



*The Decalogue: Living as the People of God*

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*"Baker's timely book challenges us to reconsider the foundational place of the Decalogue in Christian personal and public ethics. . . . The result is a richly rewarding textbook, surveying the field of biblical scholarship comprehensively but with a light touch, drawing together many threads in wider biblical theology, and reflecting on the relevance of the Ten Commandments in contemporary church and society."*

— Christopher J. H. Wright,  
international ministries  
director, Langham  
Partnership, author of *Old  
Testament Ethics for the People of  
God*

## Scholarly Study of the Decalogue Also Considers the Text's Relevance for Today

For centuries it was taken for granted in the Western world that the Ten Commandments were relevant for all times and in all places. They were displayed on church walls and windows and formed an essential part of Roman Catholic and Protestant worship. The 1604 Anglican Canons decreed that "the Ten Commandments be set up upon the East-end of every Church and Chapel where the people may best see and read the same." In Lutheran and Anglican liturgies today, the Ten Commandments or a summary of the law are read in preparation for confession, to convict people of sin so they turn to God for forgiveness. In some Reformed liturgies, they are placed after the confession of sin as guidance for Christian living. Either way, their continuing relevance for Christians is assumed.

But what about national and international ethics? In modern Western societies the relevance of the Ten Commandments is less obvious. Churches in Britain have been largely unsuccessful in opposing the liberalization of Sunday trading laws. In the United States there has been vigorous debate about whether the commandments should be displayed in schools and public places, and on several occasions judges have ruled that stone monuments inscribed with the commandments must be removed.

While Christians may regret these outcomes, it is probably unrealistic to expect governments of countries that are becoming increasingly secularized to acknowledge the authority of biblical laws, though many of the principles they express are accepted by civilized peoples throughout the world.

In any case, I am convinced these laws are still important for the people of God, as I aim to show in this book. I tackle the commandments one by one in three contexts:

- First, I place each commandment in the context of ancient Near Eastern law and culture. This context is mentioned only incidentally or not at all in most other books.
- Second, I explain each commandment in the context of the Bible itself (canonical context). This has been done in other commentaries, but it is absolutely essential in my view and could not be omitted responsibly.
- Third, I reflect on each commandment in the context of the world today. Many commentaries limit their scope to the biblical context, leaving readers to draw their own conclusions about the contemporary relevance of the text. There are also a good number of books with valuable insights concerning the relevance of the commandments, but these often lack a firm basis in the study of the text. I aim to bridge the gap by covering both explanation and reflection in one study.

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# BOOK EXCERPT

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— Adapted from the preface

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**David L. Baker** (PhD, University of Sheffield) is a lecturer in biblical studies at All Nations Christian College, Hertfordshire, England. Until 2014 he was senior lecturer in Old Testament at Trinity Theological College in Perth, Western Australia. Previously, he was deputy warden of Tyndale House, Cambridge, England, and a seminary lecturer in Indonesia for over twenty years.

Baker is the author of *Two Testaments, One Bible: The Theological Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments* and *Tight Fists or Open Hands? Wealth and Poverty in Old Testament Law*, as well as several books in Indonesian. His research interests include Deuteronomy, the Decalogue, the relationship between the Testaments, and wealth and poverty in the Old Testament.