

# The Ten Commandments for today

## 1. "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me" (Ex. 20:3)

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**T**HE TEN COMMANDMENTS have traditionally been considered to be the basis of morality, and, though they are part of a law to which believers today are not subject, the principles of these commands are reiterated in later Scripture, making them applicable for today. Our one-page exhortational articles for 2006 will be devoted to the theme of the Ten Commandments and their relevance for us today.

Throughout Bible times the people of God were living in a world full of the worship of false gods, who of course had no existence in fact, only in men's minds. When Israel received the Ten Commandments they had not long left behind a nation that worshipped many gods, and they went into a country in which a male and a female deity, Baal and Ashtaroth, were first amongst a range of deities that were worshipped. The nation had to be reminded of the need to remain true to Yahweh, the one true God, Who had brought them out of Egypt with many wonderful works. God gave them a whole system of ordinances designed to remind them of this, and yet they constantly went away from Him to idol worship. We are of the same nature as they, so we ought to take seriously this tendency to go after false gods.

The Jews eventually shook off idolatry in captivity in Babylon, and in the New Testament it is when the gospel is preached to the Gentiles that we come across the worship of false gods. When Paul performed a miracle of healing at Lystra, he and Barnabas were taken to be gods. Note what they said in beseeching the people to turn to the one true God: "turn from these vanities unto the living God, Which . . . gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness" (Acts 14:15-17). Much of the worship of the gods was centred round the fact that they were believed to be the providers of the necessities of life, yet God in His goodness provides for all His creation whether they acknowledge Him or not. Do we take for granted the necessities of life, or worse, think of them as being provided by man in his cleverness?

Though there were many first-century believers

who had first to shake off their belief in other gods, the New Testament has little in the way of commandment about not worshipping these gods. Instead other forms of idolatry are identified. Jesus says, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Mt. 6:24), mammon being a Hebrew personification of riches. Paul refers to those "whose God is their belly" (Phil. 3:19), and includes "covetousness, which is idolatry" in a list of fleshly ways which must be mortified, that is, put to death, by believers (Col. 3:5). It is clear, therefore, that for believers to put their trust in material things, and pursue worldly riches and possessions, is to depart from the undivided worship that God requires.

For each of the kings of Judah we have an assessment of their character, good or bad. Careful examination of what is said about them leads us to the conclusion that the main criterion in these assessments is whether the king was undivided in his allegiance to Yahweh the God of Israel or whether he worshipped idols as well. Those who did not go after idols are given a favourable assessment, even though the record says that they did other wrong things. There is no space here to prove this; readers must consider it for themselves. Is God assessing us by the same criterion? And if so, what will be the verdict if we allow our lives to be ones in which the desiring of and the pursuing after material things is predominant?

Among the temptations of our Lord Jesus Christ was one to bow down, as it were, to the spirit of this world and misuse the power that had been given him to gain the rulership of the earth, with all that it could provide him with. The passage that he chose to defeat this temptation was, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve" (Mt. 4:10, citing Deut. 6:13). The temptations that he conquered in the wilderness of Judea would have come back to him time and time again, but were always resisted. As a result he will rule the earth on behalf of God in the age to come, and we can be with him if we resist the temptation to worship false deities. Whom are we serving, God or mammon?