

# Ten Commandments

Moses holding the tablets of the Ten Commandments. Eastern Orthodox icon from the 1590s.

*Moses smashing the Tables of the Law* is a painting by [Rembrandt van Rijn](#)

The **Ten Commandments** are a set of rules or laws. The [Bible](#) says that God gave them to the people of [Israel](#).<sup>[1]</sup> The commandments exist in different versions. One version can be found in the [Book of Exodus](#) of the [Bible](#). Another version can be found in the [Book of Deuteronomy](#). In the Book of Exodus, the mountain where they were given is called [Mount Sinai](#), the Book of Deuteronomy talks about Mount Horeb (the same Mount Horeb where God called Moses from the burning bush, Exodus 3:1-3).<sup>[2]</sup> Both are probably names for the same mountain. The laws were written on stone tablets. These laws are important for [Judaism](#) and [Christianity](#). Countries which follow those religions often have some of the commandments as part of their [Civil laws](#).

Sometimes these rules are also called **Decalogue** (from [Greek](#), can be translated as *ten statements*). The name decalogue first occurs in the [Septuagint](#). The Israelites received the commandments after they had left [Egypt](#) during the reign of [Pharaoh Thutmose III](#). There are different [texts](#) talking about the commandments. Most of them are in the [Bible](#): The Book of [Exodus](#), Chapter 20 and the book of [Deuteronomy](#), Chapter 5. The [Qu'ran](#) mentions the tablets but does not list exactly the same commandments. For instance Quran 17:23-39 began with worshipping God alone and honouring your parents.

**The Exodus version** (from the [English Standard Version](#) of the Bible)<sup>[3]</sup>

1. "You shall have no other gods before me."
2. "You shall not make yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God are only worthy of worship, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments."
3. "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain."
4. "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, 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, or your servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy."

5. "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you."
6. "You shall not murder."
7. "You shall not commit adultery."
8. "You shall not steal."
9. "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor."
10. "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."

## Ten Commandments in the Old Testament Torah

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The Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy Chapter 5: verses 1-22 [New King James Version](#)<sup>[4]</sup>

5 And Moses called all Israel, and said to them: "Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your hearing today, that you may learn them and be careful to observe them. <sup>2</sup> The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. <sup>3</sup> The Lord did not make this covenant with our fathers, but with us, those who *are* here today, all of us who *are* alive. <sup>4</sup> The Lord talked with you face to face on the mountain from the midst of the fire. <sup>5</sup> I stood between the Lord and you at that time, to declare to you the word of the Lord; for you were afraid because of the fire, and you did not go up the mountain. *He* said:

<sup>6</sup> 'I *am* the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

<sup>7</sup> 'You shall have no other gods before Me.

<sup>8</sup> 'You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness *of anything* that *is* in heaven above, or that *is* in the earth beneath, or that *is* in the water under the earth; <sup>9</sup> you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth *generations* of those who hate Me, <sup>10</sup> but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

<sup>11</sup> 'You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold *him* guiltless who takes His name in vain.

<sup>12</sup> 'Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. <sup>13</sup> Six days you shall labor and do all your work, <sup>14</sup> but the seventh day *is* the Sabbath of the Lord your God. *In it* you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female

servant, nor your ox, nor your donkey, nor any of your cattle, nor your stranger who *is* within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. <sup>15</sup> And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

<sup>16</sup> 'Honor your father and your mother, as the Lord your God has commanded you, that your days may be long, and that it may be well with you in the land which the Lord your God is giving you.

<sup>17</sup> 'You shall not murder.

<sup>18</sup> 'You shall not commit adultery with somebody's spouse.

<sup>19</sup> 'You shall not steal.

<sup>20</sup> 'You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

<sup>21</sup> 'You shall not covet your neighbor's wife; and you shall not desire your neighbor's house, his field, his male servant, his female servant, his ox, his donkey, or anything that *is* your neighbor's.'

<sup>22</sup> "These words the Lord spoke to all your assembly, in the mountain from the midst of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness, with a loud voice; and He added no more. And He wrote them on two tablets of stone and gave them to me.

## Differences in teachings and interpretation

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These commandments are translated from ancient [Hebrew](#) to [Basic English](#), so the exact words chosen may not mean to us exactly what they meant to the Hebrews. There are different interpretations of these commandments:

### Images

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A stained glass image of Protestant leaders, including Martin Luther

The [Roman Catholics](#) understanding of the commandment to not make "any image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above" means that "likenesses" may be built and used, as long as the object is not [worshipped](#) as an [idol](#).

The [Eastern Orthodox Church](#) has a very similar position. Eastern Orthodoxy teaches that the [incarnation](#) of an [invisible](#) God as a visible human, Jesus, makes it alright to use flat images in worship (see [Iconoclasm](#)).

Most other Christians allow statues of religious figures, provided there is no "veneration" of them. They are not commonly found in [Protestant](#) Churches, but may be found nearby or in Museums. Historical figures or busts may be used for educational purposes. Stained glass windows may contain depictions of honored historical or Biblical persons.

[Judaism](#) in its various forms usually takes a position somewhere between the [Protestant](#) view and that of [Islam](#). Synagogues would not have any statues in them. Images of God are forbidden anywhere.

[Islam](#) forbids any images whatsoever of [Allah](#) (God) or persons, including [Mohammad](#). That is why their buildings are generally decorated with [calligraphy](#) but never [depictions](#) of living beings.

[Jehovah's Witnesses](#) criticize the use of all of the above, as well as the use of the cross.

The [Amish](#) forbid any sort of image, such as [photos](#).

## Using God's name improperly

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This can be understood to mean [cursing](#) or using [profanity](#) which includes the name of God.

Many languages have expressions of anger or dismay that include the word "God". In addition, many times people "swear to God" to try to convince others they are telling the truth. Another offense might be to say that "God told me" to do something when He didn't. The actual name of God in the Old Testament was YHWH, sometimes pronounced Yahweh or Jehovah. Pious Jews refrain from using this name or even the word God, for which they substitute G\_d. This is to avoid using God's name in a way that might break this commandment.

Another belief is that the original text translates to "Do not carry the Name of the LORD in vain." This means to not do evil in the Name of God.

## Sabbath day

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*Main articles: [Sabbath](#) and [Shabbat](#)*

Jews honor the Sabbath (*Shabbat*) from sundown on Friday until the appearance of three stars in the sky on Saturday night, the seventh day of the week on the [Jewish calendar](#).

In the [New Testament](#) Jesus did things that made the Sabbath command different from the other nine. Jesus seemed to reduce its demands, unlike

some other commandments where he made them stronger. Jesus was often criticized for healing on the Sabbath or doing other things. He said that "the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath". Doing good on the Sabbath seemed to be praised and practiced by Jesus. In that way he disobeyed some of the strict interpretations that had become common in His day.

Most [Christians](#) honor the Sabbath on Sunday to remember the [Resurrection](#) of Jesus on the first day of the week on the Jewish calendar.

Some conservative Christians are "Sabbatarians" (most of these follow the [Reformed traditions](#)). Sabbatharians think the first day of the week or *Lord's Day* is the new Sabbath, because the 4th commandment has never been removed. They also say that the Sabbath law was given [when the world was made](#). It came before the ten commandments were given.

Others believe that the Sabbath remains as a day of rest on Saturday, while Sunday as a day of worship, in reference to Acts 20:7: the disciples came together on the first day of the week to break bread and to hear the preaching of the apostle Paul. Also, Jesus appeared to his followers on the "first day of the week" while they were in hiding.

The [Seventh-day Adventist Church](#), and some others, believe that the custom of meeting for worship on Sunday originated in [paganism](#), specifically [Sol Invictus](#) and Mithraism (in which [sun god](#) worship took place on Sunday). Instead, Adventists keep Saturday as the Sabbath as a memorial to God's work of creation<sup>[5]</sup> believing that none of the Ten Commandments can ever be destroyed.<sup>[6]</sup> Seventh-day Sabbatharians claim that the seventh day Sabbath was kept by the majority of Christian groups until the [2nd and 3rd century](#), but because of opposition to Judaism after the [Jewish-Roman wars](#), the original custom was gradually replaced by Sunday as the day of worship.

There are also some Christians who believe the Sabbath is still Friday sundown to Saturday sundown, but that you don't need to be religious about it. They find no evidence that the Commandment changed and they still view it as a day of rest from labor. They agree with Jesus's teaching that it's lawful to do good on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:12) and that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath (Mark 2:7). They believe the use of Acts 20:7 is a misinterpretation, as the Sabbath isn't about fellowship. In Acts 2 it discusses how the Christians gathered in their homes, streets, and the temple every day for the breaking of bread, which would make the Sabbath every day if the Sabbath was about gathering.

## Married relations

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To "be false to the married relation", called [adultery](#), is when a married person has [sexual relations](#) with a person other than his or her spouse. Having sex outside of marriage is [fornication](#) and is also sin. It is condemned

in other places in the Bible,<sup>[7]</sup> but not specifically in the Ten Commandments. Jesus taught his audience that the outward act of adultery does not happen apart from sins of the heart: "From within people, from their hearts, come evil thoughts, unchastity, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, licentiousness, envy, [blasphemy](#), arrogance, folly. All these evils come from within and they defile."<sup>[8]</sup> In The New Testament Jesus says "But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart."<sup>[9]</sup>

## Killing or murder

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There are different [translations](#) of this commandment; the Hebrew words אל תרצח are translated either as "thou shalt not kill" or "thou shalt not [murder](#)". Older Protestant translations of the Bible, those based on the [Vulgate](#) and Roman Catholic translations usually translate it "Thou shalt not [kill](#)". The [Catholic Church](#) believes that endangerment of human life or safety is a mortal sin that breaks The Fifth Commandment. Furthermore, the Catholic Church does not believe in a difference between murder and manslaughter the way the law does. With the exceptions of killing in self-defense (a form of manslaughter in many nations' laws) and killing in war, the Catholic Church believes all other forms of killing or attempting to kill violate The Fifth Commandment. Unsafe driving could also lead to unintentional killing. Jewish and newer Protestant versions tend to use "You shall not [murder](#)". There are different opinions as to which translation is more faithful to the original.

The many examples in the Old Testament of killing sanctioned by God, are quoted in defense of the view that "murder" is more accurate. Furthermore, the Hebrew word for "kill" is "הרג" - "*harog*", while the Hebrew word for "murder" is "רצח" - "*retzach*", which is found in the Ten Commandments "לא תרצח" - "*lo tirtzach*".

## Stealing

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Many [theologians](#) (such as German Old Testament scholar [Albrecht Alt](#):: *Das Verbot des Diebstahls im Dekalog* (1953)) suggest that the commandment "you shall not steal" was originally intended against stealing people—abductions and [slavery](#). This would be the same as the Jewish interpretation of the statement as "you shall not kidnap". Civil laws in most countries list many types of stealing. These include [burglary](#), [embezzlement](#), [looting](#), [robbery](#), [shoplifting](#) or [fraud](#). The penalties depend on the value of the thing stolen, and if violence was used to take it.

In some places stealing horses brought a death penalty. That is because it could cause danger or even death to the horse's owner who could no longer do necessary travel. [Poaching](#) is the illegal killing of wild animals. Especially in modern times, money is often stolen by trickery or keeping false bank or



debt records. In the 21st century this can be done using computers. This is called "[White-collar crime](#)".

Some societies have attempted to say that no property is "private" but everything belongs to the whole society. If this were ever put in practice, it would make stealing impossible, but it has not been fully practiced anywhere.

## False witness

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To "give false witness" would include [lying](#) in court which is called [perjury](#). Telling false [gossip](#) which harms someone is similar. Some think this commandment includes all lying. It is to knowingly give any false statement. Others allow a [white lie](#). Some Jewish teachers said that not all lying is false witness (perjury). They say that lying is sometimes "permissible or even commendable". This would include changing the truth to be modest or to avoid harm to someone.<sup>[10]</sup> [Saint Augustine](#) believed that some lies could be pardoned, and that there were in fact occasions when lying would be the right thing to do.<sup>[11]</sup> He says that lies which hurt nobody and benefit someone may be forgiven. These need to be used with great caution, however.

## Different numbering

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The Bible does not number the commandments. Different religious groups have numbered them in different ways. The Jews, followed by Christian [Protestants](#), end the first commandment with "You are to have no other gods but me." as above. [Catholics](#) and [Lutherans](#) end the first commandment at "I will have mercy through a thousand generations on those who have love for me and keep my laws." and separate in their last two commandments the desire for a man's wife from the desire for other things he owns.

The commandments passage in Exodus has more than ten important statements, there are 14 or 15 in all. While the Bible itself gives the count as "10", using the Hebrew phrase *'aseret had'varim*—translated as *the 10 words, statements or things*, this phrase does not appear in the passages usually presented as being "the Ten Commandments".<sup>[12]</sup> Various religions divide the commandments differently. The table below shows those differences.

Division of the Ten Commandments by religion/denomination

Commandment	Jewish Orthodox	Lutheran**, Roman Catholic***	Most other Christians
I am the Lord your God	1		preface
You shall have no other gods before me	2	1	1

You shall not make for yourself an idol and worship it		2		2
You shall not make wrongful use of the name of your God	3	3	2	3
Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy	4	4	3	4
Honor your Father and Mother	5	5	4	5
You shall not murder*	6	6	5	6
You shall not commit adultery with somebody's spouse	7	7	6	7
You shall not steal	8	8	7	8
You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor	9	9	8	9
You shall not covet your neighbor's house			9	
You shall not covet your neighbor's wife	10	10	10	10

Notes:

- \* The [Roman Catholic Church](#) uses the translation 'kill' (less specific than 'murder').<sup>[13]</sup>
- \*\* Some [Lutheran](#) churches use a slightly different division of the Ninth and Tenth Commandments (9. You shall not covet your neighbor's *house*; 10. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his workers, or his cattle, or anything that is your neighbor's).<sup>[14]</sup>
- \*\*\* The Roman Catholic Church combine the original 2nd commandment with the 1st commandment They change the numbers of the 3rd to 9th commandment into 2nd to 8th. They divide the 10th commandment into two.

## Use in Christian Worship

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In some churches the Ten Commandments are read as part of the worship service. This is usually followed by a prayer asking for forgiveness. Sometimes in place of the longer reading, the summary of the law given by Jesus is used. *You shall love the Lord the God with all your heart, and your neighbor as yourself.*<sup>[15]</sup> The first part is thought to summarize the first 5 commandments, and the last part the last 5 commandments. Thus the duty to both God and other people is stated.



## Other religions

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In general, religions other than those mentioned (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) do not recognise the Ten Commandments as [ethical standards](#). Many of them ([Buddhism](#), [Hinduism](#), [Jainism](#), etc.) have similar laws or principles though.<sup>[16]</sup> In the [atheist Soviet Union](#) the "[Moral Code of the Builder of Communism](#)" was a set of rules that resembled the Ten Commandments.

Comparison between the Ten Commandments and the Buddhist Five Precepts<sup>[17]</sup>

### Ten Commandments

I am the Lord your God  
You shall have no other gods  
before me  
You shall not make for  
yourself an idol  
You shall not make wrongful  
use of the name of your God  
Remember the Sabbath and  
keep it holy  
Honor your Father and  
Mother  
You shall not murder  
You shall not commit  
adultery  
You shall not covet your  
neighbor's wife  
You shall not steal  
You shall not covet your  
neighbor's house  
You shall not bear false  
witness against your  
neighbor

### Buddhist Five Precepts

Buddhists worship their parents as gods.  
abstain from killing persons or animals.  
  
abstain from sexual misconduct  
  
abstain from taking what is not given (e.g.  
stealing, displacements that may cause  
misunderstandings)  
  
abstain from bad speech (e.g. telling lies,  
hurting words, deceiving, manipulating)  
  
abstain from intoxicating drugs and drinks  
which lead to carelessness

## The Ritual Decalogue

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The "Ten Commandments" usually means the list mentioned in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. Another set of commandments is given in Exodus 34. A story starts in Exodus 31:18. There the stones with the commandments written on them are created. Exodus 32:19 tells how the

stones are broken. The commandments in Exodus 34 are sometimes called "Ritual Decalogue". That is because they are about [religious rituals](#) and not moral commands.

[Johann Wolfgang von Goethe](#) and some others believed that the book of Exodus is a combination of several different texts. These people thought that the commandments in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 show a later set of Ten Commandments. They say that the ten ritual commandments in Exodus 34 were the original Ten Commandments. They say that the moral ones came later.

## Influence

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[Picture of a large stone monument displaying the ten commandments with the Texas State Capitol in Austin in the background. The picture was part of a news release Wednesday, March second, 2005, by then Attorney General Abbott.](#)

Stone monument of the Ten Commandments on display at the State Capitol in [Austin, Texas](#)

The commandments have influenced Jewish [ethics](#) and [law](#) and, through [Judaism](#) and [Christianity](#), Western [ethics](#) and [law](#) since the [Roman Empire](#).<sup>[18]</sup> Historically monuments containing the Commandments have been placed outside courts of law. In the early 21st century some have been challenged or removed as a violation of freedom of religion.<sup>[19]</sup>

Christians disagree somewhat as to the purpose of the commandments. In the [Sermon on the Mount](#), Jesus states that He came to "fulfill" the Law rather than destroy it. He reinforces the commands about murder and adultery. He also says that the righteousness of His followers must be higher than that of the "scribes and pharisees". They were very strict in observing the Ten Commandments.

[Saint Paul](#), in his letter to the [Roman Christians](#), says the purpose of the Law is to show us how sinful we are. It acts as a "schoolmaster" to bring us to [Christ](#) for [salvation](#). The leaders of the [Reformation](#) said that this means that keeping the Ten Commandments could not make us holy in God's eyes. Only [faith](#) in Jesus could do that. However, after finding salvation through faith, most of the reformers said we should obey the law. Some extreme reformers said we could break them since only our faith mattered, not our actions. This teaching is called "Antinomianism" (against the law).

Some modern Christians say that today our only law is the law of love. Others say that the "moral" law of the Old Testament still applies to Christians today. They say that all of the Ten Commandments are repeated somewhere in the [New Testament](#) books.

## In the arts

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### Movies

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There are two famous movies called *The Ten Commandments*. They both were directed by [Cecil B. DeMille](#). The first was a silent movie in 1923, and the second was made in 1956. The 1956 movie starred [Charlton Heston](#) as Moses, and was the biggest money making movie of that year.

### In animation

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In the anime series Seven Deadly Sins, a Japanese manga and anime by mangaka Nakaba Suzuki, there is a group of characters called the Ten Commandments. These individuals all possess a title and supernatural ability named after each commandment.

## References

[[change](#) | [change source](#)]

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5. [↑](#) [Genesis 2:1-3](#), [Exodus 20:8-11](#), [Exodus 16:23, 29-30](#)
6. [↑](#) [Matthew 5:17-19](#), [Exodus 31:16](#)
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13. [↑](#) "[Catechism of Catholic Church](#)"., also see [Killing or murder](#)
14. [↑](#) Catechism Christian Doctrine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland Church Council Helsinki 2000) [[1](#)][PDF](#) (126 [KiB](#))
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18. [↑](#) Coogan, Michael (2014). *The Ten Commandments; A Short History of an Ancient Text*. Yale University Press. ISBN 978-0300178715.
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- [The ten Commandments, at the Website of the Vatican](#)

## More reading

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