

# The Ten Commandments: Living For God Living with Each Other

## Getting A Feel for Context

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### Introduction

Since 1973, the 1956 Cecil B. DeMille classic film *The Ten Commandments*, is shown on network television across the United States of America. Replicas of the commandments are the centers of controversies over their display in municipal buildings. And beginning around the 16th century, they have been associated with Anglican worship. The Ten Commandments are all around us, but what do they mean, and is there a way they can be useful in informing our faith today? In this session, we are introduced to the Ten Commandments' Biblical context, an essential step in understanding them. We'll also look at how our chief worship and theological resources, The Book of Common Prayer and The Hymnal, give present-day importance for them in our spiritual lives.

### Bible Study: Reading for Context

The first and most essential step when studying a Bible passage is to get a feel for context. It helps to get a feel for a book, the chapters, and the verses around the central verses one will study. Though we will spend most of our time looking at Exodus 20:1-17, we can get a fuller of the action by reading about the events and interactions that lead up to our main Scripture. Sometimes, outlining a passage helps one see the Scriptural context more clearly. I made an outline as an example. The scriptures are hyperlinked to a web browser for convenience.

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<a href="#">Exodus 19:1-6</a>	Three months after the children of Israel flee Egypt, they have arrived at the base of Mt. Sinai.
<a href="#">Exodus 19:7-25</a>	God wants to be known and seen amongst the people, with boundaries established to prepare the people for an encounter with God.
<a href="#">Exodus 20:1-11</a>	Relating to God
<a href="#">Exodus 20:12-17</a>	Relating to One Another
<a href="#">Exodus 20:18-21</a>	The Children of Israel react to what they have seen and heard; Moses takes on the role as spokesperson for God.
<a href="#">Exodus 20:22-26</a>	Emerging details of what the God of Israel requires for worship.

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**What are your thoughts or impressions of the Ten Commandments as you begin this study?**

**As you read for context, what types of historical, geographical, or theological things may help you understand The Ten Commandments?**

**Perhaps artistic representation can help you think about Scriptural context. Consider this wood engraving from Gustave Doré's illustrations for *La Grande Bible de Tours*.**

### THE GIVING OF THE LAW UPON MOUNT SINAI



And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled. Exodus 19:16 *King James Version*

GUSTAVE DORÉ (1832–1883).

David Lang, *The Accordance Gallery of Bible Art*, Accordance electronic ed. (Altamonte Springs: OakTree Software, 2006), paragraph 116.

## Worship Resources

The Book of Common Prayer sets the standard for our common worship and articulates some of our understanding of God. In worship, we are summoned to the Mount of God. We commune with God, who is shrouded in mystery and speaks in rumblings, yet desires to be known. Immediately after the Ten Commandments are given, the worshipping identity of the Children of Israel is addressed. The Ten Commandments can inform our worship and understanding today.

**How does the Outline of the Faith characterize the Ten Commandments on [pages 847-848](#) of the Book of Common Prayer?**

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“The Ten Commandments were given to *define* our relationship with God and our neighbors. . .since we do not fully obey them, we *see more clearly* our sin and our need for redemption.” (emphasis added)

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**How does the Book of Common Prayer make use of the Ten Commandments (also called The Decalogue) in The Penitential Order on [pages 317-321](#) and [pages 335-353](#) of the Book of Common Prayer? What may this tell us about the nature of corporate and personal prayer and self-reflection?**

**Consider this poetry set to music in The Hymnal 1982. Can it offer another way to reflect on the Ten Commandments?**

Hymn 431 *The stars declare his glory*

So shine the Lord's commandments  
to make the simple wise;  
more sweet than honey to the taste,  
more rich than any prize,  
a law of love within our hearts  
a light before our eyes

Timothy Dudley-Smith (b.1926)