Ten Commandments or Prohibitions?
Numbering the Ten Words

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Abstract: Exodus 34:28 established, ostensibly, that Moses recorded "Ten Words" (known as the Ten Commandments) revealed by *Yahweh*. What is in question is not how to number but how to *name* these Ten. Since Origen, different sets of ten commands have been proposed. Opposing Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant traditions exist. Logical, theological, and linguistic arguments have been offered as justifications for how to best divide the texts (Exod 20:3–17 and Deut 5:7–21) into two distinct commands and eight prohibitions. Most variations center on how to combine or split the several directives contained at the beginning and end, which respectively focus on idolatry and coveting. No consensus has been reached, although one list has become popular. Jewish exegesis includes a proposal for only nine. Some interpreters have proposed more than ten commands (12-14). Is a new approach possible? This article suggests there are ten clear prohibitions that leave aside the positive commands to keep Sabbath and honor parents. The proposal is made that these two could be seen as adjunctive to the prohibitions that precede, so do not function technically as two of the Ten negations intended.

Key terms: Decalogue, Ten Commandments, Ten Words, Two Tablets, law code, Sinai Covenant, Mosaic law

Exodus 34:28 says Moses inscribed "ten words" (עֲשֶׂרֶת הַדְּבָרִים), the "words of the covenant," on the tablets (or "planks"), and that this occurred during a forty-day-and-night period when he was with *Yahweh*.[1] There were two "tablets"; however, *Yahweh* had previously stated

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[1] Also known as the "Decalogue" (from *deka logous* "ten words" in the Greek Septuagint, OT version).

that he would write on them (Exod 34:1).[2] Although the numbers "ten" and "twenty" in Hebrew share the same root consonants, no serious proposal has been made to date for textual emendation. What exactly was on the two tablets is debated. Some take the verse literally that only ten words were inscribed. How they were distributed is also a question (5 and 5 only being a logical deduction, but echoed by Gamaliel, while other sages proposed duplicate tablets, ten on each).[3] Jewish artwork often displays two tablets with one word per command (suggestive of the remaining text) or using the first ten letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

The passages that contain these commands (Exod 20:3–17 and Deut 5:7–21) do not specify the number or enumerate them. That there were ten commands (whether words or statements) is clear. The question that remains is, how do we know how to arrange these texts into ten different topics. The traditional Christian[4] or Jewish arrangements[5] are not necessarily the biblical arrangement intended. Christian

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[2] In Exodus 31:18 the two stone tablets of הָעֵדֻת ("the testimony; law; decree") given to Moses by *Yahweh* had been inscribed by *Elohim*'s finger. They were inscribed on both sides, front and back, made by *Elohim* and written by *Elohim* (32:16). When Moses descended from the mountain and caught the Israelites worshiping a golden calf idol, he smashed these tablets (32:19). So, the tablets in chapter 34 are a second edition.

[3] See Jacob Z. Lauterbach, 1933; rev., reprint ed.: *Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael: A Critical Edition on the Basis of the Manuscripts and Early Editions with an English Translation, Introduction, and Notes* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1961). See also Tractate *de-ba-Hodesh* 5 in H. S. Horovitz and I. A. Rabin, ed., 1931; reprint ed.: *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael* (Jerusalem, Mekitze Nirdamim 1960), 233. In the ancient world, diplomatic treaties were duplicated for each party involved (see M. Margaliot, "What was Written on the Two Tablets?" Lectures on the Torah Reading, Bar-Ilan University, July 2004 (https://www.biu.ac.il/JH/Parasha/eng/kitisa/mar.html. Accessed 22 Apr 2020).

[4] According to Origen: 1. Not have any other gods. 2. Not make or worship any image of God. 3. Not lift the Lord's name in vain. 4. Keep the Sabbath. 5. Honor father and mother. 6. Not kill (murder). 7. Not commit adultery. 8. Not steal. 9. Not give false testimony.10. Not covet your neighbor's wife, house, or possessions. But according to Augustine: 1. Not have any other gods. 2. Not lift the Lord's name in vain. 3. Keep the Sabbath. 4. Honor father and mother. 5. Not kill (murder). 6. Not commit adultery. 7. Not steal. 8. Not give false testimony. 9. Not covet your neighbor's wife. 10. Not covet neighbor's possessions (https://biblescripture.net/Commandments.html).

[5] 1. I am *Yahweh* your God. 2. Not have any other gods. 3. Not lift the Lord's name in vain. 4. Keep the Sabbath. 5. Honor father and mother. 6. Not kill (murder). 7. Not commit adultery. 8. Not steal. 9. Not give false testimony.10. Not covet your

arrangements also differ between Catholics/Lutherans and Protestants.[6] If any of these are correct, what proof is there? What about the nature of these biblical passages makes other arrangements possible? Actually, more than ten commands or directives appear in these passages. One Jewish tradition counted not ten but thirteen commands (e.g. *Sefer ha-Chinnukh*, thirteenth century).[7] Which are the ten intended or that were delivered to Moses? As Sarna observed: "While these broad, basic divisions are clear and convincing, less obvious is the manner in which the number ten is attained."[8] Beale observed, "While Exodus 34:28 specifically identifies that there were 10 commandments, the precise division of the commandments is subject to interpretation."[9] Also Akin remarked, "This is a problem because there are actually [more] than ten imperative statements in the two relevant texts (Exod. 20:1–17; Deut. 5:6–21). One dispute concerning the Ten Commandments concerns how they are to be divided. We are told in Scripture that there are ten … but we are not told exactly how the text should be divided."[10]

Textual Data

The oldest extant text of the Jewish Ten Commandments is a Hebrew manuscript from the Dead Sea scrolls (4Q41 or 4QDeut^n; dated

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neighbor's wife, house, or possessions (https://bible scripture.net/Commandments. html). However, David Stern offers a slightly different order: 1. I am *Yahweh* your God, so do not have any other gods. 2. Not make or worship any image of God. 3. Not lift the Lord's name in vain. 4. Keep the Sabbath. 5. Honor father and mother. 6. Not kill (murder). 7. Not commit adultery. 8. Not steal. 9. Not give false testimony. 10. Not covet your neighbor's wife, house, or possessions.

[6] Catholics/Lutherans combine verses 3–5 in Exodus, making the second command about the divine Name, and split the verses on coveting into two commands; whereas Protestants tend to split verses 3–5 into two commands (making misuse of the divine Name #3) and combine all the final ones about coveting.

[7] Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 107.

[8] Ibid., 108.

[9] Matthew S. Beal, "Ten Commandments," edited by John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2016), n.p.

[10] James Akin, "The Division of the Ten Commandments," n.p. Accessed 08 Sep. 2020. https://www.ewtn. com/catholicism/library/division-of-the-ten-commandments-1099.

between 30–1 BC).[11] Nothing about this text informs us about how to distinguish the ten "words/statements." We only have a tradition. Before the discoveries at Qumran the oldest Hebrew manuscript was the Nash Papyrus (150–100 BC; only 4 papyrus fragments), which contains the Decalogue. It was found in Egypt and likely used by Egyptian Jews. This version combines parts of the Exod 20 commands with those in Deut 5. Some similarities with the Septuagint have been noted, e.g. the same reversal of murder/adultery to adultery/murder.[12] The oldest known inscription is the Samaritan version, which dates several centuries later (AD 300–500), and is inscribed on a white marble slab 2 feet square and weighing about 200 pounds. The text has twenty lines in Samaritan script, but most interesting is that it only uses nine of the ten biblical commands. The command not to use God's name lightly ("in vain") is absent. Instead, the other nine have a tenth added about building a temple on Mount Gerizim (the Samaritan holy hill as distinct from Jewish Jerusalem or Mt. Zion).[13] None of this (neither the Jewish Palestinian, Jewish Egyptian, nor Samaritan textual data) helps us determine how to accurately enumerate the Hebrew Ten Commandments; but these data do point to long-standing lack of clarity on the matter, which is illustrated by differing religious numbering traditions (previously detailed).

Jewish Tradition

A standard critical Hebrew Bible (*Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*) reflects the Qumran text, only with the addition of vowels, accents, diacritics, and marginal notes. These notes do not comment on enumeration, but there is the placement of divisional symbolic consonants (in

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[11] Daniel Estrin, "Oldest Complete Copy of Ten Commandments Goes on Display in Israel," *The Times of Israel 5 May 2015. www.timesofisraelcom.* Accessed 20 Apr 2020; and Sidnie Ann White, "The All Souls Deuteronomy and the Decalogue," *JBL* 109 (1990): 193–206.

[12] See e.g. Stanley A. Cook, "A Pre-Massoretic Biblical Papyrus," *Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology* 25 (1903): 34–56. See also William F. Albright, "A Biblical Fragment from the Maccabean Age: the Nash Papyris," *JBL* 56 (1937): 145–76.

[13] See the account of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman, who said to him, "I can see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem" (John 4:19–20; NIV). See also https://www.history.com/news/oldest-known-inscription-of-10-commandments-goes-up-for-auction.

Exodus 20) after verses 6 (*samek*), 7 (*pe*), 12 (*samek*), 13 (*samek*), 14 (*samek*), 15 (*samek*), 16 (*samek*), and 17 (pe). However, these represent editorial decisions long after the original composition. These data still are not irrelevant but are inconsistent. The Masoretic Text Decalogue in Exod 20:3–17) is divided into nine logical reading sections: vv. 3–6 (idolatry); v. 7 (blasphemy); vv. 8–11 (Sabbath); v. 12 (parents); v. 13 (murder); v. 14 (adultery); v. 15 (theft); v. 16 (false witness); v. 17 (coveting). Deuteronomy 5:7–21 has ten by dividing the coveting section with a marker: vv. 7–10 (idolatry); v. 11 (blasphemy); vv. 12–15 (Sabbath); v. 16 (parents); v. 17 (murder); v. 18 (adultery); v. 19 (theft); v. 20 (false witness); v. 21a (coveting); v. 21b (coveting). Nine more than ten are suggested if we base the numbering on these Masoretic punctuation indicators. Sarna categorizes the commands as five (all marked by "*Yahweh* your God") and the next five lacking this designation.[14]

Regardless, these align with all traditions in separating commands or commands-with-commentary that end and begin at these breaks: vv. 6/7, 12/13, 13/14, 14/15, 15/16, and 16/17. But this only accounts for eight commands. Ten are achieved by having vv. 2–5 split into two commands: 1. Not have any other gods and 2. Not make or worship any image of God. This aligns with Stern's Jewish order (n. 5 above) and would explain the basis for the Jewish enumeration. The alternative Jewish list noted in the same footnote (4) is questionable since its #1 is not a command at all. D. N. Freedman considers the scholarly consensus the same as Stern (see n. 5 above).[15] While this favors major categories, apostasy and idolatry are somewhat interchangeable and are divided no more obviously than coveting women and possessions. Nothing in the Hebrew text make these categorical distinctions obligatory. Uniquely and oddly, the *Talmud* made the preface ("I am *Yhwh* your God") the first command.[16] In general, Jewish tradition has favored Exod 20:2 as an independent statement and vv. 3–4 as a combined unit.[17]

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[14] Sarna, *Exodus*, 108.

[15] Apostasy; Idolatry; Blasphemy; Sabbath observance; Parental respect; Murder; Adultery; Stealing; False Testimony; Coveting. David Noel Freedman, "The Nine Commandments," *Proceedings of the 36th Annual Convention of the Association of Jewish Libraries* (La Jolla, CA; June 24–27, 2001), 5.

[16] See Daniel I. Block, "The Decalogue in the Hebrew Scriptures," 1–27 in *The Decalogue Through the Centuries: From the Hebrew Scriptures to Benedict XVI*, ed. Jeffrey P. Greenman and Timothy Larsen (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 2012).

[17] Sarna, *Exodus*, 108.

Other Church Traditions

As already indicated, Origen's list (AD 184–253) differs from Augustine's (AD 354–430). The Lutheran Small Catechism list is the same as Augustine (see n. 4 above) except that he reverses 9 and 10.[18] This happens because the order differs between Exod 20:17 and Deut 5:21. The former has the order "not covet neighbor's house, wife, or servants" whereas the latter has "not covet neighbor's wife, house, land, or servants" (which order in the Hebrew of Deut 5, is the same as the coveting commands in the Septuagint/LXX of Exodus and Deuteronomy). Calvin's order is the same as Origen's (intentional or not; see n. 4 above).[19] Philo's list mirrors that of Origen except he reverses adultery and murder. He speaks of the first two as contra polytheism and then contra idolatry.[20] A Puritan who wrote a commentary on the Ten Commandments by that name (Thomas Watson, 1620–1686) listed them the same as Origen (see n. 3 above).[21] A fairly recent book (2017) arranges the commands into two groups of five (theological and sociological) by including the one to honor parents in the first grouping about relating to God.[22] This view was already noted by Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch (citing Josephus and Philo), who observed opposing ideas about the number of commands supposedly recorded on each of Moses' two tablets. In addition to the balanced five-and-five approach (which includes honor for parents), others have supposed three-and-seven (the three being those comments about idolatry, then God's Name, and then Sabbath), making no separation between having, making, bowing to, or serving idols. The Church fathers through

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[18] https://catechism.cph.org/en/10-commandments.html. Accessed 20 Apr 2020.

[19] http://www.johncalvinforeveryone.org/chapter-8-parts-1-5.html. Accessed 20 Apr 2020.

[20] http://www.earlyjewishwritings.com/text/philo/book26.html. Accessed 20 Apr 2020. See also J. H. A. Hart, "Philo of Alexandria," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 17 (1904): 726–31. See a discussion about Philo's delineation of the Mosaic Legislation for non-Jews by Emil Schürer, *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1896), 219–20. (https://www.preteristarchive.com/Books/pdf/1890-96_schurer_history-of-the-jewish-people_D2-V3.pdf. Accessed 22 Apr 2020).

[21] Thomas Watson, 1692, *The Ten Commandments*, rev. ed. 1890 (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1995).

[22] David L. Baker, *The Decalogue. Living as the People of God* (London: Apollos, 2017).

the fourth century were unanimous on the balanced 5/5 view, which is supported by the Eastern and Reformed churches. Augustine is credited with the origin of the 3/7 view, and quoted (in translation) as saying "the commandment against images is only a fuller explanation of that against other gods, but that the commandment not to covet is divided into two commandments by the repetition of the words, *"Thou shalt not covet."*[23] Respect for Augustine tended to cement this perception in the Western Church, so over time tradition put the brakes on critical revision. Luther agreed with one change, the same as Catholicism, that not coveting a neighbor's house is the ninth command. Augustine followed the different order (than Exodus) in Deut 5, where not coveting another's wife precedes coveting another's house. Keil and Delitzsch sense that opposition to Christianity influenced the Jewish decision, among some, to take the introductory words ("I am YHWH your God") as the first command, after which they combine the prohibitions against gods and images and all coveting into one.[24] Typical Reformed or Orthodox approaches find an initial four sacred and then six social laws. Numbering differs in relation to dividing or not the idolatry comments, using or not the introductory remarks as a command, and how to separate or not the statements about coveting.[25]

More recently and typically, the command to honor mother and father has been viewed as belonging to those about human relationships (cf. the 5/5 and 3/7 view above). Other approaches could be exposed, but these represent the various contrasts in how the Ten Commandments have been numbered. Most confusion stems from the nature of the beginning (idolatry, other gods, etc.) and the ending

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[23] Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 392.

[24] Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 392. In a footnote on this page they say, "It is adopted by *Gemar. Macc.* f. 24 *a*; *Targ. Jon.* on Ex. and Deut.; *Mechilta* on Ex. 20:15; *Pesikta* on Deut. 5:6; and the rabbinical commentators of the middle ages." They explain as well that this numbering mode is found in *Julian Apostata* and Jerome (alluding to Hosea 10:10).

[25] See Beal, "Ten Commandments," n.p.; John Barton, "The 'Work of Human Hands' (Psalm 115:4): Idolatry in the Old Testament," 194–204 in *The Ten Commandments: The Reciprocity of Faithfulness,* edited by William P. Brown (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004); Ronald F. Youngblood, "Counting the Ten Commandments," *BibR* 10:6 (Dec 1994): 30–35, 50, 52 (http://www.bib-arch.org/brd94/counting.html); and J. W. Marshall, "Decalogue," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, edited by D. W. Baker and T. D. Alexander (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003), 172.

(coveting various categories of people and property). But there are a number of other aspects to the biblical texts that create even more questions and call for perhaps new ways of identifying the exact content of these Ten "Words."

Commentaries

Although dated, Keil and Delitzsch remains a mainstay commentary for conservatives. Still, the commentary presents unique observations. On the question of the right way to number the commands, this commentary makes the argument that no view is automatically best due to priority in formation or majority in affirmation. The biblical text is the only basis for any authoritative answer, which this commentary claims eliminates Augustine's approach. As an example, no difference exists in the coveting commands as does essentially between believing in other gods and bowing to them. I am not sure this is so clear cut. The exegetical basis for the claim, however, is based on instances of image worship (i.e., the golden calf at Sinai as well as Gideon [Judg 8:27]; Micah [Judg 17]; and Jeroboam [1 Kgs 12]). Formally, it is argued that only the first five attach justifications for their existence. The final five uniquely are each connected to the following command with the conjunction *waw*.[26] Much is said about the Masoretic markers for breaks in the text, but these, while well preserved, establish a reading tradition while, like added vowels, not having the same authority as the consonantal text (see Jewish Tradition, above). Keil and Delitzsch makes a good case for the 5/5 distribution, but still leaves some ambiguity over how to clearly identify the exact ten commands. A reasonable case is made for Apostasy; Idolatry; Blasphemy; Sabbath observance; Parental respect; Murder; Adultery; Stealing; False Testimony; Coveting.

J. A. Thompson (1974) divided the ten into the first four obligations (to God) and the following six (to fellow humans).[27] His order for the ten was (1) a general principle of total allegiance to God (Deut 5:7); (2) a prohibition of making a *Yahweh* idol (5:8–10; cf. Exod 20:4–6); (3) a prohibition against the careless use of the name *Yahweh* (5:11); (4) a positive prescription for Sabbath observance (5:12–15); (5) a

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[26] Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 393.

[27] J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy*, TOTC (London: Inter-Varsity, 1974), 114–18.

second positive prescription for parental honor (5:16);[28] and then a final five prohibitions that indicate respect for (6) life (5:17); (7) marriage (5:18); (8) property (5:19); (9) another's reputation (5:20); and then end with (10) a rejection of covetousness (5:21). Notably these last five were widely represented in the ANE law codes. For Thompson this is not a removal but recognition of their divine origin in the Hebrew Scripture., since they are built into the fabric of the moral universe.[29] P. C. Craigie (1976) followed the same order.[30] But he saw a 5/5 division between those laws about communion with God and those about fellowship in God's community.[31] But neither Thompson nor Craigie were concerned with alternative identifications for naming or numbering the ten commands.

Recent commentaries hardly refer to the problem of identifying which commands account for the Ten intended. Durham makes no mention of different views on differing collections of the Ten. He does mention the issue of arrangement, but in terms of why this sequence was used.[32] He recognizes these Ten as beyond question: *have no other gods, *do not worship them, *not misuse the Name *keep the Sabbath, *honor parents, *no murder, *no adultery, *no theft, *no false witness, and *do not covet.[33] This is the same tradition as Origen and others, including Ewald "undoubtedly."[34] Propp also has no interaction with the established debate. He does not number the commands but says "next command … next … final"; but he only lists nine regulations.[35] No solution to the debate is offered, but he does give evidence of the importance of the topic about identifying the Ten correctly. Unlike Durham, he has the prohibition against taking the Name

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[28] Cf. negative (prohibitive) versions in Deut 27:16 and Exod 21:17.

[29] Thompson, *Deuteronomy*, 118.

[30] (1) no idolatry (Deut 5:7); (2) no idols (vv. 8–10); (3) no blasphemy (v. 11); (4) observe Sabbath (vv. 12–15); (5) honor parents (v. 16); (6) no murder (v. 17); (7) no adultery (v. 18); (8) no theft (v. 19); (9) no false witness (v. 20); and (10) no coveting (v. 21). P. C. Craige, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, NICOT, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 151–63.

[31] Ibid., 163–64.

[32] John I. Durham, *Exodus*, WBC 3 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 282.

[33] Ibid., 284–99.

[34] David L. Baker, "The Finger of God and the Forming of a Nation," T*ynB* 56 (2005): 12.

[35] William H. C. Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, AB 2A (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 305–6.

in vain as the second rather than third. Coveting is the ninth and final one; but he says it really is not a command, rather the root of all unhappiness.[36] Stuart refers to N. Ararat's observation that the Ten have traditionally been divided incorrectly. He saw the second command as not bowing down to idols. Ararat argued for five commands on each of two tablets. Stuart objects strongly arguing for ten on each (2 copies).[37] He lists the same Ten as Durham.[38] Jason S. DeRouchie argues for a modified version of the Catholic-Lutheran numbering and for Yahweh's claim to be Israel's redeemer as foundational not to the entire Decalogue but just to the first command. Deuteronomy 5 is thought to clarify the numbering of commands 5–10.[39] He thinks syntactical features combine all of the idolatry warnings but otherwise divide the rules on coveting. However, similar data could be used to support a distinction between the ten prohibitions and two exhortations (Sabbath and parents), suggesting the latter are not distinct Words.

The Biblical Texts

Exodus 20:3–17 (as Deut 5:7–21) contains 12 prohibitions (לא+ imperfect verb; you must not!"): you must not have other gods! (v. 3); you must not make an idol! (v. 4); you must not bow to them! And you must not worship, them! (v. 5; is this one or two commands?); you must not bear the name *Yahweh* frivolously! (v. 7); you must not perform (work!, on the Sabbath; v. 9); you must not murder! (v. 13); you must not commit adultery! (v. 14); you must not steal! (v. 15); you must not testify falsely! (v. 16); you must not desire your neighbor's house! (v. 17a); you must not desire your neighbor's wife, etc.! (v. 17b). In addition there are two positive commands (but only one imperative verb is used): to remember/observe the Sabbath (v. 8; functional

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[36] Propp, *Exodus*, 304–8.

[37] On the matter of the tablets and arrangement, see David L. Baker, "Ten Commandments, Two Tablets: The Shape of the Decalogue," *Them* 30:3 (Summer 2005), 8–9. Baker alludes to the naming of the Ten as a crucial question but does not try to answer it directly or in detail.

[38] Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, NAC 2 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 447–73, 449 n. 25.

[39] Jason S. DeRouchie, "Counting the Ten: An Investigation into the Numbering of the Decalogue," 93–126, in *For Our Good* Always: Studies on the Message and Influence of Deuteronomy in Honor of Daniel I. Block, ed. by Jason S. DeRouchie, Jason Gile, and Kenneth J. Turner (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013).

impv.?) and honor your parents! (v. 12). Deuteronomy 5:15 uses the infinitive as well for "Remember you were slaves!" (not in the Exodus version). All this leads to 14–15 functional commands (only 13 actual formal ones).[40] But the OT specifies "ten." Clearly the negations, then, count as commands as much as the literal imperatives. So on what basis do we derive eight commands out of the 12 prohibitions to add to the imperatives (formal or functional) in order to arrive at the Ten Commands that Exodus 34:28 had in mind?

Recognition also has occurred regarding several OT passages that show similarities with the Decalogue. Exodus 34:11–26 includes directions regarding Sabbath and devotion to Yahweh alone. Leviticus 19 contains allusions or citations from a majority of the Ten (exact number used depends on how the Ten are counted). Deuteronomy 27:15–26 involves curses that overlap the Ten in subject matter. Ezekiel 18:5–9 and 22:6–12 have remarks about idolatry, adultery, theft, parents, Sabbath, and murder. Most of the issues in the Decalogue are mentioned in Hosea 4:2 and 7:9. Some also find overlap with Psalms 15 and 24 as well as Isaiah 33:14–16. All are later than the Ten and influenced by their precedence. Parallels with the Egyptian Book of the Dead and a Babylonian ritual text have been noted.[41]

Ten Prohibitions

If we set aside the opening paragraph about false gods and the closing one about desire, then we are left with seven commands that everyone recognizes: (1) Not lift the Lord's name in vain; (2) keep the Sabbath; (3) honor father and mother; (4) not kill (murder); (5) not

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[40] (1) You must not have other gods alongside me! (20:3; 5:7); (2) You must not craft an idol! (20:4; 5:8); (3) You must not worship or serve [false gods]! (20:5; 5:9). Is this one or two commands? (4/5)You must not misuse the name YHWH! (20:7; 5:11); (5/6) Remember/Observe the Sabbath day to honor it! (20:8; 5:12); (6/7) You must not do any work! (20:10; 5:14); (7/8) Remember you were slaves! (5:15); (8/9) Honor your parents! (20:12; 5:16); (9/10) You must not murder! (20:13; 5:17); (10/11) You must not commit adultery! (20:14; 5:18); (11/12) You must not steal! (20:15; 5:19); (12/13) You must not testify falsely against your neighbor! (20:16; 5:20); (13/14) You must not covet your neighbor's house or possessions! (20:17; 5:21b); (14/15) You must not covet your neighbor's wife or possessions! (20:17; 5:21a)

[41] See Baker, "Ten Commandments," 17–19; Baker, "The Finger of God," 21–24; and C. F. Burney, "A Theory of the Developement of Israelite Religion in Early Times," *JTS* 9 (1908): 350–52.

commit adultery; (6) not steal; and (7) not give false testimony. Now we need three more. The problem is that to do this we have to bifurcate either the opening or closing paragraph. But what evidence supports one over the other? Both have multiple but similar parts, so it makes just as much sense to divide one as the other. Any solution is artificial. Is there a way to be consistent and correct and end up with ten different commands? If we focus only on the actual and formal prohibitions we arrive at ten (if we allow the two in 20:5/5:9 to be redundant [bow = worship/serve]): (1) you must not have other gods! (2) you must not make an idol! (3) you must not bow to, or serve, them! (4) you must not bear the name *Yahweh* frivolously! (5) you must not murder! (6) you must not commit adultery! (7) you must not steal! (8) you must not testify falsely! (9) you must not desire your neighbor's house! And (10) you must not desire your neighbor's wife! This leaves out "you must not work on Sabbath!" but that is subordinate to the "Observe Sabbath!" command that, along with honoring parents, is not part of the main prohibitions. Perhaps Moses had in mind these Ten Prohibitions. All these could easily have been recorded as one "word" or expression (לֹא + the imperfect). An alternative, to avoid the repetition in the coveting category, would be to allow for the command "you must not perform [work]" to function as a distinct category. Either way we have ten prohibitions.[42] Although there would be twelve if each negation is counted. See Figure 1—Configurations of the Ten Words below.

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[42] Peter Leithart gets 12 by separating bow and worship and counting the prohibition against work on Sabbath ("Don't Do, Don't Desire," Patheos, Evangelical. Leithart, 1. Jan. 7, 2019. https://www.patheos.com/blogs/leithart/2019/01 /dont-do-dont-desire/. Accessed 15 March 2020). I only saw this blog for the first time after I had written this present article. See also Akin, "The Division," n.p., who counted fourteen: 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 [the seventh day] you shall not do any work. 8 Honor your father and your mother. 9 You shall not kill. 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.
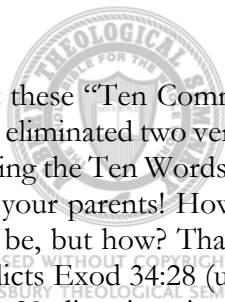
Figure 1—Configurations of the Ten Words

# of the commands			Formal Prohibitions (*lō'* + the imperfect)	Translation of Functional Imperatives	Typical #ing	Exod. Verses
1	1	1	*lō' yihyeh*	You must not have . . .	1	3
2	2	2	*lō' a'aśeh*	You must not make . . .		4
3	3/4	3	*lō' thishtachveh* (//*lō' tha'abdēm*)	You must not bow/ You must not serve . . .	2	5a 5b
4	5	4	*lō' thiśśa'*	You must not lift up (carry) . . .	3	7
Positive command to honour Sabbath 4						
---	---	5	*lō' tha'aśeh*	[You must not do (work) . . .]	-----	10
Positive command to honour parents 5						
5	6	6	*lō' tirtzāch*	You must not murder	6	13
6	7	7	*lō' tin'āph*	You must not adulterate	7	14
7	8	8	*lō' tignōb*	You must not steal	8	15
8	9	9	*lō' tha'aneh*	You must not answer . . .	9	16
9	10	10	*lō' thachmōd*	You must not desire . . .	10	17a
10	(12)	(11)	*lō' thachmōd*	You must not desire . . .		17b

The typical order creates ten "commands" by adding the two positive commands honor of Sabbath and parents between the prohibition against misusing God's Name and murder. But this approach has to substantiate the reason for separating or combining the 3 or 4 prohibitions related to idolatry. What requires a separation between having other gods and making images but a combination of bowing and serving? Could not all 3 or 4 statements be combined as anti-idolatry? The traditional divisions seem subjective and inconsistent.

Two Imperatives

Having arrived at these "Ten Commands" still leaves us with the problem that we have eliminated two very important imperatives in the history of understanding the Ten Words of *Yahweh* to Moses: Keep the Sabbath! and Honor your parents! How can these reasonably not be included? They must be, but how? That would lead to 12 commandments, which contradicts Exod 34:28 (unless "ten" is incorrect there). It is possible to find 20 directives in these passages (combining all stated and implied prohibitions plus positive commands/imper-

atives).[43] Since we have no textual variants to suggest twenty instead of ten, the best solution is to find how the two imperatives (one formal and one functional) can fit with the Ten Prohibitions.[44] The solution may be that these two commands function as subordinate aspects of the prohibition against misusing the name *Yahweh*.

A fly in the ointment of this study and what it might imply, is Jesus' words in Matt 19:18–19. After Jesus told an inquirer he needed to keep the command to obtain "eternal" life, whatever that meant,[45] he asked "which ones?" (19:18a). Jesus replied, "Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother, and love your neighbor as yourself" (19:18b–19; NIV). He named four of the prohibitions, plus one of the two positive commands (all related to human interaction), and ended by tagging on Leviticus 19:18b (also about responsibility for humans, i.e. neighbors). So, six commands in all, but only the last is not part of the Sinai

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[43] You must not put other gods before Me! (20:3); You must not make graven images of created objects above! (20:4a); [You must not make graven images] of created objects below! (20:4b); You must not worship false gods! (20:5a); [You must not] serve [false gods]! (20:5b); You must not bear My name YHWH in an empty manner! (20:7); [You must] Remember the Sabbath! (20:8); You must not work on the seventh day! (20:11)[You must] Honor your parents! (20:12); You must not murder! (20:13); You must not commit adultery! (20:14); You must not steal! (20:15); You must not testify falsely against your neighbor! (20:16); You must not covet your neighbor's house! (20:17); You must not covet your neighbor's wife! (20:17); [You must not covet your neighbor's] male servants! (20:17a); [You must not covet your neighbor's] female servants! (20:17b); [You must not covet your neighbor's] oxen! (20:17c); [You must not covet your neighbor's] donkey! (20:17d); [You must not covet your neighbor's] possessions! (20:17e).

[44] Exodus 20:8 uses an infinitive (absolute) verb "to remember" (זָכוֹר) while Deut 5:12 has the infinitive (also abs.) for "keep/observe" (שָׁמוֹר)). Deuteronomy 5:15 uses an *inverted* completed-action (or past tense) verb (perfect/*qatal*) for "remember" (same word as in Exod 20:8). In this case the *waw conversive* is prefixed, making it function in the future tense (sometimes called the "prophetic perfect" or more recently "perfect of certitude" is preferred). All of these are presented in English versions ostensibly as imperatives. The infinitive absolute in classical Hebrew syntactically can function as an imperative (see e.g. 2 Kgs 5:10; Isa 14:31). In Deut 5:15, the "perfect of certitude" creates the sense "then you will remember," so not necessarily a command. See Ronald J. Williams, *Williams' Hebrew Syntax*, 3rd ed., rev. John C. Beckman (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 68, 87.

[45] It might be questioned if this common English rendering as used today really conforms to how the corresponding Greek word was understood at that time. Did it really mean unending time (quantitative), or did it have more the sense of a quality of existence?

Commands (Exod 20; Deut 5). Remarkably, Jesus did not include any command about service to, or love of, God. Perhaps he intended the first five as a summary of the "Ten"; but clearly, in light of the Leviticus text, he wanted to stress that the life the man wants is essentially connected to loving neighbors. The man claimed he had kept the commands, but seems to have sensed that Jesus was not impressed, so asked what else he must do (v. 20). Jesus knew he was wealthy so pressed further on his "love of neighbor" record by telling him, to complete the task, he must sell his possessions and give to the poor and follow Jesus (v. 21). Then Matthew tells us he walked away sad due to his great wealth (v. 22). What is most relevant here, for the present study of Ten Commandments, is that Jesus mixes one of the positive commands with the prohibitions. This suggests if we asked Jesus to name the Ten, he would count honoring the Sabbath and parents as two of them. However, Matt 19 does not specify that the so-called Ten Commandments were part of the discussion or thinking. It could be that Jesus just selected five that dealt with love of fellow humans; and if he was responding to a request based on the Ten, we would wonder why he included the Leviticus text. Jesus appears just to be responding to "which commands?" as open to any directives of the Law or Torah. After all, "Ten Commandments" are never recognized in the New Testament (but does appear three times in the OT; see Exod 34:28; Deut 4:13; 10:4).

So, is it possible the claim of Ten Words has to do with Ten Prohibitions? None of these uses a formal imperative verb but is functionally imperative since there is no imperative form for a prohibition, but the indicative verb is used with a negation for the sense "You must not do x!" Since what is claimed is the prescription of ten "words" or "statements," then actual, formal "commands" (i.e. imperative verbs) are not in view. The rest of these passages contains directives but utilizing morphologically imperative verbs (e.g. כַּבֵּד "Honor!" in 20:12). And there are only two of these: respecting or honoring the Sabbath and parents (20:8, 12). Is it possible that these two play a supportive role to the ten prohibitions? Seventy of the 172 words in Exod 20:2–17 are accounted for by these two commands, so perhaps this section (vv. 8–12) is supplementary or complimentary. Both could be seen as an extension of the prohibition not to treat YHWH's name or reputation lightly (20:7). The command to give due significance to the Sabbath and parents continues the theme of maintaining God's

uniqueness and worth by not failing to give recognition to his reputa-
tion or character (which his name reflects).[46] To not bear God's char-
acter in vain is to not downplay his significance or essential worth as
God. To "honor" (כבד) parents is to give them the worth they are due.
The verb כבד has to do with giving due weight or value to someone or
something. The noun form is used for God's "glory." To "remember"
the Sabbath in order to maintain its uniqueness or distinction ("holi-
ness"; קדש) is to protect or preserve its value or significance. Perhaps
these two contextually unusual commands about maintaining rever-
ence and respect for Sabbath and parents were added to compliment
the prohibition against making light of God's character, the 4th or 5th
of Ten Prohibitions.

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[46] The traditional "do not take the name of the LORD your God in vain" is very
misleading. The Hebrew text actually prohibits "bearing" or "carrying" lightly the
name *that is* YHWH; see Carmen J. Imes, *Bearing God's Name: Why Sinai Still Matters*
(Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), who argues the command "do not take
the LORD's name in vain" is misunderstood and mistranslated. The popular trans-
lation makes it sound as if the readers has to ask, "What is the name of the LORD?"
"LORD" is merely a symbol for the Hebrew YHWH. The expression "name of
YHWH" is yet another construct genitive and in this case is appositional as to syntax,
so the meaning is "name *that is* YHWH" (not possessive, name that belongs to
YHWH). The name bears his nature, but what it means has been lost since the time
when the Jews decided to erase the memory and evidence of how the name was
spelled. The NIV's "not misuse the name" also misses the point, which has nothing
to do with speaking the Name in some off-color manner. God's Name was given to
Israel to be used since it reminded them of his essential character. God expected this
Name to be used frequently but not abused. Ironically the greatest abuse possible
would be to stop using it. This is like deciding never to eat in order to prevent obesity.
The cure is worse than the disease. Regardless, we now no longer understand for
sure what God's Name YHWH signifies, which diminishes his fame or reputation or
value. In light of God's order to Moses to say that "I Am" sent him to Pharaoh
(Exod 3:14; יהיה), and since the verb "to be" in Hebrew is HYH (or HWH), then the
Name possibly is a prefix pronoun Y followed by HWH, meaning "he is" or "he will
be" (although Exod 3:14 has "I am" or "I will be"). If true, then God's Name reflects
his essential nature as Being or eternally existent, The Eternal One. This is attractive
as a solution since God's self-existence or distinction or independence as Creator
from creation and all that is temporal and earthly is what makes him God. He is not
created or part of the creation and dependent on nothing outside himself. This is the
kind of significance we would expect his Name to reflect. But we do not know for
sure how to pronounce or spell or explain it because these data have been lost due
to neurotic piety. See Austin D. Surls, "Making Sense of the Divine Name in the
Book of Exodus: From Etymology to. Literary Onomastics," PhD Dissertation,
Wheaton College, 2015.

Conclusion

The problem, nevertheless, is that leaving aside the two positive commands leaves us with only two ways to have ten; but both of these require splitting a topic (either the command[s] about idolatry or about coveting). Breaking up these categories seems artificial, but if we keep them both consolidated, we end up with only nine commands, unless we add back in the two positive ones, and then we have eleven. As the chart above indicates, the most reasonable way to have ten commands, and use the two positive ones, is to combine having and making gods (Exod 20:3–4) while dividing this from worshiping them (v. 5). While this requires combining two seemingly different actions in v. 5, they are arguably overlapping as much or more than having/making idols and desiring various possessions. This is the most consistent way to include the two positive commands and arrive at ten basically distinct topics (the only caveat being the separation of idolatry prohibitions for the obtaining of, or obeisance to, idols). In practice, however, over time, interpreters have differed over how to combine or separate the 3–4 different commands connected to idolatry in the opening verses of the Ten Commandments passages (Exod 20:3–5; Deut 5:7–9). Otherwise, we have to separate out one command from the idolatry or coveting categories, yet that is inconsistent and artificial. Related to this are the long-standing interpretive conflicts over how to number the prohibitions in the final section about coveting. An alternative is to recognize ten distinct prohibitions and accept the two positive commands as supportive and extended narrations. We have no compelling evidence for which topics to choose and then where to make the splits. Keil and Delitzsch notwithstanding, in the end, how exactly to isolate the ten "words" as intended, remains uncertain if not elusive. Exodus 34:28 compels us to have ten commandments, but "which ten?" is a question that still lacks a definitive and completely satisfactory solution. That the debate is longstanding and recent commentators do not engage it is curious. Since the biblical texts do not make any clear division of the Ten, new options challenging what has become traditional are warranted. Origen's numbering has become popular, but what proves it? Perhaps the ten prohibitions are what the author had in mind who specified Ten Words (Exod 34:28).