

Brief Study of the Decalogue: The Ten Words, Exodus 20:1-17

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A careful study of the Ten Commandments is always in order, because they are one of the chief parts of Christian doctrine which pastors teach each year in catechism class. Such a study is especially fitting at this time, because after some decades of moving from translation to translation in the catechism (and the change from German to English), we have had the opportunity to evaluate one translation of the catechism for twenty some years.

Our study will be based on an exegesis of Exodus 20:1-21 and Deuteronomy 5:1-22, with reference to the Septuagint, Luther's German, and to old and new English translations of the Catechism, whenever appropriate. Our study of each commandment will consist of three parts: a literal translation to reflect the Hebrew idioms, some notes and comments, and a suggested translation based on these comments.

The First Word: Exodus 20 v 1-2

(We are numbering "The Ten Words" according to one of the systems of numbering used by the Jews, so that we can compare it with the Catholic/Lutheran system of numbering and the Reformed system. Notice that according to this system of numbering the first word is not a commandment but a motivational statement. The various methods of numbering the commandments will be discussed in an appendix, after we have examined the texts of Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5.)

1 וַיְדַבֵּר אֱלֹהִים אֵת כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה לְאָמֹר: ס
2 אֲנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ
מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עַבְדִּים:

Literal translation: *And God spoke all these words, saying, "I [am] Yahweh your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, from the house of slaves."*

These words are vital to a proper understanding of the Decalogue. These words put the Decalogue into its proper setting as part of God's gracious covenant with Israel (Ex 24:12). God does not call these statements "commandments" (מִצְוֹת) but rather "words" or "sayings" (דְּבָרִים). To stress only their nature as law backed by threats and punishment would destroy their true significance. These words, for the most part, are indeed a statement of law, but they are not a repressive code, full of threats and punishment. Nor do they have the specification of penalties that is typical of a civil law code. They outline the basic principles for a life which is pleasing to the Lord and beneficial to people. For the most part, these principles are the same as the principles of the innate moral law that is implanted in people by nature (Ro 2:14-15).

Although the words "I am the LORD your God" do demonstrate that this law is backed by the divine power and authority of the God who is true to his law, their real purpose is to show that the giver of this law is the covenant God of Israel, their Redeemer. This law is not an arbitrary set of rules, imposed by a harsh God. The giving of these commandments, both positive and negative, was a display of God's love. His commandments do not really restrict liberty. Following them is true liberty (Jas 1:17). The law was given, not to make man a slave, but to serve his good (Mk 2:27). Serving God's law is real freedom.

The words "I am the LORD your God who brought you out of Egypt" supply the motive for obedience to the laws which follow. These words remind Israel of the gospel motivation for obedience to the Lord, which they had received through the Exodus from Egypt. In Deuteronomy the historical review in the first four chapters of the book provides the same sort of motivation in a more comprehensive way. The Decalogue is not given as a dry, impersonal law code. In Exodus it is imbedded in the account of salvation history. In Deuteronomy it is part of a sermon.

These opening words show that these laws are not intended to serve as a way to redemption. They are not a way of earning credit with God. They are not directions for how to become God's people. These laws are a guide for a people that already had been redeemed by grace. By keeping these laws Israel could show love and gratitude for the grace and mercy which they had received in the Exodus and all the other blessings which would follow after it. The position of the Decalogue in Exodus teaches Israel not only what they have been redeemed *from*, but also what they are redeemed *for*.

The words "I am the LORD *your God*" supply the motive for obeying the nine laws which follow, as well as all of the other laws which follow in the Pentateuch. The King of the Universe, the Lord of the Nations, was their God. The singular "you" individualizes this truth to each Israelite.

The prologue to the commandments in Deuteronomy 5:1-4 reminds the next generation of Israelites of the covenant that God had made with them at Sinai: "Hear, O Israel, the decrees and laws I declare in your hearing today. Learn them and be sure to follow them. The LORD our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. It was not with our fathers that the LORD made this covenant, but with us, with all of us who are alive here today. The LORD spoke to you face to face out of the fire on the mountain." The commandments cannot be understood apart from their context in the covenant.

יהוה (Yahweh) is the personal name of the true God in Hebrew. We do not know with certainty how this name is to be pronounced because already before the New Testament era the Jews had adopted the custom of not pronouncing this name so as not to profane its sanctity. Instead, whenever they came to the sacred name, they pronounced the word *adonai*, "Lord," or *ha-shem*, "the name." The common pointing in the BHS text (יהוה) seems to point to אֲדֹנָי, *shemah*, the Aramaic version of "The Name," rather than to the pronunciation *adonai*. This substitution of "The Name" for the Tetragrammaton is found in Leviticus 24:11. It is generally accepted that יהוה is derived from a 3rd person singular masculine imperfect of the verb יהוה/הוה, an archaic form of the verb "to be." It would then mean "he is" and would describe God as the self-existent, eternal, unchanging being. This interpretation is supported by God's explanation of his name to Moses in Exodus 3:14, where God said, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" Another suggested translation of this explanation of the Name, אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה, is "I will continue to be what I was." This too would stress God's unchanging being and character.

As to the significance of this name, it has often been said that this is God's gospel name or his covenant name. This statement is a great truth because the Lord's most important attribute toward us is that he is characterized by an unchanging faithfulness to his gospel promises. This truth is stressed in his exposition of his name to Moses in Exodus 34:5-7, "Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the LORD. And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, 'The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.'" Though it is a great truth to call the Tetragrammaton God's gospel name, it is also something of an oversimplification. The exposition of God's name in Exodus 34 finishes with these words, "Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation." The unchanging God who is faithful to his gospel is also faithful to his law. Though he wants all people to repent and receive forgiveness, those who spurn his grace will experience his punitive holiness. One of the favorite phrases of the prophet Ezekiel is "Then they will know that I am the LORD." This phrase occurs in response to the fulfillment of both law and gospel sections of the prophecy. The Tetragrammaton reveals God as the one who is faithful both to his law and his gospel. God is both just and the justifier (Ro 3:25-26). Both aspects of the meaning of the Name are relevant to the giving to the Ten Commandments.

Grammatical Notes

It makes little difference whether we read, "I am the Lord your God" or "I the Lord am your God."

In verse two, in the relative phrase **אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ**, the verb **הוֹצֵאתִיךָ** is a first person verb agreeing with the first person pronoun **אֲנֹכִי**, which is the antecedent of the relative clause, rather than a third person verb agreeing with the relative pronoun **אֲשֶׁר** as it would be in English. This reminds us that **אֲשֶׁר** is not really a relative pronoun but simply an indication of a relative relationship between two clauses.

Perhaps the dual form of **מִצְרַיִם** points to the two parts of the kingdom, upper and lower Egypt.

Suggested translation: Then God spoke all these words. He said, “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, where you were slaves.”

The Second Word: Exodus 20:3-6

3 לֹא יִהְיֶה לְךָ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים עַל-פְּנֵי:
 4 לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה-לְךָ פֶסֶל וְכָל-תְּמוּנָה
 אֲשֶׁר בַּשָּׁמַיִם מִמַּעַל וְאֲשֶׁר
 בָּאָרֶץ מִתַּחַת וְאֲשֶׁר בַּמַּיִם מִתַּחַת לָאָרֶץ:
 5 לֹא-תִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לָהֶם וְלֹא תַעֲבֹדֵם כִּי אֲנֹכִי
 יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֵל קַנָּא
 פֹּקֵד עֹון אָבֹת עַל-בְּנֵי עַל-שְׁלֵשִׁים וְעַל-רְבָעִים לְשִׁנָּאִי:
 6 וְעֵשָׂה חֶסֶד לְאֲלֹפִים לֹא-הָבִי וְלִשְׂמֵרֵי מִצְוֹתַי: ס

Deuteronomy 5 is identical.

Literal translation: There shall not be to you other gods in front of/against my face. You shall not make to you a carved image and any likeness [of anything] which [is] in the heavens from above, or which [is] in the earth from beneath, or which [is] in the waters from under to the earth. You shall not bow down to them, and you shall not become subservient them, for I the LORD your God [am] a God-jealous, visiting/punishing the perversity/guilt/iniquity of the fathers upon the sons and upon the third and upon the fourth [generations] to those hating me, and doing mercy/covenant faithfulness to thousands, to those loving me and to those keeping my commandments.

Notice that although the covenant is made with the people of Israel, the “you” in the commandments is singular, as it was in the introduction. Each individual Israelite is responsible for his or her own obedience or disobedience to the commandments.

Notice the strong form of the prohibition with **לֹא** (GK 107o, 109c). In Hebrew there are two forms of prohibition: **לֹא** plus the imperfect is a strong permanent prohibition, “Do not ever do that. You must not do that. Don’t you ever do that.” Only the addition of the cognate infinitive absolute would make a stronger prohibition. **אַל** plus the jussive/imperfect is an immediate prohibition. “Stop doing that. Don’t do that.” The commandments always use **לֹא** and the imperfect. “You shall not” is a more literal rendering of the Hebrew imperfect which is used here, but “Do not” or “You must not” are better ways of expressing a strong prohibition in English.

The phrase “no other gods *before me*” (**עַל-פְּנֵי**) literally means “no other gods upon, in front of, or against my face.” The basic meaning of **עַל** refers to position *on* or *above* something: “on your bed,” “above the heavens.” Other connotations include: 1) spatial position at or beside: “by the river,” 2) provoker of an emotion: “he was angry at me,” 3) hostility: “he fought against them,” 4) more rarely, accompaniment or addition: “they came with them,” “he added this evil to his sins.” The connotations “along side of,” “above,” or “in opposition

to” seem most relevant here. Suggested translations include “except me,” “in defiance of me,” “in my presence,” *πλὴν ἐμοῦ* (LXX), *coram me* and *in conspectu meo* (Vulg), and *neben mir* or *vor mir* (Luther). Some translations of the Catechism (including the current WELS version) solve the problem by omitting the phrase. There is really not much difference between the translations, as long as this phrase is understood as an absolute prohibition of other gods. Some liberal commentators claim that this commandment forbids only the presence of other idols in Yahweh’s temple. Others introduce a false notion into the translation “above me” when they state that at this stage in the evolution of religion the Israelites recognized the reality of other deities as long as they were kept subordinate to Yahweh or not worshipped along with him (monolatry or henotheism, but not monotheism). Exodus 34:14 makes it clear that not even a single other god can in any way be tolerated, “Do not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.”

כָּל־תְּמוּנָה means “carved or engraved idol,” but it may refer to idols in general regardless of their form. Verse five is a significant addition to the prohibition of idolatry. It not only prohibits the worship of any other god. It also prohibits every attempt to represent the unique, infinite God by any created form (כָּל־תְּמוּנָה). For example, the Golden Calf was not meant to be a repudiation of the LORD. It was an attempt to worship the LORD under the form of an image. The calf may not even have been intended to be a representation of the LORD himself, but only of the pedestal on which he stood. Nevertheless, the making of the calf was strongly condemned as idolatry, as were the golden calves of Jeroboam. This verse, however, is not a total prohibition of statues and representational art as some of the Jews interpreted it (compare also the aniconic practice of Islam). It forbids images only as objects of worship. Both the tabernacle and temple contained images that were made according to God’s directions, including cherubim, bulls, lilies, trees, and pomegranates. The Bronze Serpent also was made at the command of the Lord, but it was destroyed by Hezekiah when it was misused as an idol (2 Ki 18:4). The second statement (v 5), which forbids the worship of idols, explains the purpose of the first (v 4), which forbids making images.

Some commentators suggest that the prohibition of כָּל־תְּמוּנָה prohibits even the idea of another god.

תִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה is either the hithpael imperfect of שָׁחָה with metathesis or the hishtaphel (eshtaphel) imperfect of חוּה. Most older lexicons suggest that the root is שָׁחָה/שָׁחוּ. Newer lexicons and grammars, on the basis of analogy with the Ugaritic *hwy*, suggest that the root is חוּה (WO 21.2.3d; JM 59g 79t). There are non-hishtaphel forms of this verb in Isaiah 51:23 and Proverbs 12:25 (יִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה שְׁחִי), which support the idea of a root שָׁחָה, but these may be back-formations developed on the basis of an erroneous assumption that the common verb יִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה was a hithpael of שָׁחָה rather than a hishtaphel of חוּה. The verb means to bow down all the way to the ground, to prostrate oneself.

תִּעֲבֹדֶיךָ is best understood not as an anomalous qal imperfect but as a hophal with a middle meaning, “do not permit yourself to become subservient to.” It has been called a derogatory form (GK 60b, BDB 713). Believers serve the true God. Heathen are subservient to false gods.

The word קִנְיָא from the phrase “a jealous God” (אֱלֹהֵי קִנְיָא) is used only in reference to God. However, other words from the same root are used also of human beings. קִנְיָא refers to God’s intense zeal for righteousness and holiness and to his claim to exclusive loyalty. The word’s meaning is clarified by the following passages.

Exodus 34:6-14—a jealous God will by no means clear the guilty.

Deuteronomy 4:24—the LORD your God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God.

1 Kings 14:22—God’s jealousy, provoked by Israel’s idolatry, led to the captivity.

Deuteronomy 32:16-21—Israel provoked God to jealousy with its idols, so he provokes them to jealousy by grafting the Gentiles into their place.

Numbers 5:11-34 and Proverbs 6:34—The jealousy of a husband toward his wife (that is, his rightful desire for exclusive faithfulness to him) illustrates the jealousy of God.

John 2:17 and Psalm 69:9—Jesus’ zeal in cleansing the temple.

1 Corinthians 11:2—Paul’s godly jealousy over the Corinthians, which wants them to be loyal to Christ alone.

1 Kings 19:10—Elijah’s zeal for God opposes all unfaithfulness to him.

Isaiah 42:8—the Lord will not share his glory with idols nor his praise with images.

Ezekiel 16—the Lord cannot tolerate Israel’s adultery with idols.

This still leaves us with the problem of how to translate all of this idea with a single word or brief phrase. Here are some of the attempts: LXX: ζηλωτής; Vulgate: *zelotes*; Luther: *eifriger*; KJV, Beck, NEB and others: jealous God; recent trial catechisms: “I mean all that I say” and “a God who demands exclusive loyalty.” Although the word “jealousy” is not entirely satisfactory, since it makes us think of self-centered human jealousy, I believe it is still the best choice. We need to explain the word so that we elevate our concept of jealousy to be fitting of God, rather than allowing our idea of God to fit our notion of jealousy.

In God “jealousy” is not a passing or petty passion. It is more of an action than a feeling. It is an aspect of his very essence. It is his holiness in action against sin, his hatred of evil (Ps 5), his desire that his glory not be shared with another (Is 42:8). It is his possessive protectiveness of his own flock, so that no one can pluck them out of his hand. It is a warning that God is not mocked. It is not petty jealousy of non-existent rivals, empty idols which are nothing, but the determined zeal that his honor and glory be upheld.

דָּקַף is a word of many meanings. The basic meaning “is come upon, meet, or strike against.” The verb דָּקַף usually refers to a visit made in an official capacity, for example, to make an inspection, to enroll people on the draft rolls or the tax rolls. When used of God, this verb, often translated “visit,” refers to occasions when God manifests his presence, either in mercy or in judgment. God is, of course always present and active at every time and place, but the verb דָּקַף refers to a decisive intervention by God to bless or punish (Exodus 32:34, Luke 1:68). “Visit,” of course, fails to give the correct connotation in contemporary English since it is used to describe the presence of someone who is usually absent, and its connotations are largely social. For this reason, most contemporary translations translate דָּקַף as “punish” or “bless” as the context dictates.

Etymologically the word עֲוֹן describes sin as that which is twisted, bent, or perverse. It usually carries with it the connotation of “guilt.” Guilt is liability to punishment because of sin. עֲוֹן may refer to the deed which incurs guilt, to the guilt itself, or to the punishment due to the guilt.

The punishment which passes down to the third and fourth generation of those who hate the Lord is not punishment of descendants for the sins of their predecessors. It is true that the natural consequences of such sins as idolatry, alcoholism, and sexual immorality (for example, poverty, disease, etc.) may continue to have an affect on future generations. Here, however, the point is that successive generations tend to follow in the sins that that they have learned from the preceding generation (as Canaan followed Ham), and so they receive the same judgment. This principle does not contradict the legal principle that one person should not be punished for the crimes of another (Dt 24:16). Ezekiel 18:20 states that children should not be punished for the sins of the fathers or vice versa, but parents’ sinful example can lead their children down the wrong road, and their children can be affected by the disasters the parents’ sins bring on the family. Since people often feel more grief over the misfortunes of their children and grandchildren than over their own, the warning that sin often affects one’s descendants is a strong curb against sin. Our sin can echo down the generations.

Some like Beck translate “showing mercy unto the thousandth generation” in order to parallel the preceding phrases “unto the third ones and the fourth ones,” that is, “the third and fourth generations.” Deuteronomy 7:9 seems to support this interpretation. If a generation is 20 to 30 years, the world has not yet reached a thousand generations, and perhaps it never will. This phrase, in effect, means “always,” “forever.” The current WELS catechism has “to thousands” in the first edition and “to a thousand generations” in the 1998 edition.

In the phrase עַל־רִבְעֵים לְשָׁנָאֵי the use of the absolute noun רִבְעֵים followed by לְ, rather than a construct noun followed by a dependent noun, allows רִבְעֵים to remain in the absolute state so that it matches the previous words (בְּנֵים שְׁלֹשִׁים) in the string of objects of the preposition עַל.

The NIV usually translates רַחֲמֵי as “love.” It seems best, however, to reserve the translation “love” for אַהֲבָה, the generic Hebrew word for love, which is parallel to ἀγάπη. The ancient versions regularly translated רַחֲמֵי as “mercy” (ἔλεος). The King James also followed this convention. About three fourths of the occurrences of רַחֲמֵי in the Old Testament have God as the subject and man as the object. In the mid 20th century it became popular to claim that רַחֲמֵי was a word for covenant loyalty which meant something like “steadfast love.” God’s mercy certainly is exercised within his covenant and, thus, it is always faithful. This meaning, however, flows more from the biblical concept of God’s faithful love than from the word רַחֲמֵי itself. God’s love and mercy are not a result of his covenant obligation, but his covenant obligation is a result of his love and mercy (Dt 7:7-8). When the psalmist wants to stress the faithfulness aspect of God’s mercy, he makes it explicit by using the hendiadys רַחֲמֵי וְאֱמֻנָה, “mercy and truth,” that is, dependable mercy. Recently there has been a tendency to return to “mercy” as the best translation for רַחֲמֵי.

We note that the words that have sometimes been called “The Conclusion” of the commandments are really an introduction to the commandments. Luther called them “What does God say of all these commandments?” Luther’s commentary is sufficient explanation of these words.

What Does God Say of All These Commandments?

He says thus: I the Lord, your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me, and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love Me and keep My commandments.

What does this mean?

God threatens to punish all that transgress these commandments. Therefore we should dread His wrath and not act contrary to these commandments. But He promises grace and every blessing to all that keep these commandments. Therefore we should also love and trust in Him, and gladly do [zealously and diligently order our whole life] according to His commandments.

Suggested Translation: You must not have any other god beside me. Do not make for yourself any carved image or a likeness of anything in heaven above, or on the earth beneath, or in the waters under the earth. Do not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God. I pursue the sins of the fathers unto their children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren, if they hate me too. But I keep my gracious promises to thousands who love me and keep my commandments.

The Third Word: Exodus 20:7

7 לֹא תִשָּׂא אֶת־שֵׁם־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ
 לְשׁוֹן כִּי לֹא יִנָּקֶה יְהוָה אֶת
 אֲשֶׁר־יִשָּׂא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ לְשׁוֹן: פ

11 Dt 5 לֹא תִשָּׂא אֶת־שֵׁם־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ
 לְשׁוֹן כִּי לֹא יִנָּקֶה יְהוָה אֶת
 אֲשֶׁר־יִשָּׂא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ לְשׁוֹן: ס

Literal translation: You shall not lift up the name of the Lord your God to evil/falsehood/nothingness for the Lord will not leave unpunished/hold guiltless the one who lifts up his name to evil/falsehood/nothingness.

The Lord cannot be represented by an image, but he is represented to us by his name, that is, by everything that he has revealed to us about himself. In the first commandment the Lord spoke of himself in the first person (before *me*). Here he speaks of himself in the third person.

לְשׂוֹא, lifting up the name, refers first of all to swearing an oath (Lv 19:12). לְשׂוֹא (often translated “in vain”) literally means 1) to nothingness, emptiness, or vanity, 2) to falsehood or to a lie, 3) to evil. It sometimes refers to a false god. Should we translate in a narrow sense (“to a lie”) and limit the application to perjury? Or should we translate in a wide sense (“in vain” or “for evil” or “to a useless purpose”) so that all misuse of God’s name such as cursing, swearing, superstition, frivolity, and false doctrine are included? Almost all translators have agreed with the broad sense chosen by Luther (*misbrauchen*), the LXX (ἐπι ματαίω), and the Vulgate (*assumes in vanum*). Not only gross blasphemy but a frivolous “Oh God” or “Jesus Christ” is a violation of this command.

לֹא יְנַקֶּה may mean either “hold guiltless” or “leave unpunished” (BDB 667). With Luther, who translated *nicht ungestraft lassen*, I prefer the latter. See Leviticus 24:10-23 for an example of the judgment against blasphemy.

Suggested translation: Do not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not permit anyone who misuses his name to escape unpunished.

The Fourth Word: Exodus 20: 8-11

8 זְכוֹר אֶת־יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ:
 9 שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲבֹד וְעָשִׂיתָ כָּל־מְלָאכְתְּךָ:
 10 וַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שָׁבַת לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ
 לֹא־תַעֲשֶׂה כָּל־מְלָאכָה אַתָּה
 וּבִנְךָ־וּבִתֶּךָ עַבְדְּךָ וְאִמְתֶּךָ וּבְהֵמְתֶךָ
 וְגֵרְךָ אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ:
 11 כִּי שֵׁשֶׁת־יָמִים עָשָׂה יְהוָה אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם
 וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֶת־הַיָּם
 וְאֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־בָּם וַיָּנַח בַּיּוֹם
 הַשְּׁבִיעִי עַל־כֵּן בֵּרַךְ יְהוָה אֶת־
 יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת וַיְקַדְּשֵׁהוּ: 8

12 Dt 5 שְׁמוֹר אֶת־יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ
 כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ:
 13 שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲבֹד וְעָשִׂיתָ כָּל־מְלָאכְתְּךָ:
 14 וַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שָׁבַת לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ
 לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה כָּל־מְלָאכָה אַתָּה
 וּבִנְךָ־וּבִתֶּךָ וְעַבְדְּךָ־וְאִמְתֶּךָ וְשׂוֹרְךָ
 וְחֹמְרֶךָ וְכָל־בְּהֵמְתֶךָ וְגֵרְךָ
 אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ לְמַעַן יָנוּחַ עַבְדְּךָ וְאִמְתֶּךָ כָּמוֹךָ:
 15 וַזְכַּרְתָּ כִּי־עָבַד הָיִיתָ בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם

וַיִּצְאָה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ
 מִשָּׁם בְּיַד חֲזָקָה וּבְזֶרַע נְטוּיָה
 עַל־כֵּן צִוָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ
 לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת־יּוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת: 8

Literal translation: To remember the day of the rest to keep it holy, six days you shall serve and shall do all your assigned work, and the seventh day [shall be] a rest to the LORD your God. You shall not do any assigned work, you and your son and your daughter and your male servant and your female servant and your cattle and your alien/sojourner who [is] in your gates, for [in] six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all which [is] in them and he rested/settled down on the seventh day, therefore the LORD blessed the day of rest and made it holy.

The first word of the command, זָכוֹר (remember, observe without lapse), raises a question of syntax. It is not the regular form of the imperative, but an infinitive absolute. Many grammars say that this is an alternative form of command equal to an imperative, but more emphatic (GKC 113y, bb). This construction may be an abbreviation for an imperative plus an intensifying infinitive absolute. In his grammar (p 93) J. W. Watts insists that a distinction must be maintained between these forms. According to his interpretation, the infinitive in v 8 (זָכוֹר) is the governing word of an adverbial clause. This adverbial clause modifies the main verb in verse 9, “you shall labor.” Watts translates v 8 and 9 “Remembering the sabbath day to keep it holy, six days shall you labor,” etc. The two clauses together bring out a dual obligation. *Work* six days in order to *consecrate* the seventh day to rest and worship. In both interpretations the emphasis on Sabbath rest is the same, but Watts’ translation brings out the emphasis on working the other six days more clearly. Watts’ translation makes verses 8 and 9 a positive command to work for six days, and verse 10 a prohibition of working on the seventh day. See the discussion on WO, p 593, including notes 51 and 52. Deuteronomy 5:12 uses a different word (שָׁמֹר keep, guard), but it too is an infinitive absolute. The Samaritan Pentateuch has שָׁמֹר in both Exodus and Deuteronomy. The word “remember” may be prospective, looking ahead to the continued celebration of the Sabbath, but it may also be retrospective, looking back to the institution of the Sabbath (Ex 16 or before?). “Keep” the Sabbath puts more emphasis on guarding or preserving the institution entrusted to them.

In v 9 וְשֵׁשֶׁת־יָמִים is the so-called adverbial accusative which indicates “time within which” without a preposition (GK 118k). In this case English also permits the omission of a preposition. In other cases, such as in v 11, English needs a preposition.

In v 10, in the phrase וַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי, although the whole phrase is definite, only the second member has the article, contrary to the usual construction which has the article with both words. This phenomenon occurs especially with numbers (WO, p 260; VNK, p 232).

The word translated “work” (מְלָאכָה) comes from the same root as מְלָאֲךָ (messenger, angel, one sent out). The root idea is not “toiling,” “hard labor” but “being commissioned.” For this reason I have translated “assigned work.” This word may have been chosen to show that it is not doing *anything* on the Sabbath that is prohibited by this commandment, but the carrying out of one’s job. However, the word מְלָאכָה is used especially of skilled work, such as the work of the artisans of the tabernacle. It is also used of God’s work in Genesis 2:2. This may be the reason that it is used here. Leviticus 23:7 defines the prohibition for the festivals as servile work (מְלָאכַת עֲבָדָה), work done as someone’s servant (the NIV has “regular work”). I take this as explanatory of what is meant by מְלָאכָה rather than as a lessening of the restriction for the festivals (see TDOT, VIII, p 328). Does the omission of the wife in this prohibition mean that serving meals was not prohibited, or is it a way of indicating that she was not one of the servants in the household? The mention of the man himself would seem to make this second idea less likely. More likely is the view that “you” is inclusive of both husband

and wife. Exodus 12:16 grants an exemption for the preparation of food for the festival Sabbaths. Perhaps it was to be understood that this applied to the regular Sabbaths as well.

In Deuteronomy 5 God’s delivery of Israel from slavery in Egypt is mentioned as motivation for keeping the Sabbath rest. Rest to serve the Lord was the first request made of Pharaoh. Freedom to serve the Lord was the basic reason for the Exodus. Here in Exodus the Lord’s action and example in creation are the reasons for keeping the Sabbath rest. These two reasons complement each other. The example of God after Creation is the primary reason all Israelites should honor the Sabbath. Their experience as slaves in Egypt should help them understand why they should not deprive anyone of needed rest, not even the resident aliens who had taken up residence with them. Deuteronomy gives a more detailed list of the draft animals that were not to be put to work for profit on the Sabbath than Exodus does.

The commandment in Deuteronomy 5:12 adds a special reminder for the Israelites of God’s institution of the Sabbath.

In this “word” the specific form of obedience applies only to Israel, as the New Testament statements about the abrogation of the Sabbath make clear.

Suggested translation: Remember to keep the day of rest holy [or remember the day of rest by keeping it holy]. Six days you should serve and do all your assigned work, but the seventh day shall be a rest unto the LORD your God. Do not do any assigned work, neither you nor your sons or daughters, your male or female servants, nor your cattle nor the alien who is staying with you. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and everything which is in them, but he rested on the seventh day, therefore the LORD blessed the seventh day and made it holy.

The Fifth Word: Exodus 20:12

12 כִּבֵּד אֶת־אָבִיךָ וְאֶת־אִמְךָ
לְמַעַן יָאָרְכוּן יְמֶיךָ עַל הָאָדָמָה
אֲשֶׁר־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לָךְ: ֵס

5 Dt 16 אֶת־אָבִיךָ וְאֶת־אִמְךָ כְּאֲשֶׁר
צִוָּךְ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְמַעַן
יָאָרְכוּן יְמֶיךָ וְלִמְעַן יִיטֵב לָךְ עַל הָאָדָמָה
אֲשֶׁר־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לָךְ: ֵס

Literal translation: Give weight to/honor your father and your mother in order that your days may be long upon the cultivated land which the Lord your God [is] giving to you.

The piel כִּבֵּד means to regard or treat as heavy, that is, it is the opposite of our expression “to take lightly.”

This is the first commandment with promise, “that your days may be long on the land.” Deuteronomy 5 adds “that it may be well with you.” The promise refers especially to the enjoyment of each Israelite’s personal inheritance within the land of Israel, the specific piece of land which the Lord was giving to each family of Israelites. The word for land (הָאָדָמָה) refers more to soil, ground, dirt, or farmland, rather than to a nation with geographic boundaries or to the whole world (אֶרֶץ). If the children were rebellious and did not listen to their parents, they would not learn of the covenant with the Lord. They would live without regard for the covenant and so would be cast out of the land. In the New Testament, in Ephesians 6:2-3, “land” is translated “earth,” broadening the application to all people (ἐπὶ τῆν γῆν).

The verb יִאָרְכוּן is the longer form ending in nun. This so-called paragogic *nun* on the verb is archaic and/or emphatic. It occurs largely on pausal forms. When this form appears in non-pausal contexts as it does here, it may indicate contrast or consequence (WO, p 517, GKC 47m). Notice the different spelling of the form (without and with yod) in Exodus and Deuteronomy. This illustrates the idiosyncrasies of Hebrew spelling, especially in regard to the presence or absence of vowel letters.

יָרָךְ looks feminine but is the pausal form of the masculine.

Suggested translation: Honor your father and your mother that your days may be long on the land which the Lord your God is giving to you.

The Sixth Word: Exodus 20:13

13 לא תרצח: ט

5 Dt 17 לא תרצח: ט

Literal translation: You shall not murder.

There are many Hebrew words for “kill.” Most English translations do not follow a consistent pattern which distinguishes them from each other. The word used here (רָצַח) is not a general word for “kill” like הָרַג or מָוַת in the hiphil. It is not the main word used for the execution of criminals (מָוַת). Nor is it a word used specifically for the slaughter of animals (תַּשֵּׁחַ). The word used here (רָצַח) means “murder”, just as the corresponding word φονεύσεις in the quotations of the 5th commandment in the New Testament does. Even the apparent exceptions do not undermine this meaning of רָצַח. In 1 Kings 21:19 we are told that Ahab “killed” (יָרַח) Naboth, but this act was certainly a murder, even if cloaked under a façade of lawfulness. In Numbers 35:16-34 the man who kills someone, either in anger or by accident is called a רָצֹחַ (killer—KJV, homicide—NEB, murderer—NIV). This means that he is the violent illegal killer of another man. The only question is whether premeditation is involved, or in other words what degree of murder is this? Verse 30 of Numbers 35 is especially interesting. It says, literally, “He shall murder (רָצַח) anyone who smites a soul, the murderer (אֶת־הָרָצֹחַ), upon the testimony of witnesses.” This verse seems to contradict our contention that רָצַח means murder, because the authorized execution of a murderer by the avenger is called murder. But this seeming discrepancy disappears when we remember the method of prosecution and execution in this case. The execution was not carried out by the state, but by the personal avenger of the murdered man. It was, in effect, a murder for a murder. The NEB seeks to avoid the difficulty by making “anyone who smites a soul” the subject of the verb and translating רָצַח passively, “the homicide shall be put to death as a murderer” but this is contrary to the natural meaning of the Qal.

Our contention that the 5th commandment, “You shall not kill,” does not prohibit capital punishment or killing animals does not rest on the word רָצַח alone. Many clear passages of Scriptures show this, since both execution of criminals and use of animals for sacrifices and food are referred to in many places, including the chapters that follow immediately after the Decalogue. But it is interesting that even the Hebrew word chosen for the commandment supports this understanding.

We can easily see the relationship between the 5th commandment and Israel’s covenant with God when we see that the commandment was protection of each person’s time of grace.

Suggested translation: Do not murder.

The Seventh Word: Exodus 20:14

14 לא תנאף: ס

5 Dt 18 ולא תנאף: ס

Literal translation: You shall not commit adultery.

The word נאף in itself refers only to adultery in the narrow sense. Our broadening of the commandment to include fornication and other sexual sins does not rest on the word, but on parallel passages of the Old Testament such as Leviticus 18 and 20 and Deuteronomy 22-25, as well as many passages in the New Testament. Adultery as such is the sexual sin emphasized in the Sinaitic Covenant because it best illustrates the parallel between unfaithfulness to husband or wife and unfaithfulness to Yahweh, which is a common theme in Scripture. In Israel's civil law adultery was punished by death because it undermined one of the basic pillars of society, marriage, which was the first institution of God for human life in his world.

The order of the commandments of the second table is discussed in an appendix.

Suggested translation: Do not commit adultery.

The Eighth Word: Exodus 20:15

15 לא תגנב: ס

5 Dt 19 ולא תגנב: ס

Literal translation: You shall not steal.

גנב and κλέψεις emphasize the sneaky aspect of stealing, rather than violent strong-arm robbery. Some interpreters feel that גנב actually refers primarily to kidnapping (cf Dt 24:7). Taking a person away from his family, especially to sell him into foreign slavery, separated him from his covenant blessing. The lack of an object shows that the prohibition is comprehensive of every sort of stealing.

Suggested translation: Do not steal.

The Ninth Word: Exodus 20:16

16 לא־תענה ברעך עד שקר: ס

5 Dt 20 לא־תענה ברעך עד שוא: ס

Literal translation: You shall not answer against your neighbor/friend as a witness to a lie.

The text itself speaks only of perjury, and the versions all follow this interpretation: LXX: ψευδομαρτυρήσεις; Vulgate: *loqueres falsum testimonium*; Luther: *falsches Zeugnis*. Other passages of Scripture, however, justify the broadening of the application of the commandment from those who speak false words to include those who speak with a false spirit (gossip etc).

“Neighbor” is not necessarily limited to Israelites (*TDOT*, XII, p 526).

There is no essential difference between the two words for falseness.

Suggested translation: Do not give false testimony against your neighbor.

The Tenth Word: Exodus 20:17

17 לא תִחְמַד בֵּית רֵעֶךָ לֹא־תִחְמַד
אִשְׁת־רֵעֶךָ וְעַבְדוֹ וְאִמָּתוֹ וְשׁוֹרוֹ
וְחִמְרוֹ וְכָל אֲשֶׁר לְרֵעֶךָ: פ

5 Dt 21 לא תִחְמַד אִשְׁת־רֵעֶךָ ס וְלֹא תִתְאַוֶּה
בֵּית רֵעֶךָ שְׂדֵהוּ וְעַבְדוֹ
וְאִמָּתוֹ שׁוֹרוֹ וְחִמְרוֹ וְכָל אֲשֶׁר לְרֵעֶךָ: ס

Literal translation: You shall not covet the house of your neighbor. You shall not covet the wife of your neighbor and his male servant and his female servant and his ox and his donkey and anything which [is] to your neighbor.

חָמַד (strongly desire) can be used in either a good or bad sense, like the Greek ἐπιθυμίασεις or the Latin *concupio*. Exodus uses this verb two times. Deuteronomy 5 uses two different verbs, the qal of חָמַד and the hithpael of אָוָה. The repetition of the verb seems to justify our division of the prohibition on coveting into two commandments, but Deuteronomy raises doubt on this point, because it changes the order of the items to read, “Do not covet your neighbor’s wife. Do not desire his house etc.” If this commandment is divided into two, the 9th commandment is different in Exodus than it is in Deuteronomy. See the further discussion below in the appendix.

Deuteronomy adds mention of the neighbor’s field.

It is very fitting that the commandments should conclude with a “word” which emphasizes the motivation and thoughts of the heart, just as they began with a “word” which emphasized motivation. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts and the beginning of sin. Out of the heart comes the motivation of faith, which moves one to keep the commandments.

Suggested translation: Do not covet the house of your neighbor. Do not covet the wife of your neighbor or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything which is your neighbor’s.

Epilogue

18 וְכָל־הָעָם רֹאִים אֶת־הַקּוֹלֹת וְאֶת־הַלְפִידִם
וְאֵת קוֹל הַשֹּׁפָר
וְאֶת־הַהָר עֵשָׂן וַיֵּרָא הָעָם וַיִּנְעוּ וַיַּעֲמְדוּ מֵרָחֵק:

5 Dt 5 אָנֹכִי עֹמֵד בֵּין־יְהוָה וּבֵינֵיכֶם בְּעֵת
הַהוּא לְהַגִּיד לְכֶם אֶת־דְּבַר
יְהוָה כִּי יֵרְאֶתֶם מִפְּנֵי הָאֵשׁ וְלֹא־עֲלִיתֶם בָּהָר לֵאמֹר: ס

Ex 20:18 And all the people were seeing the thunders and the lightnings and the sound of the horn and the mountain [in] smoke, and the people saw [or feared in some versions] and they shook and they stood far off.

Dt 5:5 I was standing between the LORD and you at that time to declare to you the word of the LORD, because you were afraid of the appearance of fire and you did not go up the mountain.

The participle ראיִם sets the circumstances during the actions indicated by the following finite verbs. The verb “see” here includes perception of both sights and sounds.

The forms of the verbs for “see” (ראה) and “fear” (ירא) are easily confused, accounting for the variants here.

These words emphasize the fear which the law of the holy God creates in sinners and the respect with which we should approach his law. These sentiments are echoed in the New Testament.

Hebrews 12: 18You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; 19to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, 20because they could not bear what was commanded: “If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned.” 21The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, “I am trembling with fear.” 22But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God....25See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven? 26At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, “Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.” 27The words “once more” indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain. 28Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, 29for our “God is a consuming fire.”

Though the new man does not know fear as a motivation (1 Jo 4:18), the old man needs to be curbed by fear of punishment. It is the other kind of fear, however, that moves us to keep the commandments: we should fear, love, and trust in God above all things so that we gladly obey his commands. This can happen only when contrite hearts have been consoled by the gospel and moved to serve the Lord with gratitude.

Appendix One: Numbering of the Ten Commandments or the Ten Words.

There are fourteen commands in Exodus 20, so obviously some of them must be grouped together if we are to have Ten Words.

- 1 You shall have no other gods before me.
- 2 You shall not make for yourself a graven image.
- 3 You shall not bow down to them or serve them.
- 4 You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.
- 5 Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.
- 6 Six days you shall labor.
- 7 In it you shall not do any work.
- 8 Honor your father and your mother.
- 9 You shall not murder.
- 10 You shall not commit adultery.
- 11 You shall not steal.
- 12 You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
- 13 You shall not covet your neighbor’s house.

14 You shall not covet your neighbor's wife.

Groupings are 1-3, 5-6, 13-14.

The Pentateuch says that there are ten *words* or *sayings* (Hebrew עֲשֶׂוֹת הַדְּבָרִים) not ten commandments:

Exodus 34:28 He wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the Ten Words.

Deuteronomy 4:13 He declared to you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, that is, the Ten Words; and he wrote them upon two tables of stone.

Deuteronomy 10:4 He wrote on the tables, as at the first writing, the Ten Words, which the LORD had spoken to you on the mountain out of the midst of the fire on the day of the assembly; and the LORD gave them to me.

None of these texts specifies how this proclamation of the law is to be divided into ten “words” or “statements.”

There are three main ways of numbering the Words:

1. The numbering followed in the commentary above divides the text into one introductory word followed by nine commandments. The advantage of this system is that it avoids the arbitrary division of a commandment that seems to deal with one topic (whether idolatry in the case of the first or coveting in the case of the last) into two commandments. This system was followed by Jewish Tannaitic sources, the Midrash, Ibn Ezra, and Peter Martyr. It is often called the Talmudic order.
2. The second system divides the first commandment, which prohibits idolatry, into two commandments. This system is followed by Philo, Josephus (Ant. 3,5,5), the Greek Orthodox, Eastern Catholics, Socinus, many of the Reformed, and most Evangelicals. It is often called the Philonic order. This division seems rather arbitrary, and in the case of some of the Reformed it seems to be motivated by an aversion to any use of images.
3. The third system divides the commandment against coveting into two. This system was followed by Augustine, Aquinas, Roman (Latin) Catholicism, and Luther. There seems to be no real basis for this division, especially in view of the fact that this system produces different 9th and 10th commandments depending on whether one follows Exodus or Deuteronomy.

The question of how the material in the Decalogue should be divided thus boils down to three main questions:

- a. Is the statement “I am the LORD your God...” one of the Words or not?
- b. Should the commands against other gods and idols be grouped together or separated?
- c. Should the commands against coveting a neighbor's wife and desiring his property be grouped together or separated?

The following lists give some of the arguments of the advocates and opponents of each of the three views. Not all the arguments are of equal strength, but all are included here as representative examples of the argumentation offered.

The following arguments are cited in favor of Augustine's division of the coveting prohibitions into two commandments:

1. The Deuteronomy 5 version of the Decalogue uses two different verbs in the two prohibitions. It says do not “covet” (Hebrew, רָצַח) a neighbor’s spouse, but do not “desire” (Hebrew, חָשַׁק) a neighbor’s property. Two separate verbs, thus two separate Words. Exodus uses only one verb, but it repeats it.
2. In Exodus the 9th Commandment deals with depriving the neighbor of his place, the 10th deals with depriving him of the service of others.
3. In Deuteronomy 5 the two prohibitions are in the same order as the Words against adultery and theft.

Arguments cited against this division of the coveting prohibitions include:

1. The purpose of this “word” is not to list new categories of sin but to show that sins that remain in the heart are nevertheless real sins.
2. The Exodus 20 version of the Decalogue places the command concerning a neighbor’s wife into a catalogue of his property, destroying the parallelism cited in point 3 above.
3. The Exodus version of the Decalogue uses only one verb, “covet,” to refer to setting one’s heart on either another’s wife or property.
4. Both versions treat this “word” as one verse (though Dt 5 has the paragraph mark D in the middle of the verse).
5. The prohibition is not treated as two separate commandments in New Testament summaries.
6. The prohibitions are taught as one commandment even by Roman Catholics and Lutherans who divide it into two parts.
7. If בַּיִת is understood as “household,” the problem disappears and the prohibition is one. In this case the Exodus version gives the general term first, followed by details. Deuteronomy gives the most important member first, followed by other examples.

In rejoinder to argument 1 above, supporters of the Augustinian system may reply:

1. The theory of one general command to teach inner adherence to the commandments is weakened by the fact that the last word does not repeat any of the other commands besides adultery and theft. If this was the purpose, it should have included prohibitions of inner breaking of the sabbath, inner dishonoring one’s parents, of hating one’s neighbor, or of believing lies about others. Jesus made an internalized application of most of these commandments in the Sermon on the Mount.

Arguments in favor of dividing the first commandment into two:

1. There is a difference between worshipping a false god and using idols. One can do one without the other, thus the need for two commandments.

Arguments against this division of the prohibition against idolatry:

1. In the ancient Near East during the second millennium BC, polytheism and idolatry were synonymous. The Israelites did not need both a prohibition of polytheism and a prohibition of idolatry. Prohibiting one prohibited the other.
2. If there is only one commandment here, the “them” in the prohibitions of verse 5 directly applies both against any other gods (v 3) and any idols (v 4).

3. The statement “You shall not make for yourself a graven idol” cannot be intended to ban all images, for God himself commands the making of images of “things in heaven and on earth” when he commanded the making of the bronze serpent (Numbers 21:8) or the cherubim which covered the Tabernacle, Solomon’s Temple, or Ezekiel’s visionary Temple. It is, therefore, less likely that the prohibition of images is a separate commandment.

Since neither of the two suggested divisions into ten commandments seems very persuasive, that leaves the explanation which treats the motivating statement that begins the text as the First Word. It would be strange if the Decalogue began with a prohibition of false gods without first giving direction to worship the true God. This is the first and greatest of all commandments. Thus the statement “I am the LORD your God...” should be regarded as one of the Words. We could even call it an implied command to worship, though it is more of an invitation. The Israelites needed to have stressed to them both their duty and motivation to worship the true God, who had delivered them from Egypt, and the fact that they must not worship other gods in any way, shape, or form. Thus the statement “I am the LORD your God...” should not be lumped together with the prohibition of false gods.

Many fundamentalist web sites vilify the Catholic Church for falsifying the commandments against idolatry by eliminating the prohibition against images, but this criticism of the Catholic Church is at least in part unfair since it has not made a dogma of the division of the commandments. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says:

The division and numbering of the Commandments have varied in the course of history. The present catechism follows the division of the Commandments established by St. Augustine, which has become traditional in the Catholic Church. It is also that of the Lutheran confessions. The Greek Fathers worked out a slightly different division, which is found in the Orthodox Churches and Reformed communities (Par. 2066).

The Catholic Encyclopedia says:

A confusion, however, exists in the numbering, which is due to a difference of opinion concerning the initial precept on Divine worship. The system of numeration found in Catholic Bibles, based on the Hebrew text, was made by St. Augustine (fifth century) in his book of “Questions of Exodus” (*Quaestionum in Heptateuchum libri VII*”, Bk. II, Question lxxi), and was adopted by the Council of Trent. It is followed also by the German Lutherans, except those of the school of Bucer....Another division has been adopted by the English and Helvetian Protestant churches on the authority of Philo Judæus, Josephus, Origen, and others, whereby two Commandments are made to cover the matter of worship, and thus the numbering of the rest is advanced one higher; and the Tenth embraces both the Ninth and Tenth of the Catholic division. It seems, however, as logical to separate at the end as to group at the beginning, for while one single object is aimed at under worship, two specifically different sins are forbidden under covetousness; if adultery and theft belong to two distinct species of moral wrong, the same must be said of the desire to commit these evils.

The Catholic Church is not dogmatic about the divisions of the “words.” Jews followed a number of systems. In the Large Catechism discussion of the prohibition of coveting, Luther refers both to “these two commandments” and “this commandment.” No important issue is at stake here. What is important is that the substance of all the commandments be taught correctly. Just as the two versions of the Lord’s Prayer do not affect its purpose to serve as a model of prayer, so the two versions of the Decalogue do not affect its purpose of being a basic summary of moral law. Some, however, get quite worked up over the issue. Numerous sites

devoted to the argument can be located by searching “numbering of the commandments” or some similar phrase on the Internet.

Appendix Two: Variant Orders of the Commandments

The order we traditionally follow in the second table of the law is the order of the Masoretic Text, the Samaritan Pentateuch, Josephus, and Rabbinic sources. Variant orders of the second table appear in some manuscripts of the Septuagint, in Philo, and in the Nash Papyrus.

The LXX (B)			
of Ex 20 has	13 οὐ μοιχεύσεις.	14 οὐ κλέψεις.	4 οὐ φονεύσεις.
The LXX of			
Dt 5 has	17 οὐ μοιχεύσεις.	18 οὐ φονεύσεις.	19 οὐ κλέψεις.
Rom 13:9 has	οὐ μοιχεύσεις.	οὐ φονεύσεις.	οὐ κλέψεις.
The Nash Papyrus has			
	Do not commit adultery	do not murder	do not steal
Philo has the order			
	Do not commit adultery	do not murder	

Mark 10:19 and Luke 19:20 also follow a free order with the 4th Commandment at the end.

Appendix Three: Two Tables

Exodus 34:1, Deuteronomy 5:22, and Deuteronomy 10:3 refer to two tables of stone, but do not specify the contents of these tables or tablets. There is no indication whether each of the tables contained half of the text of the law, the two tables were duplicate copies of the whole law, or there was some topical division of the law into two parts. The traditional division into two tables, the first pertaining to God, the second to other people, is based on Jesus’ summary of the Law in Luke 10:27 and the reference to the Fourth Commandment as a first commandment, with promise (Eph 6:2).

Appendix Four: Nash Papyrus of the Decalogue

The four papyrus fragments that make up the Nash Papyrus were acquired in Egypt by W. L. Nash and first described by Stanley A. Cook in 1903. The fragments were the oldest Hebrew fragments known at that time which contained a portion of the biblical text, specifically, the Decalogue and the Shema (“Hear, O Israel”). Though dated by Cook to the second century AD, subsequent reappraisals by Albright and others have pushed the date back to the second century BC. The text of the Decalogue present in the papyrus is sometimes closer to the Masoretic version of Exodus, sometimes closer to Deuteronomy. Most of the agreements with Deuteronomy, however, are also reflected in the Septuagint version of Exodus. Furthermore, the papyrus shows other affinities with the Septuagint, particularly in regard to the order of the sixth through eighth commandments (adultery-murder-theft)—agreeing with several Septuagint manuscripts, Philo, and some instances in the New Testament—and in containing the introductory phrase to the Shema. It also exhibits a few unique readings. The papyrus was probably copied from a liturgical work rather than a biblical text; the practice of reading the Decalogue before the Shema is attested in both Talmuds (Based on *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*).

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