

# THE TEN COMMANDMENTS (EXOD 20:1-17)

## ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION

<sup>1</sup> And God spoke all these words, saying,

<sup>2</sup> “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

<sup>3</sup> “You shall have no other gods before me.

<sup>4</sup> “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. <sup>5</sup> You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, <sup>6</sup> but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

<sup>7</sup> “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

<sup>8</sup> “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. <sup>9</sup> Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, <sup>10</sup> but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. <sup>11</sup> For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

<sup>12</sup> “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

<sup>13</sup> “You shall not murder.

<sup>14</sup> “You shall not commit adultery.

<sup>15</sup> “You shall not steal.

<sup>16</sup> “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

<sup>17</sup> “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.”

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- The expression עֲשֵׂרֵת הַדְּבָרִים (*‘ăšērēt hădebārîm*), meaning “the ten words” (cf. Exod 34:28; Deut 4:13; 10:4), fuels the quest to divide the Decalogue into ten distinct laws. How would *you* number the Ten Commandments?
  - The numbering of the Ten Commandments varies across religious traditions.

## THE TEN COMMANDMENTS (EXOD 20:1-17) ENUMERATION SCHEMES

Biblical Text	Jewish	Catholic	Lutheran	Reformed
<sup>1</sup> And God spoke all these words, saying, <sup>2</sup> “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”	1	1	Preamble	Preamble
<sup>3</sup> “You shall have no other gods before me.”	2	1	1	1
<sup>4</sup> “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. <sup>5</sup> You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, <sup>6</sup> but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.”	2	1	(1)	2
<sup>7</sup> “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.”	3	2	2	3
<sup>8</sup> “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. <sup>9</sup> Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, <sup>10</sup> but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. <sup>11</sup> For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.”	4	3	3	4
<sup>12</sup> “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.”	5	4	4	5
<sup>13</sup> “You shall not murder.”	6	5	5	6
<sup>14</sup> “You shall not commit adultery.”	7	6	6	7
<sup>15</sup> “You shall not steal.”	8	7	7	8
<sup>16</sup> “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”	9	8	8	9
<sup>17a</sup> “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house . . .”	10	10	9	10
<sup>17b</sup> “. . . you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife . . .”	10	9	10	10
<sup>17c</sup> “. . . or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.”	10	10	10	10

- Which enumeration scheme do you think is the most accurate? How do you suppose the author intended the commandments to be numbered?
- How are the Ten Commandments arranged? Is there a discernible literary structure in this collection of laws, or do they unfold randomly?

## THE TEN COMMANDMENTS (EXOD 20:1-17)

### TWO SECTIONS: #1-5 AND #6-10

<sup>1</sup> And God spoke all these words, saying,

<sup>2</sup> “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

<sup>3</sup> “You shall have no other gods before me.

<sup>4</sup> “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. <sup>5</sup> You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, <sup>6</sup> but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

<sup>7</sup> “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

<sup>8</sup> “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. <sup>9</sup> Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, <sup>10</sup> but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. <sup>11</sup> For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

<sup>12</sup> “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

<sup>13</sup> “You shall not murder.

<sup>14</sup> “You shall not commit adultery.

<sup>15</sup> “You shall not steal.

<sup>16</sup> “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

<sup>17</sup> “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.”

- This illustration shows vv. 1-2 as the preamble, followed by the Ten Commandments according to the Reformed enumeration scheme.
- The two tables of the Decalogue are shown as comprising commandments 1-5 and 6-10 (which is the most common arrangement depicted in artistic presentations).

## THE TEN COMMANDMENTS (EXOD 20:1-17)

### USE OF GOD'S NAME

<sup>1</sup> And God spoke all these words, saying,

<sup>2</sup> "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

<sup>3</sup> "You shall have no other gods before me.

<sup>4</sup> "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. <sup>5</sup> You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, <sup>6</sup> but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

<sup>7</sup> "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

<sup>8</sup> "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. <sup>9</sup> Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, <sup>10</sup> but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. <sup>11</sup> For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

<sup>12</sup> "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

<sup>13</sup> "You shall not murder.

<sup>14</sup> "You shall not commit adultery.

<sup>15</sup> "You shall not steal.

<sup>16</sup> "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

<sup>17</sup> "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's."

- Support for the 1-5 / 6-10 division is that Yahweh's name appears in the first half of the Decalogue but not the second half.
- This enumeration scheme suggests that the first half is primarily for Israel's application, and the second half has a more universal applicability.
- As we will see, however, commandment 5 may have a greater affinity with commandments 6-10.

## THE TEN COMMANDMENTS (EXOD 20:1-17)

### TWO SECTIONS: #1-4 AND #5-10

<sup>1</sup> And God spoke all these words, saying,

<sup>2</sup> “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

<sup>3</sup> “You shall have no other gods before me.

<sup>4</sup> “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. <sup>5</sup> You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, <sup>6</sup> but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

<sup>7</sup> “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

<sup>8</sup> “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. <sup>9</sup> Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, <sup>10</sup> but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. <sup>11</sup> For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

<sup>12</sup> “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

<sup>13</sup> “You shall not murder.

<sup>14</sup> “You shall not commit adultery.

<sup>15</sup> “You shall not steal.

<sup>16</sup> “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

<sup>17</sup> “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.”

- As before, this illustration shows vv. 1-2 as the preamble, followed by the Ten Commandments according to the Reformed enumeration scheme.
- But here, the two tables of the Decalogue are shown as comprising commandments 1-4 and 5-10 (which is the arrangement depicted in Cecil B. DeMille’s 1956 movie, *The Ten Commandments*).

## THE TEN COMMANDMENTS (EXOD 20:1-17) BEGINNING & ENDING POINTS

<sup>1</sup> And God spoke all these words, saying,

<sup>2</sup> “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

<sup>3</sup> “You shall have no other gods before me.

<sup>4</sup> “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. <sup>5</sup> You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, <sup>6</sup> but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

<sup>7</sup> “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

<sup>8</sup> “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. <sup>9</sup> Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, <sup>10</sup> but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. <sup>11</sup> For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

<sup>12</sup> “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

<sup>13</sup> “You shall not murder.

<sup>14</sup> “You shall not commit adultery.

<sup>15</sup> “You shall not steal.

<sup>16</sup> “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

<sup>17</sup> “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.”

- Support for the 1-4 / 5-10 division is that the first four commandments have a decidedly vertical orientation, and the last six have a decidedly horizontal orientation.
- Indeed, the collection begins with a vertical orientation (“I am Yahweh your God” in Exod 20:2a), and it ends with a horizontal orientation (“your neighbor” in Exod 20:17d).
- This enumeration scheme suggests that commandments 1-4 outline the individual’s responsibilities to God, and commandments 5-10 outline the individual’s responsibilities to others in society.
- As we will see, however, commandment 4 is not just vertically oriented.

## THE TEN COMMANDMENTS (EXOD 20:1-17) PARALLEL LAWS?

<p><sup>1</sup> And God spoke all these words, saying,  <sup>2</sup> “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.  <sup>3</sup> “You shall have no other gods before me.</p>	<p><sup>13</sup> “You shall not murder.</p>
<p><sup>4</sup> “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. <sup>5</sup> You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, <sup>6</sup> but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.</p>	<p><sup>14</sup> “You shall not commit adultery.</p>
<p><sup>7</sup> “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.</p>	<p><sup>15</sup> “You shall not steal.</p>
<p><sup>8</sup> “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.  <sup>9</sup> Six days you shall labor, and do all your work,  <sup>10</sup> but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. <sup>11</sup> For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.</p>	<p><sup>16</sup> “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.</p>
<p><sup>12</sup> “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.</p>	<p><sup>17</sup> “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.”</p>

- This rabbinic arrangement seeks to establish correspondences between “parallel laws” in the Decalogue (i.e., commandments 1 and 6; 2 and 7; 3 and 8; 4 and 9; and 5 and 10).
- While commandments 2 and 7 seem to have a certain affinity (e.g., spiritual and physical “adultery”), the other correspondences are not immediately apparent and therefore largely unconvincing. As such, the proposal lacks broad support.
- Despite the widespread portrayal of five commandments on each of the two stone tablets (cf. Deut 10:1-5), such an arrangement would have resulted in a large disproportionality of text, as the first part of the Decalogue is considerably longer than the second.
- More likely was the inscribing of all ten laws onto two separate tablets, front and back (cf. Exod 32:15), producing two complete copies of the Ten Commandments.
- Are there any other features of the Decalogue that might give us clues for its overarching structure?

## THE TEN COMMANDMENTS (EXOD 20:1-17)

### MOTIVE CLAUSES

<sup>1</sup> And God spoke all these words, saying,

<sup>2</sup> “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

<sup>3</sup> “You shall have no other gods before me.

<sup>4</sup> “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. <sup>5</sup> You shall not bow down to them or serve them, **for** I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, <sup>6</sup> but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

<sup>7</sup> “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, **for** the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

<sup>8</sup> “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. <sup>9</sup> Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, <sup>10</sup> but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. <sup>11</sup> **For** in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

<sup>12</sup> “Honor your father and your mother, **that** your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

<sup>13</sup> “You shall not murder.

<sup>14</sup> “You shall not commit adultery.

<sup>15</sup> “You shall not steal.

<sup>16</sup> “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

<sup>17</sup> “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.”

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- The second, third, fourth, and fifth commandments contain a motive clause. Motive clauses are a hallmark of biblical law (e.g., Exod 20:5, 7; 22:21, 26-27; 23:8; Lev 19:2, etc.).
  - Unlike the Laws of Hammurabi and other cuneiform law codes, Mosaic legislation often grounds its directives in Yahweh’s divine character or historical activity. In other words, God does not simply issue a raw command; he often explains the rationale behind it. His intent is to provide for his people a window into his heart and mind.
  - The presence of motive clauses in the Sinai corpus is indeed surprising, as a suzerain is never obligated to explain his thinking and ways to his vassals. That God often takes the time to explain his rationale for any given law says something about his character, not to mention the value he places upon his people to hear and consider the wisdom of his ways (cf. “Come, let us reason together . . . ,” Isa 1:18).
  - Significantly, God’s approach is not “Do as I say” but “Do as I do.” At Sinai God calls his people to follow not only his laws; he calls them to follow his lead.
  - While the motive clauses are an important aspect of the Decalogue, they do not appear to drive the structure of the collection.



## THE TEN COMMANDMENTS (EXOD 20:1-17)

### NEGATIVE COMMANDMENTS

<sup>1</sup> And God spoke all these words, saying,

<sup>2</sup> “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

<sup>3</sup> “**You shall** have **no** other gods before me.

<sup>4</sup> “**You shall not** make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. <sup>5</sup> **You shall not** bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, <sup>6</sup> but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

<sup>7</sup> “**You shall not** take the name of the LORD your God in vain, **for** the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

<sup>8</sup> “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. <sup>9</sup> Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, <sup>10</sup> but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it **you shall not** do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. <sup>11</sup> For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

<sup>12</sup> “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

<sup>13</sup> “**You shall not** murder.

<sup>14</sup> “**You shall not** commit adultery.

<sup>15</sup> “**You shall not** steal.

<sup>16</sup> “**You shall not** bear false witness against your neighbor.

<sup>17</sup> “**You shall not** covet your neighbor’s house; **you shall not** covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.”

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- The collection contains only two positive commandments (the fourth and the fifth, though the fourth eventually turns negative). The remaining eight commandments are negative.
  - There are no casuistic (i.e., “case”) laws in the collection (i.e., “If . . . then . . .”). All of the commandments are unconditional, absolute, and apodictic (i.e., “You shall not . . .”).
  - The negative form of a commandment does not necessarily suggest harshness. A rule that prohibits one particular activity still permits many others, so a negative form is much more practical to write.
  - All of the Ten Commandments target the second-person singular. They are divine directives for each individual member of the covenant community.
  - The first two commandments feature the first person pronoun with God as the speaker. The next three commandments speak of God in the third person. The last five commandments do not contain God’s name, but they are direct, succinct, and authoritatively presented.
  - While the negative commandments are an important aspect of the Decalogue, they do not appear to drive the structure of the collection.

## THE TEN COMMANDMENTS (EXOD 20:1-17)

### POSITIVE STATEMENTS

<sup>1</sup> And God spoke all these words, saying,

<sup>2</sup> **“I am the LORD your God,** who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

<sup>3</sup> **“You shall have no other gods** before me.

<sup>4</sup> **“You shall not make for yourself a carved image,** or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. <sup>5</sup> You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, <sup>6</sup> but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

<sup>7</sup> **“You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain,** for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

<sup>8</sup> **“Remember the Sabbath day,** to keep it holy. <sup>9</sup> Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, <sup>10</sup> but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. <sup>11</sup> For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

<sup>12</sup> **“Honor your father and your mother,** that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

<sup>13</sup> **“You shall not murder.**

<sup>14</sup> **“You shall not commit adultery.**

<sup>15</sup> **“You shall not steal.**

<sup>16</sup> **“You shall not bear false witness** against your neighbor.

<sup>17</sup> **“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house;** you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.”

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- The Decalogue contains a total of **three positive statements** lacking a finite verb.
  - A finite verb is a form of a verb that has a subject (expressed or implied) and can function as the foundation of an independent clause (i.e., a complete sentence). Finite verbs are distinguished from non-finite verbs, such as infinitives, participles, and gerunds.
  - These three positive statements of the Decalogue can be translated:
    - *“I being the LORD your God . . .”*
    - *“Remembering the Sabbath day . . .”*
    - *“Honoring your Father and mother . . .”*
  - John J. Owens was the first to propose that the positive statements may be a clue to the Decalogue’s overarching structure (1964). Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. concurred (1983).

## THE TEN COMMANDMENTS (EXOD 20:1-17) TRIPARTITE DIVISION

<sup>1</sup> And God spoke all these words, saying,

<sup>2</sup> **“I am the LORD your God**, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

<sup>3</sup> “You shall have no other gods before me.

<sup>4</sup> “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. <sup>5</sup> You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, <sup>6</sup> but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

<sup>7</sup> “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

<sup>8</sup> **“Remember the Sabbath day**, to keep it holy. <sup>9</sup> Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, <sup>10</sup> but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. <sup>11</sup> For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

<sup>12</sup> **“Honor your father and your mother**, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

<sup>13</sup> “You shall not murder.

<sup>14</sup> “You shall not commit adultery.

<sup>15</sup> “You shall not steal.

<sup>16</sup> “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

<sup>17</sup> “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.”

- Grammatically, these three statements can be understood to divide the collection into three sections, with each statement governing the other seven laws:
  - “*I being the LORD your God . . .*” [therefore observe commandments one to three],
  - “*Remembering the Sabbath day . . .*” [therefore do vv. 9-11], and
  - “*Honoring your Father and mother . . .*” [therefore observe commandments six to ten].
- In Moses’ restatement of the Decalogue just prior to Israel’s entrance into the Promised Land (Deut 5:6-21), commandments 6-10 are connected by the conjunction “and” (1, *vāv*), indicating, perhaps, that he understood them to be governed by the fifth commandment.
- But in what sense might commandment 4 be regarded as its own unit within the Decalogue?

## THE TEN COMMANDMENTS (EXOD 20:1-17)

### MULTI-DIRECTIONALITY OF THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT

<sup>1</sup> And God spoke all these words, saying,  
<sup>2</sup> “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.  
<sup>3</sup> “You shall have no other gods before me.  
<sup>4</sup> “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. <sup>5</sup> You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, <sup>6</sup> but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.  
<sup>7</sup> “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain. ֎

<sup>8</sup> “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. <sup>9</sup> Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, <sup>10</sup> but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. <sup>11</sup> For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

<sup>12</sup> “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.  
<sup>13</sup> “You shall not murder.  
<sup>14</sup> “You shall not commit adultery.  
<sup>15</sup> “You shall not steal.  
<sup>16</sup> “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.  
<sup>17</sup> “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.” ֎

- As noted, the Decalogue begins with a **vertical** orientation (“I am Yahweh your God” in Exod 20:2a), and it ends with a **horizontal** orientation (“your neighbor” in Exod 20:17d). Moreover, the first three commandments have a clear vertical orientation, and the last six have a clear horizontal orientation.
- That leaves the fourth commandment, which appears to be a turning point in the Decalogue. It is, in fact, a multi-directional law:
  - The fourth commandment is **vertical**, giving it an affinity with commandments 1-3.
  - The fourth commandment is **horizontal**, giving it an affinity with commandments 5-10.
  - The fourth commandment is **personal**, giving it a certain uniqueness among the laws.
- Significantly, the Masoretic scribes placed a paragraph division marker (called a *parashah*, represented by the Hebrew letter ֎, *pe*) right before the fourth commandment. This marker appears in Exodus 20 only here and after the tenth commandment (Exod 20:17). The Masoretes apparently regarded v. 8 as the beginning of a new unit in the Decalogue.
- Finally, the fourth commandment is the only commandment in the Decalogue to be arranged chiasmatically (as we will see in a moment), thus highlighting its centrality and uniqueness in the collection.
- There is sufficient support, then, to understand the fourth commandment as its own separate unit within the Decalogue.

## THE TEN COMMANDMENTS (EXOD 20:1-17) COMBINED ANALYSIS

<sup>1</sup> And God spoke all these words, saying,  
<sup>2</sup> “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.  
<sup>3</sup> “You shall have no other gods before me.  
<sup>4</sup> “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. <sup>5</sup> You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, <sup>6</sup> but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.  
<sup>7</sup> “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain. ֎

<sup>8</sup> “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. <sup>9</sup> Six days you shall labor, and do all your work,  
<sup>10</sup> but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. <sup>11</sup> For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

<sup>12</sup> “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.  
<sup>13</sup> “You shall not murder.  
<sup>14</sup> “You shall not commit adultery.  
<sup>15</sup> “You shall not steal.  
<sup>16</sup> “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.  
<sup>17</sup> “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.” ֎

- A tripartite arrangement of the Decalogue gives the collection a more balanced distribution by word count than any other proposal. (The 1-5 / 6-10 division yields a lopsided 88-12 percent distribution of Hebrew words. The 1-4 / 5-10 division yields a slightly improved 76-24 percent distribution of Hebrew words.) A tripartite division yields the greatest balance:

▪ Commandments 1-3	76 Hebrew Words	44%
▪ Commandment 4	55 Hebrew Words	32%
▪ Commandments 5-10	41 Hebrew Words	24%

- Moreover, this arrangement has the advantage of featuring the expression “the LORD your God” in each of the three sections of the Decalogue, thus making it impossible to separate a “secular” table from a “sacred” table. The Ten Commandments are inextricably linked (cf. James 2:8-11).
- This arrangement also features at least one **motive clause** and one **negative commandment** in each of the three sections, thus giving a sense of balance and uniformity to the whole collection with respect to these features.
- It can be argued that the Decalogue moves from the vertical laws to the horizontal laws because *theology is the ground of deontology*. That is, objective moral values are anchored in the existence and essence of God. To jettison the vertical is to undercut the authority of and motivation for the horizontal.

# ARRANGEMENT OF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

Timothy R. Valentino

## 1. Commandments 1-3 (Exod 20:2-7)

- The section begins with the first positive statement in the Decalogue.
- The section contains three laws (76 Hebrew words) comprising 44% of the Decalogue.
- The section highlights three key responsibilities to God.
- The section features the *vertical* laws of the Decalogue.
- The section includes four occurrences of the name “Yahweh.”
- The section ends with a paragraph division marker (פ) after v. 7 in the Masoretic text.

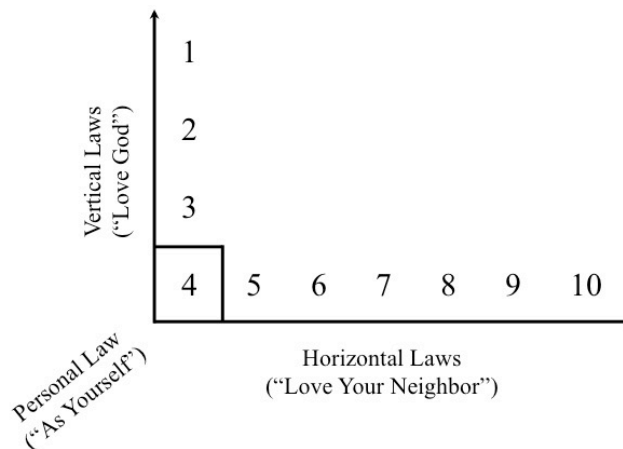
## 2. Commandment 4 (Exod 20:8-11)

- The section begins with the second positive statement in the Decalogue.
- The section contains one law (55 Hebrew words) comprising 32% of the Decalogue.
- The section highlights one key responsibility to God, oneself, and others.
- The section features the *vertical-personal-horizontal* law of the Decalogue.
- The section includes three occurrences of the name “Yahweh.”
- The section ends with the completed chiasm of the fourth commandment.

## 3. Commandments 5-10 (Exod 20:12-17)

- The section begins with the third positive statement in the Decalogue.
- The section contains six laws (41 Hebrew words) comprising 24% of the Decalogue.
- The section highlights six key responsibilities to others.
- The section features the *horizontal* laws of the Decalogue.
- The section includes one occurrence of the name “Yahweh.”
- The section ends with a paragraph division marker (פ) after v. 17 in the Masoretic text.

Quite significantly, this structure corresponds to Jesus’ summary statement of the whole law: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind’ [*vertical*]. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor [*horizontal*] as yourself’ [*personal*]. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” (Matt 22:37-40; cf. Luke 10:26-28).



# LITERARY STRUCTURE OF THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT

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- A <sup>8</sup> Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.
- B <sup>9</sup> Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, <sup>10</sup> but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God.
- C CENTER: On it you shall not do any work,  
(1) you, or  
(2) your son, or  
(3) your daughter,  
(4) your male servant, or  
(5) your female servant, or  
(6) your livestock, or  
(7) the sojourner who is within your gates.
- B' <sup>11</sup> For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day.
- A' Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.
- 

- The first unit (A) introduces the subject of the Sabbath law, and the last unit (A') concludes the regulation with a declaration of divine blessing and holiness on the day. Together they form an *inclusio*, with each unit using the expression “the Sabbath day” and the word “holy.” The literary structure conveys the divine emphasis that holiness “envelops” the seventh day. In the A' unit, God *made* the Sabbath holy, and in the A unit, the Israelites are to *keep* it holy.
- The second unit (B) specifies six days of work for the Israelites, followed by a Sabbath on the seventh day. The second-to-last unit (B') notes the rationale for the commandment—that in creation, God himself worked for six days, followed by a ceasing from his work on the seventh day. Both units employ the expressions “six days” and “the seventh day,” as well as the word “all” in reference to the work performed by God and his people. The B' unit presents God as the *pattern* for Sabbath; the B unit calls Israel to the *practice* of Sabbath.
- The unmatched middle unit (C) highlights the fact that cessation of work is the heart of the commandment (“you shall not do any work”). Moreover, the cessation of work is extended to seven categories of recipients—including one’s children, one’s servants of either gender, any sojourners in town at the time, and even one’s animals—all of which emphasize the humanitarian nature of the fourth commandment. The number seven often conveys a sense of totality, completion, or fullness. Both the form and content of the list, then, communicate that the Sabbath is to be granted to *all* creatures in the household. The list is meant to be paradigmatic not exhaustive. For example, any grandmothers or grandfathers, aunts or uncles, nieces or nephews, or any other persons on site, though not specified in the law, are to receive and observe the Sabbath. The sevenfold list encompasses everyone, even as it underscores the importance of the *seventh* day itself.