



Section 2

PRIMARY SOURCE

The Ten Commandments

from *The New English Bible*

According to the Bible, God revealed the Ten Commandments to the Hebrew leader Moses at Mount Sinai. These commandments, which have been preserved in the Old Testament in Exodus 20: 1–17 and Deuteronomy 5: 6–21, established a code of ethical conduct that became the basis for the civil and religious laws of Judaism. How should people behave responsibly, according to the Ten Commandments?

The Lord came down upon the top of Mount Sinai and summoned Moses to the mountain-top, and Moses went up. The Lord said to Moses, “Go down; warn the people solemnly that they must not force their way through to the Lord to see him, or many of them will perish. Even the priests, who have access to the Lord, must hallow themselves, for fear that the Lord may break out against them.” Moses answered the Lord, “The people cannot come up Mount Sinai, because thou thyself didst solemnly warn us to set a barrier to the mountain and so to keep it holy.” The Lord therefore said to him, “Go down; then come up and bring Aaron with you, but let neither priests nor people force their way up to the Lord, for fear that he may break out against them.” So Moses went down to the people and spoke to them.

God spoke, and these were his words:

I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

You shall have no other god to set against me.

You shall not make a carved image for yourself nor the likeness of anything in the heavens above, or on the earth below, or in the waters under the earth.

You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous god. I punish the children for the sins of the fathers to the third and fourth generations of those who hate me. But I keep faith with thousands, with those who love me and keep my commandments.

You shall not make wrong use of the name of the Lord your God; the Lord will not leave unpunished the man who misuses his name.

Remember to keep the Sabbath day holy. You have six days to labour and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath of the Lord your God; that day you shall not do any work, you, your son or your daughter, your slave or your slave-girl, your cattle or the alien within your gates; for in six days

the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and on the seventh day he rested. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and declared it holy.

Honour your father and your mother, that you may live long in the land which the Lord your God is giving you.

You shall not commit murder.

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

You shall not give false evidence against your neighbour.

You shall not covet your neighbour’s house; you shall not covet your neighbour’s wife, his slave, his slave-girl, his ox, his [donkey], or anything that belongs to him.

When all the people saw how it thundered and the lightning flashed, when they heard the trumpet sound and saw the mountain smoking, they trembled and stood at a distance. “Speak to us yourself,” they said to Moses, “and we will listen; but if God speaks to us we shall die.” Moses answered, “Do not be afraid. God has come only to test you, so that the fear of him may remain with you and keep you from sin.”

from The New English Bible (Cambridge University Press, 1970), 81–87. Reprinted in Peter N. Stearns, ed., *Documents in World History*, vol. 1 (New York: HarperCollins, 1988), 26–27.

Discussion Questions

1. **Determining Main Ideas** How should the Hebrews act toward others?
2. **Categorizing** The commandments fall into two categories of conduct. What are they?
3. **Synthesizing** In what way do the Ten Commandments form a basis for civil law?