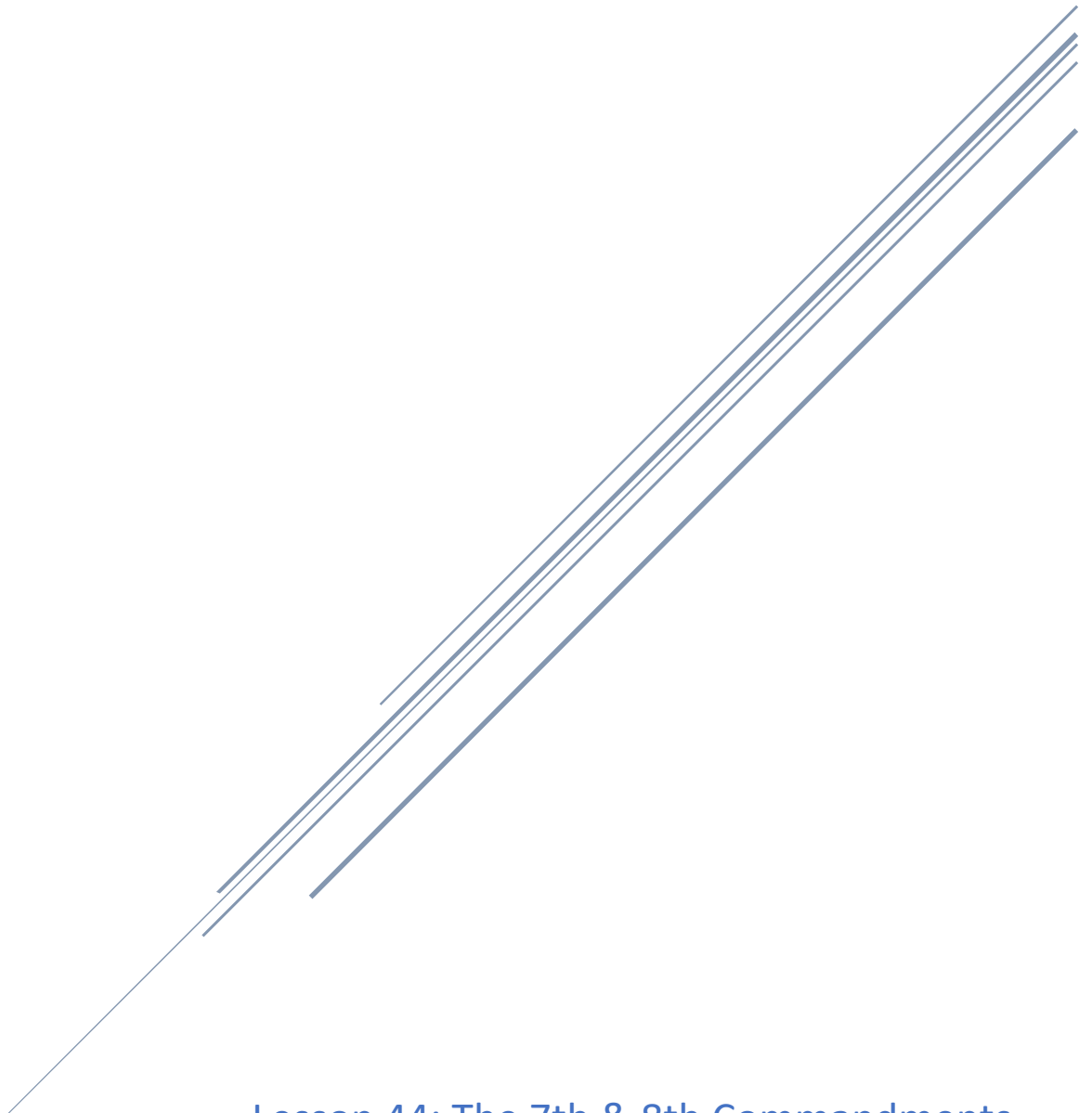


# THE KINGDOM, THE BIBLE, & US

Understanding the Bible's story, Jesus' importance, & Our place in God's plan



Lesson 44: The 7th & 8th Commandments  
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## Introduction

In this lesson we examine the Seventh and the Eight Commandments: do not commit adultery and do not steal.

Remember the first four commandments governed a person's relation to God. No other gods besides the one true God, make no image of God and worship it, do not misuse God's name, and keep the Sabbath day holy to the Lord.

The last six govern a person's relation to their neighbor (fellow human). We have examined the fifth, honor father and mother, and the sixth, do not murder.

God wanted Israel to worship Him in only the ways that truly honor Him. God called for complete devotion to Him. Next, God also wanted Israel to treat each other in ways that honor God too.

How a person treats another person can be a good picture of how healthy their relationship is with God. A person cannot say they love God and yet hate people around them. The reason is every person is an image bearer of God. We cannot say we love God and hate His image bearers around us.

To truly love God, worship Him, and seek to honor Him means we will also be careful to treat people in a way that proves we love God and want to honor Him.

Let's now look at the next two commandments.

## The Seventh Commandment: Do not Commit Adultery

### **Exodus 20:14**

The Hebrew behind the English word *adultery* is used in the Old Testament two ways. One way it is used is in reference to literal adultery. This is when a person who is married and has sexual relations with another who is not their spouse. The Jews also included within this definition a person who was betrothed (engaged) to be married.

There is another Hebrew word for sexual immorality outside of the marriage covenant, but this word in the Seventh Commandment is specifically referring to a violation of the marriage covenant due to sexual infidelity.

The second way this word is used in the Old Testament is in reference to *spiritual* adultery. At times God speaks of Israel as committing adultery against Him when they are amid sinful living. Jeremiah 3:6-9 for example contains a charge from God against sinful Israel in terms of marriage and adultery.

<sup>6</sup>The Lord said to me in the days of King Josiah: “Have you seen what she did, that faithless one, Israel, how she went up on every high hill and under every green tree, and there played the whore? <sup>7</sup> And I thought, ‘After she has done all this she will return to me,’ but she did not return, and her treacherous sister Judah saw it. <sup>8</sup> She saw that for all the adulteries of that faithless one, Israel, I had sent her away with a decree of divorce. Yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but she too went and played the whore. <sup>9</sup> Because she took her whoredom lightly, she polluted the land, committing adultery with stone and tree.

Notice with the underlined words God speaks of Israel and Judah as committing adultery against Him and being faithless. This is how God views His relationship to His covenant people. It such an offense to God when His people go off into sin that God refers to it as marital adultery, a violation of the marriage covenant between a husband and wife.

In verse nine God says they committed adultery, “with stone and tree.”

What do you think *with stone and tree* means?

God said Israel was running off with another lover, the foreign gods and idols of the other nations. God viewed this as adultery against Him by His people.

Here are some other verses that show how strong of an offense God viewed adultery in Israel.

“If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbor, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely **be put to death**” (Leviticus 20:10).

If a man is found lying with the wife of another man, **both of them shall die**, the man who lay with the woman, and the woman. So you shall purge the evil from Israel (Deuteronomy 22:22).

Notice in Deuteronomy 22:22 God says by killing the adulterer and adulteress, Israel will *purge the evil* out of their land.

Why do you think God was this strict about adultery?

Adultery is an act between two people, how could adultery be bad for an entire society?

Like we saw with the fifth commandment concerning honoring parents, God was concerned to uphold the health of the family in the nation of Israel. We concluded that societies whose children dishonor parents begin to see a breakdown in the family unit. Unhealth families lead to unhealthy societies. Societies are based on people and people are raised in families. They are all connected.

Healthy families require healthy marriages. If adultery was able to happen at will with no consequences in Israel, it would lead to a breakdown of the family unit. The preservation of the sanctity of marriage was essential for Israel to uphold. To be unfaithful against one's spouse ultimately reveals a person lacks self-control and discipline. This is a recipe for disaster. It reveals a person's heart in that they lack moral commitment. If a person can be unfaithful to their spouse, then they can be unfaithful in any other area of their lives and lack discipline.

God was very concerned that Israel honors their marriages by each person honoring their marriage vows to their spouse. In this way they honored God and protected their marriages and would raise children who likewise do the same when they grow up. This sustains healthy families and a healthy society.

The real issue is what sexual intercourse means between a husband and wife. This is the physical act of love that seals their marriage to one another. If a person has sexual intercourse with someone other than their spouse, this means there were a host of other problems leading up to that physical act. It means that the spouse had already begun to emotionally leave their spouse. It means that spiritually the adulterer is nowhere near the will of God in their own life. The act of sexual immorality in a marriage is truly the final choice made after a long list of other sins have been allowed into the marriage.

Here are some other passages that speak to the dangers of committing adultery.

<sup>32</sup> He who commits adultery lacks sense;  
he who does it destroys himself.

<sup>33</sup> He will get wounds and dishonor,  
and his disgrace will not be wiped away.

<sup>34</sup> For jealousy makes a man furious,  
and he will not spare when he takes revenge.

<sup>35</sup> He will accept no compensation;  
he will refuse though you multiply gifts. (Proverbs 6:32-35)

In this passage above, the Proverb says the one who commits adultery *lacks sense*. They are not wise. Why is it not wise? The one who commits adultery, *destroys himself*.

Their wounds and dishonor do not go away. Then there is a warning of possible violence by the woman's husband who could be called the victim of adultery.

Another verse speaks specifically about the ways of the adulterous woman. "This is the way of an adulteress: she eats and wipes her mouth and says, 'I have done no wrong'" (Proverbs 30:20).

Remember that God invented the idea of marriage. He made Adam and then made Eve and joined them together. Marriage is God's plan for a man and woman to enjoy each other for life as helpmates, living for God and bringing glory to God. Marriage is God's plan for propagating humans on earth. Marriage is very important to God. He sought to preserve and protect marriage with the Seventh Commandment.

We can say that the concern for our *neighbor* in the Seventh Commandment is our spouse and our neighbor's spouse. These two *neighbors* God wants make sure we treat rightly. To put things more positively, the seventh commandment requires husbands and wives to nurture their love for one another emotionally and spiritually as well as sexually.<sup>1</sup>

### Jesus' Interpretation of the Seventh Commandment

The Jews sometimes tried to find ways around this commandment. The men often divorced their wives and came up with any reason they could. They would then go and marry another woman. This was because they sexually desired another woman. The solution to them was to divorce their first wife and marry the other woman they were sexually attracted to. In this way, many Jewish men felt like they were not in violation of the seventh commandment because they were not literally committing physical adultery against their spouse.

Jesus had something else to say about this though.

### **Matthew 5:27-28**

In His Sermon on the Mount Jesus set the record straight that adultery begins in the heart. If a person looks with sexual lust upon another person besides their spouse, they are already in violation of the seventh commandment even though they have not committed the physical act of adultery.

The Seventh Commandment was more than simply being sexually faithful to one's spouse. The Seventh Commandment was God's way of protecting the beauty of marriage in Israel. Healthy marriages produce healthy families. Healthy families produce healthy societies.

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Graham Ryken and R. Kent Hughes, *Exodus: Saved for God's Glory* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005), 629.

## The Eighth Commandment: Do not Steal

### Exodus 20:15

The next commandment touches on property rights. A person has possessions and God makes it clear that it is not acceptable for someone to take away without permission their neighbor's possessions.

The word *steal* is straightforward in the Hebrew Bible. It means to steal someone else's possessions. It can also mean to kidnap someone. It is the idea of secretly taking away someone else's possessions with the implication that no permission was given by the owner for this to happen.

It seems strange perhaps that God included a specific command that a person was not to steal. Does it not make natural sense that if I own something you do not have the right to take it without my consent? It should be common sense, but unfortunately not everyone follows this idea. The effects of sin run deep in us, and the proof is the fact that God felt the need to state the Ten Commandments.

People do not have to be taught to steal; they must be taught to respect other people's things. People do not have to be taught how to lie; they must be taught that truth is a virtue. Sin impacts our human nature to the core. We are born in this world naturally wanting to, steal, cheat, and lie. We had to be taught as children that lying, stealing, and cheating were wrong. We had to be taught that sharing, telling the truth, and respecting others are virtues to live by.

Why do you think stealing is such a big issue with God?

This commandment did not carry the death penalty for violation. It required the thief repay plus interest. One example of this law is in Exodus 22:1. "If a man steals an ox or a sheep, and kills it or sells it, he shall repay five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep." If the man did not kill the livestock and it was returned to the original owner, the thief still had to repay double what was taken.

If a thief had no resources to pay their fine, then they were sold into slavery as theft slave. Their ability to labor for another became their payment for their theft.

Someone might steal because they are hungry and don't have enough food. God made provisions for this. Rather than stealing, the hungry poor were to go to farmland, and they had permission to eat the crops of the corners of the fields.

“And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, nor shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the LORD your God” (Leviticus 23:22).

I hope so far you have seen that each of these commandments is so much more than what the words themselves say. Behind the words of each commandment lies a deeper spiritual problem and sin that leads up to the breaking of the words of the commandment.

For example, do not murder was touching on the deeper sin of hatred of another. Hatred not dealt with can escalate to murder. Adulterer was speaking on the deeper issue of lust in the heart. Lust not dealt with can lead to the physical act of adultery.

What deeper spiritual issue might the command to not steal be dealing with?

Often people steal because they want what the owner has, and they do not want to take the legitimate path of earning funds to purchase what they want. The fact that a person could think it is morally ok for them to take someone else's possessions says a lot about their lack of respect for their neighbor. We often call this *greed*. Greed is the underlying sin the seventh commandment is warning against. Greed left unchecked, may spill over to stealing to get what one was greedy for.

Stealing also shows that the person does not trust in God's ability to provide and care for their needs. Theft is the unlawful taking to provide for what one thinks they need. The opposite of theft is trusting that God provides what you need, and you have no need to steal from others.

Hebrews 13:5 tells us about the remedy for greed. “Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’”

In Matthew 6:25-34, Jesus said the remedy for dealing with anxiety over having what one needs is trust God will provide while we focus on living for His righteousness.

What are the dangers for a society if most people stole from each other?

Implied in this command is the idea of personal property rights. If no one had any claim to personal property, then there would be no such thing as stealing at all. This doesn't mean that owners could/should not share, they should. However, God's point is that a

person cannot take away another person's possession without the owner's permission to take it.

The danger in theft is it harms other people. The farm animal thief prevents the farmer from working as effectively, and he may lose some of his own livelihood. The clothing thief causes another to go with proper warmth in the winter. We could keep going but hopefully we get the idea that theft causes harm to others either directly or indirectly.

If a society does not protect a person's rights of property ownership, then no one would care to work and earn an honest living. If everyone can steal and get away with it, then who would want to put in the time and energy to work and make money to purchase anything at all?

God makes it clear with the eighth commandment that it is not right to steal. It is an unloving thing to steal from one's neighbor. This also tells us something about the nature of God. God says it is wrong to steal because God is not a thief. If stealing were somehow the right thing to do in another universe, then God would engage in theft. God does not steal and this tells us it is not good to steal.

We should note that stealing is not only when physical property is taken away from the owner. Steal can be intangible things. An employee 'steals' money from their employer when they lie on their timecard for example. An employer steals from their employee when they do not fully pay them the wages owed or they use certain rules to avoid paying them full overtime for example.

Citizens steal from governments when they lie on their taxes. Governments steal from citizens when they squander and misuse the funds given by citizen's taxes. Taking advantage of someone else is also considered stealing. Anytime a person gains something via dishonest means, it should be considered stealing.

## Conclusion

In the seventh and eighth commandments we see more about how God wants people to respect their neighbors. The seventh commandment calls for respect of one's spouse by staying faithful to them. Not only this, but God was also calling for the protection of marriage in Israel.

The eighth commandment calls for respect of the property that one's neighbor owns. With this commandment God sought to preserve the rights of personal property and call His people trust that He will provide their needs and they should never resort to theft to get what they want.