

The Ten Commandments Before Sinai

God spoke and wrote the Ten Commandments for all mankind. Though given through Israel, the Ten Commandments have operated from the beginning of the history of man. They have always declared the holy character of God and exposed man's moral failings.

Paul in his letter to the Romans, chapter 5, verses 12-14, wrote of sin occurring before the law. Genesis reveals sin before Sinai as a violation of the principles contained in the Ten Commandments. These principles existed before the Ten-Commandment law was written.

The First and Second Commandments

Basically, God's call to Adam and Eve to obey His instructions concerning the eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil touched the springs of worship. Satan, through the serpent, contended against the word of God. He wished to seduce man from his worship of God. Satan said, "Ye shall not surely die: for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." Genesis 3:4, 5. In their disobedience Adam and Eve placed Satan and self before God. God replied by thrusting man and woman out of the garden and thus confirming the Ten-Commandment principle, "Ye shall have no other gods before Me." This episode has its thrust and tragic result only when the first and second commands have force and effect.

The Third Commandment

After the catastrophic Flood, God gave a promise in the rainbow that He would never again destroy the world with a flood. Again Satan, this time through Nimrod, attacked the character of God. In Genesis 11:4 we read: "And they said, Go to, let us build us a city

and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." Pernicious doubt and unbelief produced the tower of Babel. Man defied God. If he could build a tower high enough, no future flood would swamp him, he assumed. "Let us make us a name," it reads. That is, we do not trust God: we will make ourselves secure. This blasphemed the name of God, and therefore offended the principles of the third commandment.

One by one the principles of the Ten appear in the story of Genesis. Each time those who flout them suffer punishment. The judgments passed on the ancient world have their authority from the transgression of God's holy Ten-Commandment law.

The Fourth Commandment

Many challenge the finding of the fourth commandment in Genesis. In other important areas such commands also are lacking. Where is the commandment to tithe and to offer sacrifices in Genesis? Yet Abraham and Jacob returned tithes and offered many sacrifices, when we have no record of command to do so. The practice shows the presence of the command. The seventh-day Sabbath has similar authority.

Others contend that no record of Sabbath keeping in Israel appears between the Exodus from Egypt and the falling of the manna.

A careful reading of chapters 13, 14, 15, of Exodus will give the reader the reason why. Israel received no test regarding work until chapter 16:4. Silence does not prove that the Israelites did not keep the Sabbath. In fact, Exodus 5:5 declares the anger of Pharaoh for making the people "rest" or "Sabbath" from their burdens. Here the Hebrew reads *Shabath*, the same word as in Genesis 2:1-3, and not the usual word for "rest." Surely if Moses called the people to *Shabath* before they escaped from Egypt, and then a month after leaving Egypt they were again, resting on the Sabbath day, we may logically conclude that they kept the Sabbath during the first month to the falling 'of the manna and also, probably, at least struggled to keep it in Egypt.

Some quote Nehemiah 9:14 to prove that the Sabbath came only at Mount Sinai, and not from creation. Yet the children of Israel were keeping it in response to God's will, at least some months before

Sinai as the foregoing shows, thus Nehemiah's record does not exclude prior obedience or knowledge. The text states that God came down and made known His holy Sabbath. The Hebrew word *yada* here has the sense of bringing to mind a thing already known. Exodus 16:4 records how God worked to lead Israel to obey His instructions.

Oftentimes the absence of a comment on a certain thing proves that it already operates. For instance, some point to the writings of the epistles and declare that Christians were not keeping the Sabbath because the epistles say little or nothing on Sabbath observance. Well, the same holds true for the books of Esther, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon, a total of 245 chapters with no mention of the Sabbath. A further 126 chapters in Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, with no mention, making 371 chapters in all. Would we contend then that Israel did not observe the Sabbath during the period of those books? Certainly not, because we often read in these books of the commandments of God, which include the Sabbath. Likewise, the epistles of the New Testament speak of the keeping of the commandments of God, which include the Sabbath.

The Rev. Mead Jones, a profound scholar and a Seventh Day Baptist, traced the name *Sabbath* through 108 ancient languages, showing its ancient origins and the common traditions of a large portion of mankind. This tradition finds its roots in the Genesis record.

The Fifth Commandment

When Ham called attention to his father lying naked and exposed, he violated the principle of the fifth commandment, dishonouring his father (Genesis 9:22).

The Sixth Commandment

Cain violated the sixth commandment when he slew Abel and became a murderer (Genesis 4:4-8).

The Seventh Commandment

The antediluvian age flouted the seventh commandment when the men took wives of all whom they desired (Genesis 6:2).

The Eighth Commandment

Adam and Eve broke the eighth commandment when they stole the fruit (Genesis 3:16).

The Ninth Commandment

Abraham and Isaac lied concerning their wives and broke the ninth commandment (Genesis 20:2; 26:9).

The Tenth Commandment

Eve coveted the fruit and shattered the tenth commandment. Other instances of covetousness occur in the Book of Genesis. (Genesis 3:1-6, etc.)

So all the written Ten Commandments find their roots in Genesis. Note that in each case punishment follows violation. Such texts as Genesis 26:5; Exodus 16:4; and Psalm 105:43-45 show that Abraham knew all the principles of the Decalogue. These texts bridge the gulf between Genesis and Exodus and show the universality of the Decalogue.

A study, therefore, of the Book of Genesis reveals how truly and effectively the Ten Commandments operated at the creation of man and continued from that point. That no listing such as occurs in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, or in Jesus' teachings and Paul's epistles appears in Genesis, does not mean that these commands did not govern the moral actions of the patriarchs. Quite the contrary. One by one they appear as a basis for knowing right from wrong, or for correct worship of God.

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