodus story. It is one of the names revealed to Moses at the burning bush (Ex 6:2-3). Basically it is an assertion of authority. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 2)

Notice that He reveals Himself as a person, with the personal name. God is not an “It,” not an impersonal force. No, God is a personal being with a personal name, who speaks and acts as a person and who called Israel (and us) into a personal relationship with Himself. (LL)

And this personal God who speaks here calls Himself “your God.” He has graciously made Himself your God and has made you His people. He belongs to you, and you belong to Him. God spoke this to us. The God of ancient Israel is our God, who has called us in Christ. Both the OT and NT reveal one and the same God. (LL)

*who brought you out* - A primitive root; to *go* (causatively *bring*) *out*, in a great variety of applications, literally and figuratively, direct and proximate. (QV)

Yahweh reminds the people that he acted out of grace for them to make them his own. He did this by bringing them out of Egypt. They who were no people, he made into a people. Essentially, the commandments are a call to faithfulness, based on the good news of deliverance. It is of utmost importance that the Decalogue is in indicative, not imperative form. These are statements of what the believer who has experienced God's grace will voluntarily do. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 2)

By grace, and not because of any merit or worthiness in Israel, Yahweh acted through Moses and delivered Israel from bondage and brought them to Himself into true freedom. As God said in Ex 19:4: “You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles wings and brought you to Myself.” Israel did not deliver itself. The Israelites were helpless under Pharaoh's control in the land slavery. But Yahweh defeated Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt (Ex 12:12) and delivered helpless Israel. (LL)

The deliverance of ancient Israel from Egyptian slavery was a preview of the greater deliverance from sin, death, and the devil that we all have received by the work of Jesus Christ our Lord. God did the same saving act for us, only in a far greater way, that He did for ancient Israel. (LL)

**20:3–17** Though traditionally known as the Ten Commandments, the term “commandments” occurs only in v 6. The list proclaims both Law (vv 3–17) and mercy (vv 2, 6). According to the Jewish Mishnah, reciting the Ten Commandments was a significant feature of temple liturgy (Tamid 5:1). (TLSB)

**20:3** *no other gods before me* – To have a god, is to love an object supremely. What a man most loves is his god. By forbidding men to regard any object more than God or to worship any other, He would remove the temptation, and prevent the inclination to break His commandments which supreme regard to creatures occasions. (CB)

Prohibits any other gods from Israel's exclusive relationship with Him. (TLSB)

*before*. The Hebrew for this word is translated “in hostility toward” in Ge 16:12; 25:18. Something of that sense may be intended here. In any event, no deity, real or imagined, is to rival the one true God in Israel's heart and life. (CSB)

Lit, “in front of My face.” (TLSB)

“Before the face of me, in my presence” presumes that there is no place where God's presence is absent or missing (Ps. 139:7-12). Israel must not imitate the people around her who worshiped man gods. God will not permit even one other god. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 2)

**20:4** *a carved image or any likeness*. Because God has no visible form, any idol intended to resemble him would be a sinful misrepresentation of him (see Dt 4:12, 15–18). Since other gods are not to be worshiped (see v. 5), making idols of them would be equally sinful (see Dt 4:19, 23–28). (CSB)

Cyprian: “Idols are not gods, and ... the elements are not to be worshipped in the place of gods” (ANF 5:498). (TLSB)

an *idol*:—carved (graven) image. (QV) – To cut or shape something. From an unused root meaning to *shade*; a *phantom*, that is, (figuratively) *illusion, resemblance*; hence a representative *figure*, especially an *idol*:—image, vain shew. (QV)

It refers especially to an image or likeness used as an object of worship, an image suggesting the presence of a deity. Idols were an essential part of pagan life. The neighboring polytheists did not necessarily believe that a piece of wood, stone, or metal was itself the god worshiped. They regarded their idols as objects through which communication with the deities could take place. Because Yahweh has created everything from top to bottom, it is not possible for a human being to make an image that could represent him. God must not be represented by anything in the universe. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 2)

Why would this be wrong? Because Israel did not see God’s appearance; they only heard Him speak and saw the cloud that enclosed Him (Deut 4:11-24). Therefore, if they fashioned a statue of God, it would be based on their own imagination and reason. And certainly they should not worship such an image. That would be idolatry. (LL)

**20:5 bow down** – “Serve them.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 2)

For that is giving them the place of Jehovah; worshiping and serving the creature in opposition to and defiance of the Creator. To treat creatures, or the likenesses of creatures, as if they were divine, by bowing down to them and worshiping them, is to act as if they were gods when they are not, and thus by actions to inculcate a falsehood suited to degrade, debase, pollute, and destroy the soul. (CB)

*serve them*  A primitive root; to *work* (in any sense); by implication to *serve, till*, (causatively) *enslave*, etc.:— X be, keep in bondage, be bondmen, bond-service, compel, do, dress, ear, execute, + husbandman, keep, labour (-ing man), bring to pass, (cause to, make to) serve (-ing, self), (be, become) servant (-s), do (use) service, till (-er), transgress [from margin], (set a) work, be wrought, worshipper. (QV)

*jealous God*. God will not put up with rivalry or unfaithfulness. Usually his “jealousy” concerns Israel and assumes the covenant relationship (analogous to marriage) and the Lord’s exclusive right to possess Israel and to claim her love and allegiance. Actually, jealousy is part of the vocabulary of love. The “jealousy” of God (1) demands exclusive devotion to himself;(2) 59:17; Eze 5:13; 16:38; 23:25; 36:5; Na 1:2; Zep 1:18; 3:8) and (3) vindicates his people (see 2Ki 19:31; Isa 9:7; 26:11; Eze 39:25; Joel 2:18; Zec 1:14; 8:2). In some of these passages the meaning is closer to “zeal” (the same Hebrew word may be translated either way, depending on context). (CSB)

Hbr *qanna'*, adjective used esp of God; associated with term for “zealous” and “passionate.” God prohibits worshiping other gods because, as in any good marriage, the relationship does not admit third parties. This was not sinful jealousy, but a righteous desire for His people to be faithful. (TLSB)

Yahweh's jealousy is part of his holiness. Compromise of his worship leads to a divided or redirected loyalty. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 2)

He had as it were married Israel; He was the bridegroom, and Israel was His bride. But if His bride went after other lovers, they would provoke Him to anger. His "jealousy" is unlike human jealousy in that it is not fickle or irrational or selfish. But is jealousy in the sense that He will not share His bride with other lovers. (LL)

*visiting the iniquity.* Bringing the deserved condemnation. (TLSB)

*of the fathers on the children.* Sin, which is inherited (Ps 51:5), corrupts and affects families. Consider how children often repeat the sins of the parents and then suffer the consequences. Our relationship with God is both individual and corporate. However, note two things: God pictures His mercy here as being much greater than His wrath. Every person stands before God in judgment based on his own relationship with God, not another's (cf Dt 24:16). Luther: " 'Although the Law does not justify, it is nevertheless extremely useful and necessary. In the first place, it acts as a civic restraint upon those who are unspiritual and uncivilized. In the second place, it produces in a man the knowledge of himself as a sinner, who is therefore subject to death and worthy of eternal wrath.' But what is the value of this effect, this humiliation, this wounding and crushing by the hammer? It has this value, that grace can have access to us. Therefore the Law is a minister and a preparation for grace" (AE 26:314). (TLSB)

*to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me.* † Those Israelites who blatantly violate God's covenant and thus show that they reject the Lord as their King will bring down judgment on themselves and their households that follow in the footsteps of their idolatrous forebears—households were usually extended to "three or four" generations. (CSB)

*hate me.* In covenant contexts the terms "hate" and "love" (v. 6) were conventionally used to indicate rejection of or loyalty to the covenant Lord. (CSB)

**20:6** *showing steadfast love - kindness*; by implication (towards God) *piety*; rarely (by opprobrium) *reproof*, or (subjectively) *beauty*:—favour, good deed (-liness, -ness), kindly, (loving-) kindness, merciful (kindness), mercy, pity, reproach, wicked thing. (QV)

Steadfast, overflowing, benevolent love which seeks only the good of the recipient. It is the love only God can give us, not what we can give him. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 2)

This means not only forgiving their sins and saving their souls, but often making them instrumental in leading others, especially their children and children's children, to become pious, and the means of salvation to their posterity to many generations. (CB)

*thousands ( generations) of those.* Innumerable descendants as the emphasis is on the progeny of faithfulness and Yahweh's unending goodness to them all. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 2)

Notice that God’s love and faithfulness outweighs His punishing wrath. God’s anger extends to the fourth generation, but God’s love and faithfulness extends to the thousandth generation. (LL)

*love me and keep my commandments.* See Jn 14:15; 1Jn 5:3. In the treaty language of the ancient Near East the “love” owed to the great king was a conventional term for total allegiance and implicit trust expressing itself in obedient service. (CSB)

A primitive root; properly to *hedge* about (as with thorns), that is, *guard*; generally to *protect*, *attend to*, etc.:—beware, be circumspect, take heed (to self), keep (-er, self), mark, look narrowly, observe, preserve, regard, reserve, save (self), sure, (that lay) wait (for), watch (-man). (QV)

To keep, obey, not slavishly following orders, but listening carefully and responding correctly. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 2)

**20:7–17** God no longer speaks directly to the people, but Moses speaks for Him. Cf v 19. (TLSB)

**20:7** *not take the name of the LORD IN VAIN.* By profaning God’s name—e.g., by swearing falsely by it (see Lev 19:22; see also Jer 7:9, as on the witness stand in court. Jesus elaborates on oath-taking in Mt 5:33–37. (CSB)

The commandment prohibits taking oaths or vows in the Lord’s name, which one does not intend to keep. (TLSB)

In the sense of *desolating*; *evil* (as *destructive*), literally (*ruin*) or morally (especially *guile*); figuratively *idolatry* (as false, subjectively), *uselessness* (as deceptive, objectively; also adverbially in *vain*):—false (-ly), lie, lying, vain, vanity. (QV)

*in vain.* Without meaning (i.e., to use it unnecessarily or casually). (TLSB)

Suggests nothingness, insubstantial thing, wasted-ness, emptiness. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 2)

This refers to invoking God’s name as a throwaway remark, not only in a negative way such as cursing, but also in a neutral and meaningless way. (LL)

To use the name of God in a profane, light or irreverent manner, or to mention it without good reason, tends to lessen the reverence which the soul ought to feel for Him, to render it reckless and increasingly wicked, and is a flagrant offence against the Ruler of the universe. (CB)

The Israelites considered the name too holy to be spoken by human lips. Whenever they needed to say Yahweh, they substituted the word Adonai, which means “Lord,” If the name needed to be written, the scribes would take a bath before they wrote it and destroy the pen afterward. (Luc–Light)

**20:8** *remember* – A primitive root; properly to *mark* (so as to be recognized), that is, to *remember*; by implication to *mention*; also (as denominative from H2145) to *be male*:— X burn [incense], X earnestly, be male, (make) mention (of), be mindful, recount, record (-er), remember, make to be remembered, bring (call, come, keep, put) to (in) remembrance, X still, think on, X well. (QV)

Pay attention to. (TLSB)

Observe, blessed, praised, celebrated, invoked, pronounced, and then shared. It is more than a mental act. It is an active observance. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 2)

*Sabbath*. Hbr means “rest” or “stop.” (TLSB)

*intermission*, that is, (specifically) the *Sabbath*:— (+ every) sabbath. (QV)

The Sabbath was a weekly reminder of Passover, just as for Christians Sunday is a weekly reminder of Easter. Comes from the verb meaning to “cease, rest, a cessation for religious purposes from the normal activity of work. On the Sabbath nobody is to undertake usual work. People are not live as if time is their own, to do with it as they please. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 2)

Although we are no longer bound to worshipping on Saturday (Col 2:16), we too receive the blessing of God’s rest and a foretaste of our future heavenly rest when we hear the Gospel, remembering our Baptism, and partake of the Lord’s Supper. Of course we obey this commandment when we attend church on Sundays and at other opportunities and when we take part in Sunday school and Bible classes. (LL)

*holy*. Keep it special by being separate from other days. It is meant for rest and worship. Cf Dt 5:12–15 for emphasis on worship as re-experiencing the saving acts of God. According to Ne 13:17–19, the Sabbath began when it grew dark (Friday night). (TLSB)

Keeping this commandment involves far more than that. We also keep this commandment when we believe the Gospel that we hear and when we honor and uphold God’s Word by living in a way that is in agreement with it and when our own attitudes toward others display the forgiveness, love, and consideration God has shown us in Jesus. (LL)

As a day not to be devoted to worldly business, conversation, reading, traveling, visiting, or amusement, nor to sleep, idleness, or worldly thoughts and feelings, but to be employed in religious worship and in the promotion of our own spiritual good and that of our fellow-men. (CB)

**20:9** *Six days*. The question of a shorter “work week” in a modern industrialized culture is not in view. (CSB)

All worldly business of the Jews must be done in the six working days, and what cannot be done is those days must be left undone, except what is needful to the best discharge of the appropriate duties of the Sabbath. (CB)

**20:10** *On it you shall not do any work.* Two reasons (one here and one in Deuteronomy) are given: (1) Having completed his work of creation God “rested on the seventh day” (v. 11), and the Israelites are to observe the same pattern in their service of God in the creation; (2) the Israelites must cease all labor so that their servants can also participate in the Sabbath-rest—just as God had delivered his people from the burden of slavery in Egypt (see Dt 5:14–15). The Sabbath thus became a “sign” of the covenant between God and Israel at Mount Sinai (see 31:12–17). (CSB)

**20:11** *made holy* – As God has hallowed the Sabbath for Israel of old for sacred purposes, and for this end has blessed it, He made it a blessing to all who rightly kept it, and through them a means of rich benefits to others. (CB)

Follow God’s example by resting. People worked six days a week, 12 or more hours per day. They needed a day of rest, primarily for the soul (cf Mt 11:28). (TLSB)

*the LORD blessed the Sabbath day.* Declared it special, set apart for Him. (TLSB)

**20:12–17** Whereas the first set, or “table,” of commandments (vv 3–11) describes a person’s actions toward God, the second set, or “table,” describes one’s actions toward others. (TLSB)

**20:12** Care for parents was esp needed during old age, during funeral and burial rites, and about a year after burial, when the bones of the deceased were gathered to the family bone pile. See note, 1Ki 2:10. (TLSB)

*Honor.* (1) Prize highly (see Pr 4:8), (2) care for (see Ps 91:15), (3) show respect for (see Lev 19:3; 20:9), and (4) obey (see Dt 21:18–21; cf. Eph 6:1). (CSB)

Hold in high regard, respect and obey. (TLSB)

Primitive root; to *be heavy*, that is, in a bad sense (*burdensome, severe, dull*) or in a good sense (*numerous, rich, honorable*); causatively to *make weighty* (in the same two senses):—abounding with, more grievously afflict, boast, be chargeable, X be dim, glorify, be (make) glorious (things), glory, (very) great, be grievous, harden, be (make) heavy, be heavier, lay heavily, (bring to, come to, do, get, be had in) honor (self), (be) honorable (man), lade, X more be laid, make self many, nobles, prevail, promote (to honor), be rich, be (go) sore, stop. (QV)

God demands his rulership be recognized in those to whom he has delegated his authority in the family and in the larger domain in communal life. Father and mother are the channels of God’s gift of life. Human beings never cease to be children. Disrespect for parents as God’s representative here on earth is a serious offense. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 2)

This means to love them, listen to their teaching, and obey their commands. Treat them with respectful and kind attention, assist them when they need labor to supply their wants, promote their comfort, increase their usefulness, and do them all the good in your power. (CB)

*so that you may live long.* “The first commandment with a promise” (Eph 6:2). See also note on Dt 6:2. (CSB)

A primitive root; to *be* (causatively *make*) *long* (literally or figuratively):— defer, draw out, lengthen, (be, become, make, pro-) long, + (out-, over-) live, tarry (long). (QV)

By obeying the Lord and keeping his decrees, individual Israelites would enjoy long life in the land, and the people as a whole would enjoy a long national existence in the land.

God promises to bless the keeping of the commandment to honor parents with a long tenure in the land God would give them. The apostle Paul observes that this is the first commandment to which God attached a promise to bless those who kept it. Families comprise the basic unit of human society, and when this unit is solid and solid, with healthy relationships existing within the family, a society of people has a secure foundation on which to build other units. On the other hand, where families are characterized by disintegration, where children do not receive sound training in their early years, and where parental authority suffers, no other social units can flourish either. Sound families, where children are nurtured and parents are respected, result in more moral, secure, industrious, and prosperous communities and nations. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 2)

**20:13** See Mt 5:21–26. (CSB)

*murder*.† The Hebrew for this verb usually refers to a premeditated and deliberate act. This commandment forbids loss of life inflicted by illegal means (see Nu 35:16–18). (CSB)

The unauthorized taking of human life, whether premeditated, in anger, or by carelessness. (TLSB)

A primitive root; properly to *dash* in pieces, that is, *kill* (a human being), especially to *murder*:— put to death, kill, (man-) slay (-er), murder (-er). (QV)

Killing a person, never an animal, excluding capital punishment and war, an act of violence against an individual that results in death, out of hatred, anger, malice, deceit, or personal gain. All life belongs to God. It is not for humans to do with as they will. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 2)

This command forbids not only murder, but all those practices and kinds of business which tend to destroy human life; and requires the performance of those duties and pursuit of such courses as tend to preserve it and render it useful. (CB)

**20:14** See Mt 5:27–30. (CSB)

*adultery*. A sin “against God” (Ge 39:9) as well as against the marriage partner. (CSB)

Specifically refers to a married person engaging in sexual activity with someone other than his or her spouse. (TLSB)

A primitive root; to *commit adultery*; figuratively to *apostatize*:—adulterer (-ess), commit (-ing) adultery, woman that breaketh wedlock. (QV)

Breaking the marriage bond through sexual infidelity. The severity of the punishment shows the importance of the commandment (stoning in Deut. 22:24; burning in Gen. 38:24 and Lev. 20:14). Adultery with a husband, or betrothed of another was, like idol worship, a turning away from the commitment to Yehweh. Before God any act by a man or woman that threatens the full unity of the married couple is an act of adultery. It violates God's creational intention. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 2)

This command forbids all un-chastity in thought, word, or deed. It also forbids all those things which tend to this evil. It is the application of the great law of supreme love to God and impartial love to men with regard to purity in heart and life. (CB)

**20:15** *steal* – A primitive root; to *thieve* (literally or figuratively); by implication to *deceive*:—carry away, X indeed, secretly bring, steal (away), get by stealth. (QV)

God forbids taking private property, which shows approval of the concept of private property in human economy. Ultimately, He is the owner of everything (cf Ps 50:10). (TLSB)

Stealing of any kind under any circumstances, an action trying to gain goods, property, money without honest labor. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 2)

Every man has certain things which God has given him and which, by right from God belong to himself. They are his property. To take them away, or without just cause deprive him of them, is theft, and exposes those who do it to be excluded from heaven. (CB)

**20:16** *false witness* – concretely *a witness*; abstractly *testimony*; specifically a *recorder*, that is, *prince*:—witness. (QV)

Lie under oath in court. (TLSB)

Answer, give reply, testify, respond with deceitful testimony. Lying, deceiving, false, deceptive, fraudulent, untrue testimony. The whole matter of the responsibility of the individual Israelite for the integrity of the legal process was taken seriously in the community (Ex. 23:1; Num. 35:30). Wrongdoing coupled with a poor justice system wreaks havoc in a community. The reputation of all Israelites was important if Israel was to be God's witness to the world. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 2)

This is the application of the law of love to the reputation of others, and forbids us to speak differently of them from what under similar circumstances, we ought to wish them to speak of us. (CB)

**20:17** Understood as two commandments. Unlike the early commandments that address actions, these two focus on intentions. Ambrose: "Love of money, then, is an old, an ancient vice, which showed itself even at the declaration of the divine law" (NPNF 2 10:63). (TLSB)

*covet*. Desire something with evil motivation (see Mt 15:19). To break God's commandments inwardly is equivalent to breaking them outwardly (see Mt 5:21–30). (CSB)

Hbr *chamad*, desire or crave. (TLSB)

*neighbor's*. Member of another household. (TLSB)

*ox*. Large cattle were important contributors to the household and were kept nearby or in homes. (TLSB)

A primitive root; to *delight* in:—beauty, greatly beloved, covet, delectable thing, ( X great) delight, desire, goodly, lust, (be) pleasant (thing), precious (thing). (QV)

Covetousness is the beginning of the violation of all other commandments. The First Commandment lays the foundation for all obedience. The last attacks disobedience at its root. The basic form of the commandment prohibits an obsessive desire for any property belonging to another person. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 2)

Notice that this addresses one's heart and not simply one's actions. God's will concerns both the inner motivations as well as external behavior. Again, the concern is that we, who have received from God blessings such as house, spouse, workers, and cattle for ourselves, value and protect the blessings God has also given our neighbor. The same God has blessed us and our neighbor with His creaturely gifts. To honor God is to protect the gifts He gave others as well as being good stewards of the gifts He gave us. (LL)

The law of God forbids us not merely to take what belongs to others, but to desire to take it. It extends to the thoughts and feelings, requiring us to be content with such things as we have and can gain by doing right; loving Jehovah supremely and our fellow-men as we love ourselves, and pursuing that course which under the direction of His word, this love requires. (CB)

**20:18–21** Concludes the account of the giving of the Decalogue. The order of the narrative appears to be different from the order of events, since v. 18 is most likely a continuation of 19:25. On this reading, the proclamation of the Decalogue took place after Moses approached God (v. 21). Biblical writers often did not follow chronological sequence in their narratives for various literary reasons. The purpose of chronological displacement here may have been either (1) to keep the Decalogue distinct from the “Book of the Covenant” (24:7) that follows (20:22–23:19), or (2) to conclude the account with the formal institution of Moses' office as covenant mediator—or both. (CSB)

**20:19** See Heb 12:19–20. Israel requests a mediator to stand between them and God, a role fulfilled by Moses and subsequently by priests, prophets and kings—and ultimately by Jesus Christ. (CSB)

**20:20** *Do not fear*. Do not think that God's display of his majesty is intended simply to fill you with abject fear. He has come to enter into covenant with you as your heavenly King. (CSB)

*test*. God graciously gave the Israelites a tangible experience of His presence so they would take these commands seriously. Luth: “If He were to come to deal with us in His true person and

majesty, we would be lost. No one would believe it if He were to utter a word strong enough to resound from heaven to earth. No one would be able to endure a voice as great and powerful as the one on Mt. Sinai, when He spoke with trumpet blasts amid a great display of thunder, with the entire mountain on fire and enveloped in smoke, as is recorded in Ex. 19 and 20” (AE 22:308). (TLSB)

*not sin.* Their “fear” included saving faith and the personal, awesome experience at Sinai. Motivation for keeping the Law included not only respect for God as One who punishes sin but also simple trust in Him, which leads to joyful obedience. (TLSB)

**20:21** *thick darkness where God was.* A veil for the glory of God; the visible symbol of His majestic presence. (TLSB)

**20:1–21** God reminds His people that He graciously rescued them in the exodus, impresses them with His majesty and presence, and establishes a covenant with them to guide their service as a “kingdom of priests.” Human sin means that the Law, a reflection of God’s own righteousness, always condemns us. Therefore, the Lord comforts His people by reminding them first of His mercy toward them. He made them His people, a blessing He extends also to us (1Pt 2:9–10). • “You have this Law to see therein That you have not been free from sin But also that you clearly see How pure toward God life should be. Have mercy, Lord!” Amen. (LSB 581:11). (TLSB)

#### *Laws About Altars*

**22** And the LORD said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the people of Israel: ‘You have seen for yourselves that I have talked with you from heaven. **23** You shall not make gods of silver to be with me, nor shall you make for yourselves gods of gold. **24** An altar of earth you shall make for me and 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. **25** If you make me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stones, for if you wield your tool on it you profane it. **26** And you shall not go up by steps to my altar, that your nakedness be not exposed on it.’

**20:22–23:19** The stipulations of the “Book of the Covenant” (24:7), consisting largely of expansions on and expositions of the Ten Commandments. (CSB)

The laws and topics provided in the Book of the Covenant receive more detailed treatment in Lv and Dt. They appear to address the immediate issues of the people dwelling in Sinai. Later, the laws could more fully anticipate how the people would live in the Promised Land. Mel: “There are three general divisions of the Mosaic law: the moral laws, the ceremonial, and the civil or judicial laws.... The ceremonial laws of Moses and the civil laws are not commanded to the other nations, nor are they binding upon us. They were given to the people of Israel for that time in order that the political structure might continue for a definite period of time, so that there might be a specific place in which the Christ should be born and reveal Himself, be proclaimed, and become the sacrifice and openly complete the work of our eternal life.... The moral laws have been summarized by God in a remarkable way on one small table, which is called the Decalog [Ten Words]” (Chem, *LTh* 2:342). (TLSB)

**20:22–26** Initial stipulations governing Israel’s basic relationship with God (cf. v. 3). (CSB)

**20:22** *heaven.* God’s dwelling place. Even on “top of Mount Sinai” (19:20) God spoke from heaven. (CSB)

**20:23** See vv. 3–4. The contrast between the one true God “in heaven,” who “does whatever pleases him” (Ps 115:3), and idols of silver or gold, who can do nothing at all (see Ps 115:4–7; see also Ps 135:5–6, 15–17), is striking indeed. (CSB)

*make gods.* No image made by human hands was to depict God. He would give the people markers of His presence among them in the sanctuary (chs 25–26). Luther: “We believe and confess the one true, almighty, and eternal God. But [the evangelist John] states expressly that three distinct Persons dwell in that same single divine essence, namely, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The Father begets the Son from eternity, the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, etc. Therefore there are three distinct Persons, equal in glory and majesty; yet there is only one divine essence” (AE 22:5–6). (TLSB)

**20:24** *altar of earth.* Such an altar, with dimensions the same as those of the altar in the tabernacle (see 27:1), has been found in the excavated ruins of a small Iron Age (10th, or possibly 11th, century B.C.) Israelite temple at Arad in southern Palestine. (CSB)

Edifice of earth, stone, or other material upon which animals were sacrificed. Cf 38:1–2. (TLSB)

*I cause My name to be remembered.* As we meditate on God, His Word, and His works of salvation. (TLSB)

**20:25** *do not build it with hewn stones.* Many ancient altars of undressed stones (from various periods) have been found in Palestine. (CSB)

Carving stones for an altar verged on violating the First Commandment (v 4). Canaanite altars discovered at Ugarit were made with cut stones and steps. (TLSB)

*if...wield your tool...you profane.* For reasons not now clear, but perhaps related to pagan practices. (CSB)

**20:26** *steps.* The oldest stepped altar known in Palestine is at Megiddo and dates between 3000 and 2500 B.C. (CSB)

*nakedness benot exposed.* Men who ascended to such altars would expose their nakedness in the presence of God. Although Aaron and his descendants served at stepped altars (see Lev 9:22; Eze 43:17), they were instructed to wear linen undergarments (see 28:42–43; Lev 6:10; 16:3–4; Eze 44:17–18). (CSB)

Climbing steps increases exposure; the altar was to have a ramp instead. Respectful covering of one’s sexual organs implied deference to the One who created man and woman (cf Gn 9:22–23). Exposure of the sexual organs was disrespectful, esp in the presence of God, who had covered humankind (Gn 3:21). Priests were required to wear linen undergarments (Ex 28:42). (TLSB)

**20:22–26** Ch 20 marks the beginning of the Book of the Covenant (20:22–23:19), in which the Ten Commandments are explained and applied. Humans constantly run the risk of idolatry, making something or someone else “god” in their lives (cf Dt 4:15–20). Here God regulates worship, helping His people to receive His Word and to trust Him for salvation. To worship the God of the First Commandment is to worship the triune God, the Holy Trinity. • “The Lord, my God, be praised, My light, my life from heaven; My maker, who to me Has soul and body given; My Father, who will shield And keep me day by day And make each moment yield New blessings on my way.” Amen. (LSB 794:1) (TLSB)