

Definition

Well, what are the Ten Commandments? In a word they are the basic legislative statements of God revealing His will for men as they live before Him and before others. Israel, fresh from the trials of Egypt and recently tested through the Red Sea and the Wilderness, had camped in the Sinai wilderness. While the nation recouped its strength, Moses, the man of God, went up to the mountain peak to learn of the Divine will. Here the Lord challenged Moses and the people in a covenant of devotion, the first part of which is our portion. Pleased with the revelation of His will, Israel vowed to be a people loyal to God...giving their honest allegiance in token pledge for His care and blessing. With enthusiasm they gripped His covenant and Moses, with explanations and arrangements extraordinary, eventually returned to the mountain and received the declaration of truth that would govern the life of the people for the age to come. At the beginning of the revelation came the ten words of eternal truth that have never lost their force to those who care for God. Ten words purposed to make the Israelites a kingdom of priests, a holy nation. (Exodus 19:5-6)

Significance

We cannot evaluate fully the meaning of these words. In all parts of Scripture they are given great prominence. They comprise the backbone of the prophet teaching of the Old Testament (as rephrased in Micah 6:8, for example) as well as supplying the ethical strength for the teaching of the New Testament. They are represented and praised in all quarters of thinking persons. It is hard to imagine any comparable amount of material that has exercised even a tiny amount of similar influence.

In content the Ten Commands outline the two chief areas of