

## The Ten Commandments:

In the Book of Exodus it tells how, after the Jewish people had escaped from slavery in Egypt and had begun to travel through the desert, God gathered them together at the bottom of Mount Sinai and spoke to them - giving them a list of rules. A little later, God called Moses to go up the mountain, where He gave him a copy of the commandments, carved onto two flat pieces of stone (they are known as *tablets of stone*). Here's what it says in the *Book of Exodus: Chapter 20, verses 1-17*:

And God spoke all these words:

I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods but Me.

You shall not make for yourself an idol in the likeness of what is in the heavens above, or on the earth below, or in the waters under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a demanding God, visiting the guilt of the fathers upon the children, upon the third and fourth generations of those who reject Me, but showing kindness to the thousands of generations of those who love Me and keep My commandments.

You shall not swear falsely by the name of the Lord your God; for the Lord your God will not excuse anyone who uses His name falsely.

Remember the sabbath day and keep it holy. You have six days to labour and do all your work but the seventh day shall be a sabbath for the Lord your God. ON that day you shall not do any work - neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your cattle, nor the stranger who lives in your home. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth and sea and all that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and made it holy.

Honour your father and your mother so that you will live long on the land that the Lord your God has given you.

You shall not murder.

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.

You shall not covet your neighbour's house; you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or his male or female slave, or his ox or his ass or anything that is your neighbour's.

This list of rules is usually called **The Ten Commandments**; in Judaism they are usually called **The Ten Statements**.

Actually, there are more than 10 commandments in the list - **Discuss this with your partner or group. How many commandments can you find in the list?**

- Which commandments are about how people should behave towards God and which are about how people should behave towards each other?
- Which commandments say what people **must** do and which say what people **must not do**.

Different faith groups split the text into 10 rules in different ways. For example:

**Judaism** numbers the first 4 commandments like this:

1. *I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.*
2. *You shall have no other gods but Me. You shall not make for yourself an idol .....*
3. *You shall not swear falsely by the name of the Lord your God; for the Lord your God will not excuse anyone who uses His name falsely.*
4. *Remember the sabbath day and keep it holy....*

**Anglican Christianity** numbers them like this:

1. *I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods but Me.*
2. *You shall not make for yourself an idol ....*
3. *You shall not swear falsely by the name of the Lord your God; for the Lord your God will not excuse anyone who uses His name falsely.*
4. *Remember the sabbath day and keep it holy ...*

..and **Catholic Christianity** numbers them like this:

1. *I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods but Me. You shall not make for yourself an idol ...*
2. *You shall not swear falsely by the name of the Lord your God; for the Lord your God will not excuse anyone who uses His name falsely.*
3. *Remember the sabbath day and keep it holy....*
4. *Honour your father and your mother so that you will live long on the land that the Lord your God has given you.*

**Talk with your partner or group: How would you choose to divide this text into 10 commandments?**

The wording of the 10 commandments is not exactly the same in different books - here is an example of one of the commandments as it has been printed in a variety of different bibles and prayer books:

- *You shall not use the name of the Lord your God falsely, for the Lord will not excuse anyone who uses his name falsely.*
- *You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.*
- *Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.*
- *You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.*

**Talk with your partner or group: Do these different versions all mean the same thing? Can you think of a reason why they are all different?**

## Teachers' Notes

The intention of this worksheet is to help children develop their knowledge and understanding of the 10 Commandments which are culturally important in Judaism and Christianity and also across much of western society. The suggested activities are discussive rather than written.

The section dealing with different numbering of the commandments centres on the idea that listing rules is not sufficient- people have to come to agreements about the meanings and intentions of those rules - and that they may not all come to the same conclusions does not necessarily invalidate the rules.

The section dealing with different version of the same commandment is based on the impossibility of making exact meaning for meaning translations from one language to another. It's worth thinking about why both Judaism and Islam have a strong preference for reading their scriptures in the original languages.

The giving and receiving of the Ten Commandments is a key moment in the Jewish story. According to Exodus (in Chapter 20) the Israelites, having escaped from slavery in Egypt, were 3 months into their journey through the desert when God instructed Moses to call the people together at the foot of Mount Sinai, and there, God spoke to them so that everyone could hear the words. Interestingly, in the original Hebrew the pronoun *you* is always given in the singular form, implying that God was talking to each person as an individual.

This is the first time in Torah that God sets rules for the whole community and is seen as a community-binding event. This is seen as the point when Judaism fulfils its development as possibly the earliest form of *ethical monotheism* - the idea that there is a single deity who is the source of the standard of morality and ethics, the idea being amplified by the ethical standard being given at the same time to a community and to each individual member of that community.

The connected story of the tablets of stone does not occur until slightly later in the story (in Exodus, Chapter 31-2).