

Ten Commandments

Ten Commandments, also called **Decalogue** (Greek: *deka logoi* ["10 words"]), list of religious precepts that, according to various passages in Exodus and Deuteronomy, were divinely revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai and were engraved on two tablets of stone. The Commandments are recorded virtually identically in Exodus 20:2–17 and Deuteronomy 5:6–21. The rendering in Exodus (New Revised Standard Version) appears as follows:



Moses and the Ten Commandments

Moses Showing the Tables of the Law to the People, oil painting by Rembrandt, 1659; in the Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin.

Courtesy of Gemaldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin - Preussischer Kulturbesitz

I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me.

You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.

Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—

you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.

Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

You shall not murder.

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

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

Traditions differ in numbering the Ten Commandments. In Judaism the prologue ("I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery") constitutes the first element and the prohibitions against false gods and idols the second. Medieval Roman tradition, accepted by Martin Luther, regards all these elements as one and preserves the number 10 by separating the prohibitions against coveting another's wife and coveting another's possessions. In the Greek Orthodox and Protestant Reformed traditions, the prologue and the prohibition against false gods are one commandment and the prohibition against idols is the second.



**Moses receiving the Ten
Commandments**

Moses receiving the Ten Commandments,
with his brother, Aaron, standing to his right
and Israelites waiting at the foot of the
mountain, miniature illuminated
manuscript, c. 1322.

The British Library (Public Domain)

Dating the Ten Commandments involves an interpretation of their purpose. Some scholars propose a date between the 16th and 13th centuries BCE because Exodus and Deuteronomy connect the Ten Commandments with Moses and the Sinai Covenant between Yahweh and Israel. For those who regard the Ten Commandments as an epitome of prophetic teachings, the date would be sometime after Amos and Hosea (after 750 BCE). If the Ten Commandments are simply a summary of the legal and priestly traditions of Israel, they belong to an even later period.

The Ten Commandments contain little that was new to the ancient world and reflect a morality common to the ancient Middle East. They are a description of the conditions accepted by the community of Israel in its relationship to

Yahweh. The differences found in Exodus and Deuteronomy indicate that the process of transmission from generation to generation brought with it modifications.

The Ten Commandments had no particular importance in Christian tradition until the 13th century, when they were incorporated into a manual of instruction for those coming to confess their sins. With the rise of Protestant churches, new manuals of instruction in the faith were made available and the Ten Commandments were incorporated into catechisms as a fundamental part of religious training, especially of the young.

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