

The Ten Commandments Restated

In the Hebrew language, the translation of the terms “Ten Commandments” is literally “Ten Words” ([Exodus 34:28](#); [Deuteronomy 4:13](#)). In Greek, the translation of “Ten Words” is *deka logoi*, from which we get the English term “Decalogue.” This document known as “the Decalogue” is foundational to all the laws of the Bible. It is also foundational to the English common law and the laws of the United States. It was written on two tablets of stone, in accordance with the ancient custom of providing a written copy for the two parties involved in a treaty. It was not written by human hands, but by the finger of God ([Deuteronomy 9:10](#); [10:1-5](#)). The Decalogue was thus given to the Israelites so that they would learn to live as God’s people, in God’s special place (the Promised Land), under God’s rule, and serving a priestly function to other nations. It is a special document because it is the only legal document written directly by the LORD. The rest of the law was mediated to the Israelites through their leader, Moses.

The Ten Commandments were God’s gift to Israel and were first given on Mount Sinai when Israel was redeemed from bondage in Egypt. Total obedience to these laws was the means whereby Israel would become a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation” ([Exodus 19:6](#)). Therefore, in Deuteronomy, Moses restated the Ten Commandments on the plains of Moab to instruct the new generation of Israelites on what God required since the old generation had died out in the wilderness ([Deuteronomy 2:16](#)). To see our commentary on [Deuteronomy 2:16-23](#) [Click Here](#). This restatement of the covenant given at Mount Sinai reflects the event recorded in [Exodus 19](#) and [20](#), as well as the Abrahamic promises ([Genesis 12-15](#)) and Israel’s deliverance from Egypt ([Deuteronomy 5:6](#); [7:12](#)).

The Decalogue continues to be an important document. This is clear from the numerous citations in the New Testament ([Matthew 5](#); [19](#); [Mark 10](#); [Luke 18:20](#); [Romans 7:7-8](#); [Romans 13:9](#); and [Jas. 2:11](#)). In fact, the New Testament provides us with two key principles that sum up the essence of the Ten Commandments: love for God and love for our neighbors ([Matthew 22:36-40](#)). The first four commandments relate to humanity’s relationship with God. They could be summarized by saying “God gets to determine moral truth, not humans.” The last six commandments deal with human relationships. They could be summarized by saying “Respect the personal sovereignty of every other human.” Together, these form the basis for self-governance, which is the organizing principle advocated throughout scripture

as bringing the greatest blessing to humanity. People choosing to honor one another, working in mutual cooperation, contributing to rather extracting from others.