

Exodus 20: 1-3 – The Ten Commandments, part 1: “You shall have no other gods before me.”¹



Main point: God has made us, his people, his number one love and priority. Therefore, make God number one in your life.

Open with a short prayer, inviting God to teach us.

Background: The Ten Commandments come out of the famous story of Moses and the Hebrew people in Egypt, where they had been slaves for four hundred years. Every Hebrew man, every Hebrew woman, every Hebrew child was a slave. *How do you think life was for the Hebrews in Egypt?*

So God sends Moses to tell Pharaoh, the Egyptian king to let the Hebrew people go. After awful plagues, Pharaoh finally says, “OK, you can go!”

Who here has seen “The Ten Commandments” movie? There’s the great image in the movie, with Charlton Heston raising up his staff at the edge of the water ... How did the Hebrew people escape from Egypt? What miracle did God do to get them out?

God parted the Red Sea! And when the Egyptians tried to follow to get the Hebrews back, the seas flowed back in and the Egyptians were destroyed. Amazing show of God’s power and provision for his people.

Study: As we pick up the story in Exodus 19, Moses and the Israelites are now near Mount Sinai, and the story continues (**Exodus 19: 1-7**):

“There Israel encamped before the mountain, ³ while Moses went up to God. The Lord called to him out of the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: ⁴ ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. ⁵ Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine;⁶ and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.”

1. v. 4: *What does God tell the people that he did for them?*
 - a. Destroyed the Egyptians
 - b. Bore you on eagles’ wings
 - c. Brought you to myself
2. v. 5-6: *So how does God feel about these people, his people? What are they to him?*
 - a. A treasured possession among ALL the people
 - b. A kingdom of priests
 - c. A holy nation
3. v. 5: *What is the “if” the God sets?*
 - a. If you will obey my voice and keep my covenant
 - i. *What is a covenant?* A promise, a commitment, a contract

¹ Some material gratefully borrowed from Fellowship Monrovia: <https://madeforfellowship.com/>
© SpiritualEldercare.com

4. *How does that work in a relationship? What kinds of promises do you make in a relationship? Why?*
5. That's why the Ten Commandments can be called God's promise, a covenant with his people, a love letter.

Exodus 19 is one of the best love stories ever written. Israelites in slavery, captive, desperate for a breakthrough – and the love of their lives broke through. God says to Moses: Go tell my people, the ones I love: See what I did for you? See how I set you free? See my love in action, my passion, see me coming after you?

1. *I wonder what the Ten Commandments feel like to you? What do you think about them? Do they sound easy? Hard? Strict?*
 - a. Tempting to think about them as a set of rules, do's and don'ts. Let's find out more, starting with the first commandment.

Exodus 20: 1-3: And God spoke all these words, saying,

²“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

³“You shall have no other gods before me.

1. *v. 3: What's the first commandment?*
 - a. “Thou shalt have no other God before me.” *Why does God say this? What is the basis for him asking to be number one for them?*
 - i. *v. 2: I brought you out of the land of Egypt.*
 1. *What kinds of “gods” did they have in Egypt? In that culture, many gods.*
 - a. God says, “leave all those behind; they are not for you.”
 2. *Who made the first move in this relationship? God!*
 - ii. *Do you think God has a good argument for why they should love him first?*
 1. Yes! Not just some law, an arrogant God desiring worship. God says, I have displayed my love for you, now this is what it means for you to love me back, for me to draw you near and for you to know what it means to draw near. This is what it means: don't have any other gods.
 - iii. *Again, who made the first move? Who is number one to God?*
 1. We are! God says: “I loved you first, I loved you most, I love you best – this is how you love me back. I am priority, I am number 1, because you are My number 1.”
2. *I wonder what other kind of other gods could he mean? What sorts of things could we make number one in our lives? What do you think has been or is God's biggest competition in your life?*
 - a. Jobs, careers, spouse, children, money, prestige.... Sometimes easy for these to take priority over our relationship with God.
3. *What does it mean to put God first? What does that look like? [generate ideas]*
 - a. Spend time with God; Bible study, church; serve others; etc.

Summary of The Ten Commandments: A love letter! A call to *love*, not a burden of law. A beautiful invitation to relationship with God and each other. God makes the first move.

God says: You're not obeying me because *then* I'll love you; I've loved you first. Your obedience isn't to oblige me to love you back.

- Ask for any prayer requests for today.
- Close in prayer, naming people and needs listed.
- End with a song, e.g., first verse of Amazing Grace

The Ten Commandments

Exodus 19: 1-7: There Israel encamped before the mountain, ³ while Moses went up to God. The Lord called to him out of the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: ⁴ ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. ⁵ Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine;⁶ and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.”

Exodus 20: 1-17: And God spoke all these words, saying,
² “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.
³ “You shall have no other gods before me.
⁴ “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath ...
⁷ “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain
⁸ “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates....

¹² “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

¹³ “You shall not murder.

¹⁴ “You shall not commit adultery.

¹⁵ “You shall not steal.

¹⁶ “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

¹⁷ “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.”