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# *The Cartoon Ten Commandments*

A commentary on the ten commandments with cartoons. EXCERPT EDITION

by Richard L. Diesslin



DeKellogues - The Best to You Each Day!

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with cartoons.**

**Written, Illustrated, & Published by  
Richard L. Diesslin**

## The Cartoon Ten Commandments

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ISBN 0-9702244-2-7

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Printed in the United States

To Mindy, Grady, Sally and Neil Diesslin  
and Mary Ann Boyer

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Other Books and E-Books by the Author . . . . . (in e-book version)  
Website . . . . . (in e-book version)



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# Prologue to the Decalogue

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## Purpose and Background

The intent of this book is to convey the meaning of the Ten Commandments (a.k.a., the decalogue) to children, youth and adults. Each chapter is divided into two parts: 1) Basic Meaning and 2) Further Meaning.

Basic meaning is just that - a clear and simple explanation of the commandment. It is at the level that children will understand, yet also provide a good introduction to the Further Meaning section for youth and adults. If you go with the movie rating system, the basic meaning sections would be rated "G" for General Audiences.

The Further Meaning section goes into more depth on each commandment. It is aimed at providing more insight and historical context to the commandment in a straight-forward manner that youth and adults can appreciate. If you go with the movie rating system, the further meaning sections would be rated "PG" or "PG-13" Parental Guidance suggested for children under the age of 13.

Parents, due to the two levels of meaning designed into this book, I recommend that parents read the basic meaning sections with their children. Some of the further meaning sections get into areas that take a more mature understanding to appreciate. For example, how would you go about telling a 5 year old about adultery? Mostly you wouldn't, since is not a subject that will have any meaning to them until they are much older. Youth (a.k.a., teenagers) and adults will hopefully find the basic meaning sections a good introduction and appreciate the further meaning for it's deeper level of discussion.

While I have no choice but to write from a Christian perspective (looking back based on the teachings of Jesus), it is important to understand the Ten Commandments in their original, Israelite context (looking forward based on teachings of Moses). I make a deliberate attempt to

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separate the two perspectives so that hopefully Jewish readers will find this book as useful as Christian readers.

### *About the Cartoons*

I am a cartoonist by profession and a theologian and writer out of necessity. The cartoon is my main medium of expression! Therefore, my intent with the cartoons is to convey, in a memorable and entertaining way, the main points of the text. Actually, for me, it is the other way around - I want the text to reflect the main points of the cartoons (but hey, I'm the cartoonist)!

The cartoons are aimed at the same basic and further meaning levels as the text. Young children views cartoons mostly as they would a picture book, older children will begin to have enough life-experience and a basic understanding of jokes to begin to appreciate the humor in the cartoon. Youth and adults have the potential to be almost as warped as a cartoonist, and therefore appreciate the cartoons in their full, serious silliness. The cartoons in the basic meaning section are like a children's sermon - they attempt to appeal to children, and yet be of interest to youth and adults. The further meaning cartoons are geared to the more mature level of understanding of youth and adults. This also brings with it a warning: some further meaning cartoons may not be appropriate for children so parents ... use your discretion!

### *Adam and Eve*

The cartoons have Adam and Eve providing a running commentary at the bottom of each cartoon. This idea began in a prior book [A Journey Through Christian Theology](#) (Fortress Press) when author William P. Anderson suggested that we needed a way to provide context the cartoons, in case they were read apart from the text. Adam and Eve became our commentators of choice because of the unique perspective they offer having been around since the beginning of human history. A marginal or corner commentator is a method that is found in some editorial cartoons as a way to add perspective to the cartoon. Using Adam and Eve sometimes requires that the reader remember their unique perspective and story to appreciate their reaction to things (of course, Genesis 2 and 3 can provide a refresher, if needed). Above all else, I claim cartoonist's privilege - which simply means that silly things like time, space, history, etc. are all there for me to distort and play with tongue-and-cheek. Somewhat like a politician, I want to be able to express a viewpoint, but not be held accountable for it!

### *Why Cartoons?*

A parable is a short and entertaining story with a message. The idea behind a parable is that hearer would enjoy it enough to remember it and retell it to others (just think if they had e-mail in 30 C.E.!). There are parables in both the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) and New Testament, perhaps none more well known than those told by Jesus. A cartoon is somewhat like a visual form of parable. Humor, in general, goes a long way toward illustrating a point, often more effectively than serious discourse. As for memory, most of us have been taught the Ten Commandments ... but how many of us can list all 10? I couldn't before writing this book! After reading this book, cartoons especially, I think you will find them much easier to remember. Remembering them is certainly a good step toward implementing/integrating them into our daily lives.

## Introduction to the Ten Commandments - Basic Meaning

*What are the Ten Commandments?*

The Ten Commandments are guidelines (or rules) for living a life that is pleasing to God. They are so important that the scriptures say that God spoke them directly to the Israelite people. Later in the story of the Exodus, the Ten Commandments were written down on stone tablets and kept in a place of honor (believed to be the contents of the Ark of the Covenant).

*Why are rules important?*

Rules seem like such negative things, saying what can and can't be done. But the same God that gives us the freedom to choose between good and evil, gives these 10 rules. Not to limit freedom, but to show what is expected. The Ten Commandments are very positive rules - they tell what is needed to make the choice between good and evil, so that the right things are done in order to be good people.

*Just how important are these rules?*

How would it feel to hear God speak directly to you? Awesome, amazing, frightening, special, dangerous? It is hard to imagine, but it does help to understand why Moses and the Israelite people felt that these Ten Commandments were very important indeed! They were good care takers of these rules, because they have become the basis for most laws and legal systems throughout the world today.

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## Introduction - Further Meaning

What good timing!

Think back to the time of the Israelite people, when they first received the Ten Commandments. They had just fled from Egypt where they had been slaves for 400 years. Now they were free and looking for the promised land of their own, yet alone in the dessert not really knowing where they were headed. It is at this time God gives the Israelites the Ten Commandments. Perhaps one thing we can draw from this is that God is much more concerned about the way life is lived, than where it is lived. What made the Israelites a nation even before they had a land of their own, was their belief in one God and the way they were to live.

*The Ten Commandments, Exodus, Chapter 20.1-21 (NRSV)*

As you read these commandments, try to think how you would number them. There are different interpretations to numbering them and later I will identify the approach selected for this book.

Note: verse numbers are not important.

*20.1 And God spoke all these words: 2 I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; 3 you shall have no other gods before me. 4 You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything in heaven above, or on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. 5 You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, 6 but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments. 7 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. 8 Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work. 10 But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work - you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. 11 For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it. 12 Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land the LORD your God is giving you. 13 You shall not murder. 14 You shall not commit adultery. 15 You shall not steal. 16 You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. 17 You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you*

shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female servant, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor. <sup>18</sup> When the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking, they were afraid and trembled and stood at a distance, <sup>19</sup> and said to Moses, "Your speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, or we will die. <sup>20</sup> Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid; for God has come only to test you and to put the fear of him upon you so that you do not sin." <sup>21</sup> Then the people stood at a distance, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.

FIGURE 1. Moses and Aaron Discuss the Fine Print



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## The Twofold Emphasis of the Commandments

I believe that the 10 Commandments can be divided into religious and civil commandments. As you read them again (below) and see if you agree.

I chose the common Protestant numbering scheme of the commandments (below) because it seemed the clearest to me, not to suggest that the other approaches are wrong. In one sense, the numbering is arbitrary, because the message is the same. (Note: For further reading on the numbering, consult the references in the back of the book and/or your favorite commentary.)

### *Religious Commandments*

1. <sup>20,2</sup> I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; <sup>3</sup> you shall have no other gods before me.
2. <sup>4</sup> You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything in heaven above, or on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. <sup>5</sup> You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, <sup>6</sup> but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.
3. <sup>7</sup> 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.
4. <sup>8</sup> Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. <sup>9</sup> Six days you shall labor and do all your work. <sup>10</sup> But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work - you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. <sup>11</sup> For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.
5. <sup>12</sup> Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.

### *Civil Commandments*

6. <sup>13</sup> You shall not murder.
7. <sup>14</sup> You shall not commit adultery.
8. <sup>15</sup> You shall not steal.

9. <sup>16</sup> You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.  
10. <sup>17</sup> You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female servant, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

The fifth commandment could go in either category, religious or civil, but it has typically been associated with the first four and provides a certain symmetry for discussion purposes.

Well, now the fun begins. Many of these commandments seem so clear that there can be no question as to what they mean ... or can there? Others are sort of obscure ... what do they really mean. Hopefully this cartoon adventure into the Ten Commandments will provide you with some new insights, but, of course, only you can be the judge of that.

Enjoy!

Sincerely,  
Rich Diesslin



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# God First!

## Religious Commandments 1-5

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### Hebrew Scriptures (a.k.a., Old Testament)

*Duet 6.4 "Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. <sup>5</sup> You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. <sup>6</sup> Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. <sup>7</sup> Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. <sup>8</sup> Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and <sup>9</sup> write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates." [-Moses, The Shema]:*

### New Testament

*Mk 12.29 "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; <sup>30</sup> you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.'" [- Jesus' response to the question: "Which commandment is the first of all?"]*

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# Chapter 1      1st Commandment

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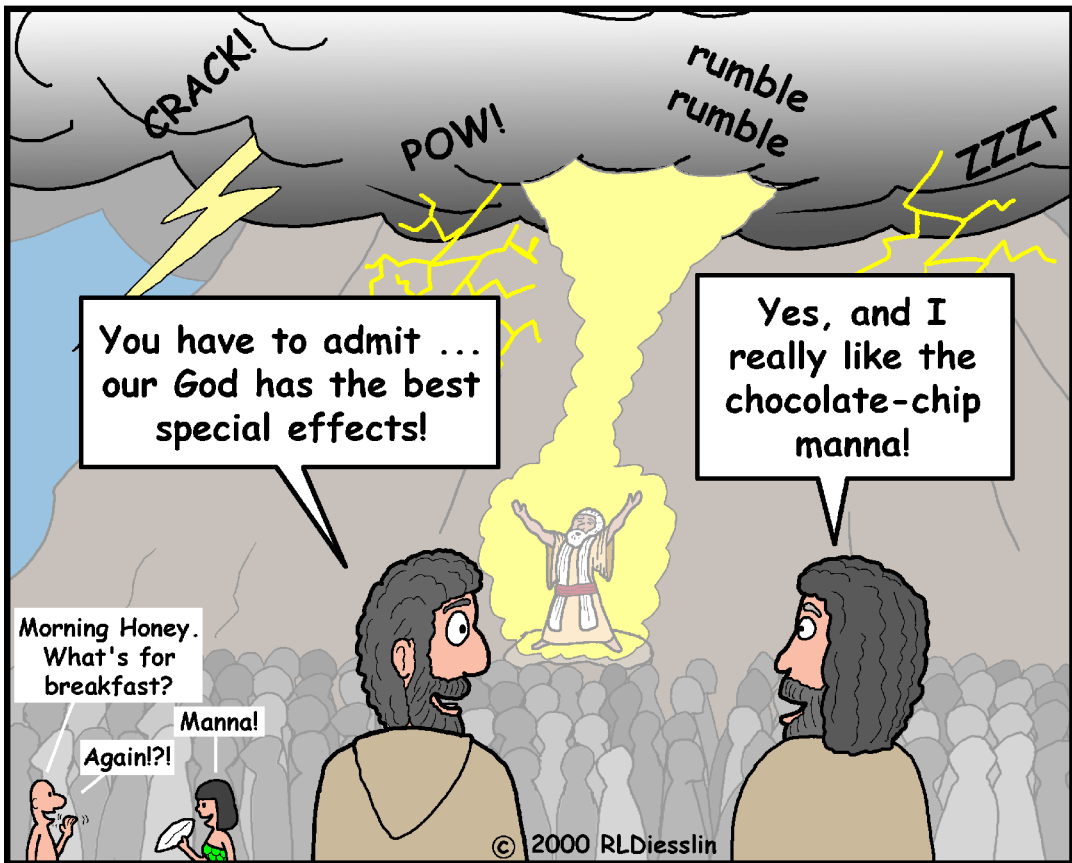
## Basic Meaning

*20.2 I am the LORD (YHWH or Yahweh) your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; <sup>3</sup> you shall have no other gods before me.*

The first commandment tells who God is and what that means. God is a savior God. God not only created the world, but acts in history to save those who love God. The Israelites knew this immediately for two reasons. God used a special name for LORD, Yahweh, a personal and most holy name. And Yahweh is also a God known by the things God does, in this case, delivering the Israelites from slavery in Egypt.

The commandment then is to know with heart and mind that there is nothing greater, or more holy, or more worthy of praise than God. In the land the Israelites had come from, there were many gods worshiped, but only Yahweh is truly God, and only Yahweh cared enough to free them.

FIGURE 2. Who Loves You?!?



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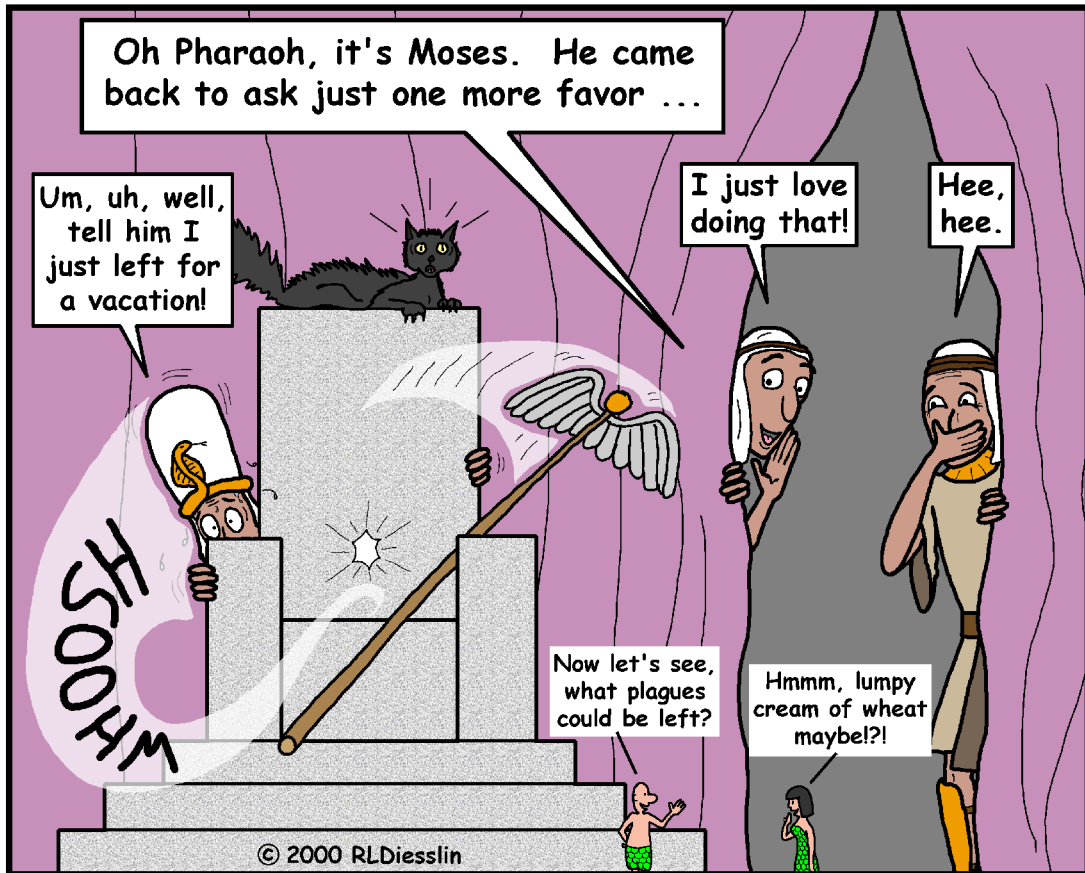
### Further Meaning

“I am the LORD (YHWH or Yahweh) *your* God, ...” In Hebrew the word for “your” is singular, so even though God is addressing the whole Israelite people, the message is personal. “... who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; ...” Genesis shows God as creator, but the Exodus shows God the redeemer and savior. The two phrases together serve to identify God both in name and in action. The personal name of God, YHWH, thought to be pronounced Yahweh, was so sacred that it was seldom said outright, and often said through other titles such as El Shaddai. In most translations of the Bible where lord is in all uppercase letters, LORD, the personal name of God, YHWH, was used in the original manuscript(s).

“... you shall have no other gods *before* me.” The word translated as “before” can also be thought of as “above” or “beside my presence” or even as “against my presence.” This does not say that there are no other gods, certainly the listeners at the foot of Mt. Sinai were aware that their culture (or at least Egyptian culture) used many gods, but it does say that no other gods count! So while this commandment does not speak to the existence of other gods, it is quite clear about precluding their worship. Even though Yahweh was the God of Abraham and the patriarchal, it has been speculated that full fledged monotheism actually begins in Exodus with Moses.

Did God save them from the Egyptians just to make them God’s slaves? Given that this commandment identifies God as the one who freed them, it is likely that the place of honor comes from a spirit of gratitude not servitude.

FIGURE 3. Looked Who Dropped In To See You ...



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## Chapter 2          2nd Commandment

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### Basic Meaning

*20.4a You shall not make for yourself an idol, ...*

An idol is a representative picture, statue or sculpture of a god. It is used here to mean a false god. The people were not to waste their time, energy and devotion on an idol, since whatever an idol is an image of could never show all of things God is and does. In other words, idol worship leads to a wrong understanding of God.

In biblical times an idol was often considered by its owner to be more than just a image of a god. It also contained some of the god's powers, as if by magic. Similar to the genie in Aladdin's lamp that grants wishes or a "lucky rabbit's foot" (or horse shoe, or four-leaf clover, crystal, etc.) that people believed to have the power to bring about good luck. So, over time, an idol worshipper might begin to believe that the figure was really a god or a way to control a god. Today this is known to be pretend (fantasy), yet some people still won't walk under a ladder, are afraid of black cats, or have things they think bring them luck. These are false beliefs are called superstition.

The God of Israel, our God, is known through actions and deeds. No one knows what God looks like, but when looking at the beauty of nature, kind actions of others, and the wonders of life (to name a few) God's presence seems near. There is no one way to capture this feeling in an image that called God. That is why God is worshipped and not the stained glass windows, altars, statues, golden calves, paintings, or countless other images used to symbolize God. They are not God and contain no magic.

FIGURE 4. Whose Lucky Day?



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## Further Meaning

*20.4b ... whether in the form of anything in heaven above, or on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. <sup>5</sup> You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, <sup>6</sup> but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.*

The basic commandment in verse 4a is further qualified by the rest of verse 4b through verse 6. This qualification is thought to have been added later, by a priestly influence, to clarify the basic commandment. Regardless of whether this theory is correct, there are several insights into the Israelite understanding of God, at this time, provided in the rest of the commandment.

What. “... whether in the *form* of anything in heaven above, or on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall *not bow down* to them or *worship* them; ...” The forms mentioned sum up most kinds of idols imaginable (heavenly bodies, animals and plants, sea creatures). Whether or not this is in reaction to other cultures’ gods, it is clear that it means no idols of *any* kind are permitted. “You shall not make for yourself an idol” is further explained as not bowing down or worshipping an idol. Many a Jew and Christian have been martyred taking this literally! Today there is very little idol worship, in the sense of graven images, but there are other kinds of idols - wealth, power, and status for example.

Why. “... for I the LORD your God am a *jealous* God, ...” The translation jealous is perhaps misleading since it’s usage is mostly negative (except one suggesting vigilant in guarding a possession). However, the word for jealous can also be translated passionate or impassioned, which is perhaps clearer. Either translation leads to the understanding that God is not just to be the primary object of our worship, but the only one!

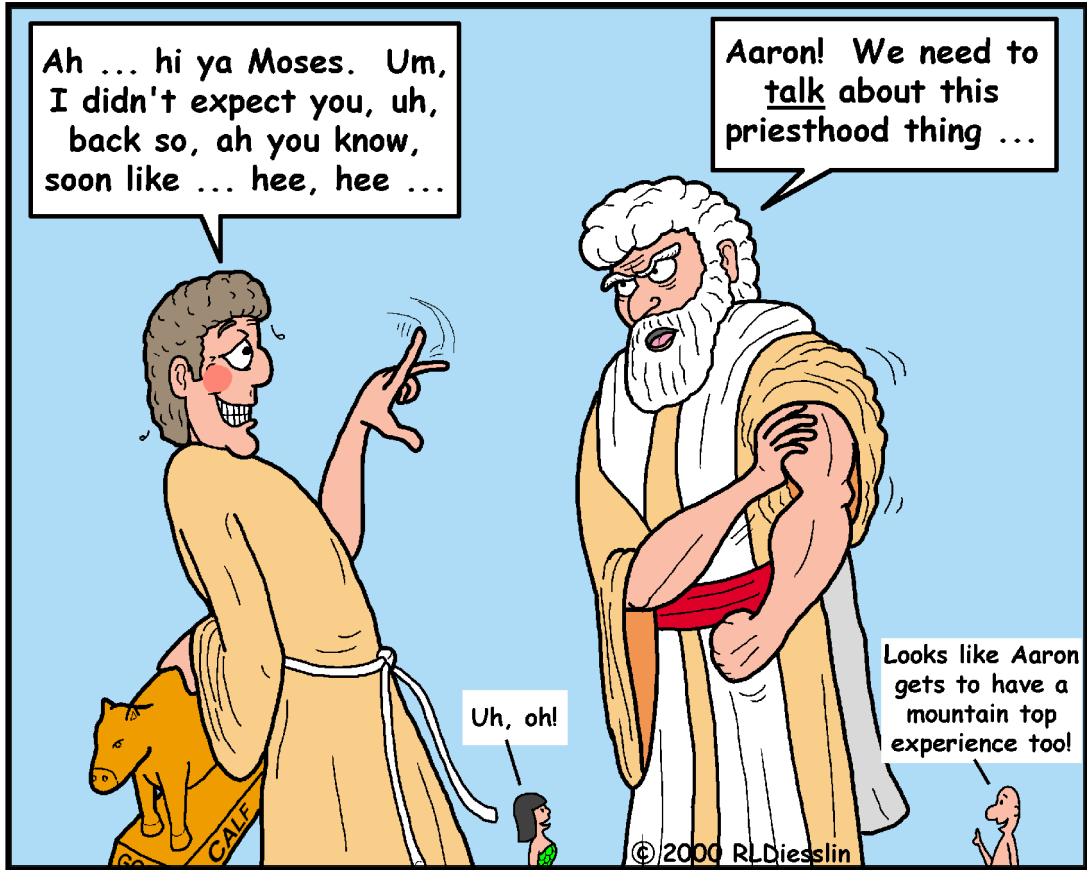
How. “*punishing* children for the iniquity of parents, to the *third and the fourth* generation of those who reject me, but showing *steadfast love* to the *thousandth* generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.” At first this seems suggest that God punishes children for their parent’s wickedness. On further study this first impression is misleading. Here’s why: the tendency of children is to emulate their parents, so if their parents are evil, or indifferent to God, this it is much harder for them to be good and follow God. Since two and three generations might



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have been living together in the same house (or proximity), it would be hard to break the family influence learned at an early age. So whether it's God's design, or just the way humans learn, the good and bad traits are carried on in our children and our children's children. However, God's mercy is such that if a person, regardless of the parents, loves God, God will in turn love to the thousandth generation (a.k.a., forever). So rather than harsh, this is extremely generous, each generation still gets to choose whether they love God or not. Perhaps a positive way to restate this part of the commandment would be 'be good parents, teaching your children in the ways of God.' It has also been observed that this is the only place in the first four books of the Bible where God's love is stressed.

FIGURE 5. God, Give Me Patience NOW!



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## Chapter 3      3rd Commandment

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### Basic Meaning

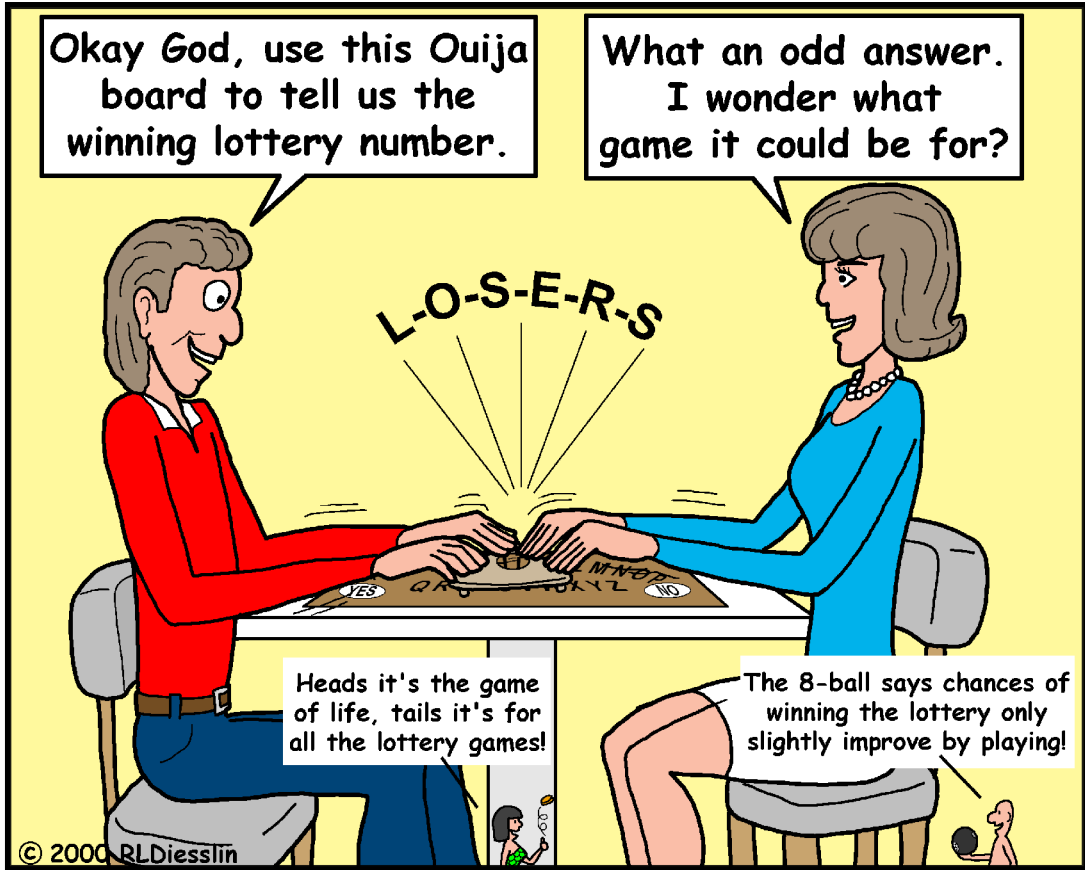
*20.7a You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God,*

...

Is this response to name calling familiar? “Sticks and stones can break my bones, but names can never hurt me.” Why worry about someone misusing God’s name? Will it hurt God? The reason is fairly simple, it shows no respect for God. If people who claim to follow God use God’s name in cuss words it shows that they do not care very much for God. It’s offensive to those who love God and a bad example to those who do not. If someone promises using words like *so help me God* or *I swear to God*, and then does not do what they promise, they look bad and their belief in God looks phoney.

To the Israelites, God’s name, Yahweh, was so special that they seldom spoke it all. Any casual use was heavily discouraged. Also in ancient times people used the names of their gods in magic sayings (chants or spells) in order to get that god to do something for them. Today, it is clear that magic is only pretend and that God’s name should only used in prayers, worship and when learning about God. Prayer should be trying to understand God’s will (a.k.a., discovering what God wants to be done), and not a magic spell or chant.

FIGURE 7. God Works in Mysterious Ways ...



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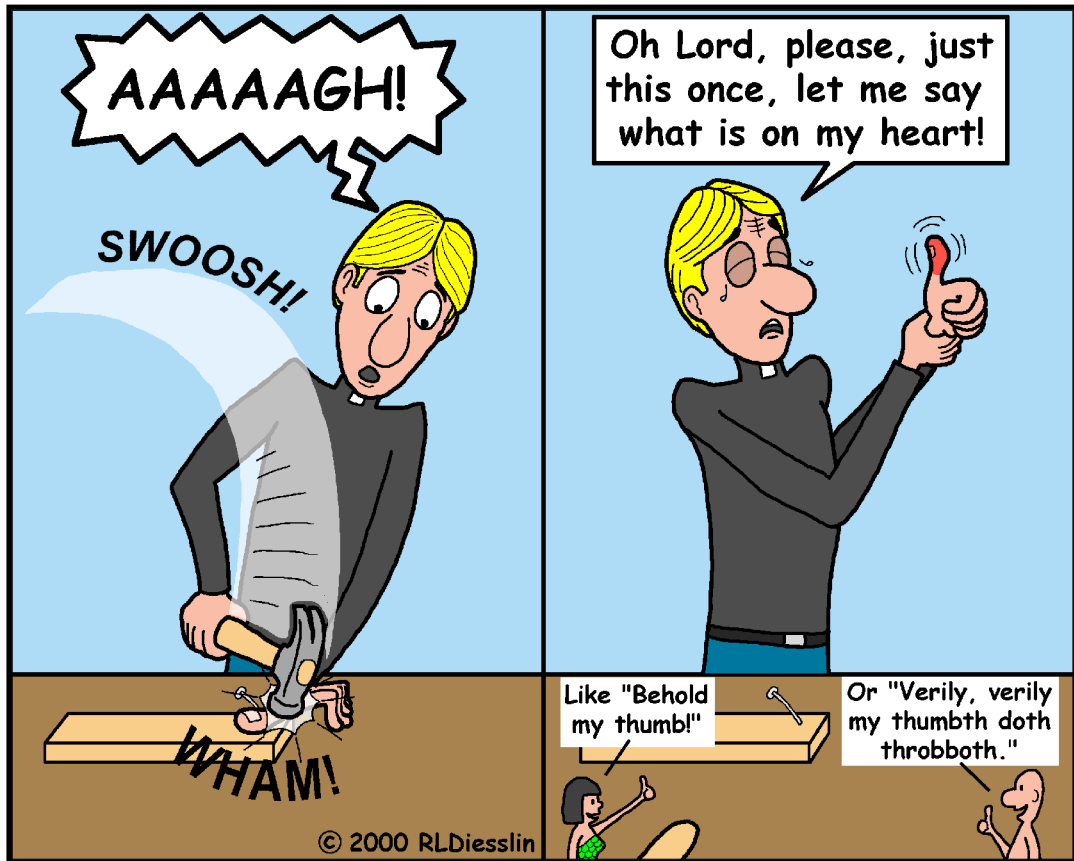
### Further Meaning

*20.7b ... for the LORD will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.*

As touched upon above, there are primarily three ways to misuse God's name: profane use - using God's name in vain; casual use - making promises on God's name (to the Israelites, any promise or oath was a very serious thing and should not be done casually, and to swear on or by God's name was an extremely serious affair and was heavily discouraged); and using God's name in some sort of magical chant (magical use).

This commandment is believed to be aimed primarily at the third use, magic or cultic worship, but all are valid interpretations. The addition of the LORD will not acquit ... adds emphasis to the seriousness in which the commandment is given, but does not provide any other insight.

FIGURE 8. Character: What You Do When No One Is Looking!



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# Hope You Enjoyed This Shareware Excerpt!

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