

Adultery

The Seventh Commandment, “You shall not commit adultery” (Exodus 20:14), was known and understood by Joseph.

“And it came to pass after these things that his master’s wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, ‘Lie with me.’ But he refused and said to his master’s wife, ‘Look, my master does not know what is with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand. There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?’” (Genesis 39:7-9).

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God also had warned Abimelech, king of Gerar, not to commit adultery with Sarah. “God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, ‘Indeed you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man’s wife’” (Genesis 20:3).

Theft

“You shall not steal,” the Eighth Commandment (Exodus 20:15), was apparently on Jacob’s mind when he discussed his wages with Laban.

“So my righteousness will answer for me in time to come, when the subject of my wages comes before you: every one that is not speckled and spotted among the goats, and brown among the lambs, will be considered stolen, if it is with me” (Genesis 30:33).

Lying and coveting

The Ninth and Tenth Commandments, “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor” and, “You shall not covet” (Exodus 20:16-17), have been breached ever since Eve saw and desired (coveted) the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam ate of it as well (Genesis 3:6), and then both of them justified their actions (verses 10-13). The result of their disobedience to God was that they were kicked out of the Garden of Eden.

Job also knew that deceit and covetousness were sins against God: “If I have walked with falsehood, or if my foot has hastened to deceit, let me be weighed on honest scales, that God may know my integrity” (Job 31:5-6). Later, in verses 9-11, Job said, “If my heart has been enticed by a woman, or if I have lurked at my neighbor’s door. ... that would be wickedness; yes, it would be iniquity deserving of judgment.”

In summary, the Ten Commandments were known before Moses, and they are still important laws for all peoples today. God gave His laws for our good (Deuteronomy 10:13). They are based on love and help us know how to show love to God and our fellow man (Romans 13:9-10). “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3).

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Were the Ten Commandments Around Before Moses?

Did these fundamental laws originate during Moses’ day? Or is there evidence that the Ten Commandments existed before the Old Covenant was initiated at Mount Sinai?

Many people are aware that God gave the Ten Commandments to Israel from Mount Sinai, as recorded in Exodus 20:1-17. This event occurred about two months after Israel left Egypt.

The question many wonder about is whether these commandments were known prior to this time, especially in light of Genesis 26:5: “Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws.”

Since Abraham obeyed God’s voice and kept His commandments hundreds of years before Moses, then surely those commandments must have been known before Mount Sinai. The Bible tells us that sin is breaking God’s law (1 John 3:4). The Bible refers to sin a number of times before the time of Moses (Genesis 4:7; 13:13; 18:20; 39:9; 42:22; 50:17; etc.), so God’s law must have been revealed, at least to some people. In fact, the Bible gives evidence that the Ten Commandments were known and were understood as being important.

Gods and idols

The First and Second Commandments state: “You shall have no other gods before Me [God]” and, “You shall not make for yourself a carved image ... you shall not bow down to them nor serve them” (Exodus 20:3-5).

Hundreds of years earlier God was working with the patriarch Jacob. After God spoke to Jacob, notice what he did with the idols that were among his household:

“Then God said to Jacob, ‘Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there; and make an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you fled from the face of Esau your brother.’ And Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, ‘Put away the foreign gods that are among you, purify yourselves, and change your garments. Then let us arise and go up to Bethel; and I will make an altar there to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me in the way which I have gone.’ So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods which were in their hands, and the

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earrings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the terebinth tree which was by Shechem” (Genesis 35:1-4).

So we see Jacob understood the importance of getting rid of idols and only worshipping the true God.

Profanity

The Third Commandment says, “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain” (Exodus 20:7).

It seems the patriarch Job lived before Moses, about the time of Isaac, according to the *Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary* quoting the historian Eusebius. Job was concerned that his children might have been taking God’s name in vain, and he knew that was wrong.

“So it was, when the days of feasting had run their course, that Job would send and sanctify them [his children], and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, ‘It may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.’ Thus Job did regularly” (Job 1:5).

The Sabbath

The Fourth Commandment tells us to “remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Exodus 20:8). To remember the Sabbath is to recall something that was established earlier. Notice Genesis 2:3: “Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.”

Interestingly, Israel was reminded to remember the Sabbath even before they came to Mount Sinai. This was when God gave them manna to eat.

“Then he [Moses] said to them, ‘This is what the LORD has said: “Tomorrow is a Sabbath rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD.” ... Then Moses said, ‘Eat that today, for today is a Sabbath to the LORD; today you will not find it [manna] in the field. Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will be none.’

“Now it happened that some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather, but they found none. And the LORD said to Moses, ‘How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My laws?’ (Exodus 16:23-28).

So even before they arrived at Mount Sinai, God expected the people to obey His commandments, including the Fourth Commandment.

Honor parents

The Fifth Commandment says to “honor your father and your mother” (Exodus 20:12). Jacob and Esau both had dishonored their parents, but Jacob finally did obey. “Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him away to Padan Aram to take himself a wife from there, and that as he blessed him he gave him a charge, saying, ‘You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan,’ and that Jacob had obeyed his father and his mother and had gone to Padan Aram” (Genesis 28:6-7).

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Murder

“You shall not murder” is the Sixth Commandment (Exodus 20:13). God told Cain he was to rule over and avoid sin, as anger was in Cain’s heart.

“So the LORD said to Cain, ‘Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.’ Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him” (Genesis 4:6-8). Cain’s anger led to the sin of murder.

After the Flood, people knew that God was against murder and demanded a penalty for it. “From the hand of every man’s brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed. For in the image of God He made man” (Genesis 9:5-6).