

The Ten Commandments 1:

Introduction.

**I Adonai, your God am
the One.**

The Ten Commandments

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Introduction

“The Ten Utterances”

Hebrew *aseret hadibrot* = “the ten utterances”

Greek *deka logoi* (“the ten words”).

- From the Greek comes the alternative name for the ten commandments = the “**decatalogue**” (see pages 317 and 350 of the Book of Common Prayer)

Introduction

Scripture Reference

Exodus 20: 1-17: God's words to Israel
from Mount Sinai

Deuteronomy 5:6-21: Moses's
recapitulation to Israel of what God told
him at Mount Horeb

Introduction

Context

part of the story of Israel's liberation from
Egypt

basis for Israel's continuing relationship
with God = "covenant"

the way to lead Israel to the fullness of life
God intended

obedience to the commandments a response
of love from a grateful Israel

Introduction

Numbering

varies among the religious traditions:

Commandment	Jews and Most Christian Traditions (from Rabbinic and reformed traditions)	Roman Catholic, Lutherans (after Origen, Clement of Alexandria, and Augustine)
I am the Lord your God . . .	1. *	1.
Have no other God before me.* Do not make for yourself an idol . . .	2.*	1.
Do not lift up the name of God in vain	3.	2.

Remember the Sabbath	4.	3.
Honor you father and mother...	5.	4.
You shall not murder...	6.	5.
You shall not commit adultery	7.	6.
You shall not steal	8.	7.
You shall not give false testimony	9.	8.
You shall not covet your neighbor's house, wife...	10.	9 and 10

* The Christians traditions give Exodus 20:2-3 as the first Commandment, and Exodus 20:4-6 as the second. However, some Jewish traditions give Exodus 20:2 as the first Commandment, and Exodus 20:3-6 as the second.

Introduction

Arrangement and Order

Jewish tradition:

five on one tablet, five on the other

first tablet: obligations primarily to God

second tablet: obligations primarily to
each other

bridge: 5th commandment (honor your
father and mother). Father and mother
are our immediate “creators,”
mediators of God’s gift of life to us

first tablet	second tablet	why?
1. I am the Lord your God...	6. You shall not murder	killing destroys a reflection of God (we are each in God's image)
2. Have no other God. . .	7. You shall not commit adultery	religion and marriage both require fidelity
3. Do not lift up the name of God in vain...	8. You shall not steal	those who steal may in the end deny it by swearing falsely in God's name
4. Remember the Sabbath	9. You shall not bear false witness	profaning the Sabbath is like testifying God did not create the world
5. Honor your father and mother	10. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife	such coveting can lead to complex relationships or families; making it difficult to give both parents a proper honor

Introduction

Arrangement and Order

God's name is not mentioned in the commandments on the second tablet. Roman emperor Hadrian (76 to 138 AD) asked Rabbi Joshua ben Chananyah why. His answer: God's name cannot lie adjacent to heinous crimes, just as the emperor does not put his name on outhouses and such.

Introduction

Arrangement and Order

The last five commandments about our relationship with others parallels the law codes of other ancient near Eastern peoples.

What is unique: breaking these laws about our relationship with others also effects our relationship with God

Introduction

At Mount Sinai

after the destruction of the temple, the **Torah** became the central focus of Jewish faith.

Whenever 2 or more gather together to study Torah, there will be the Divine Presence, the *Shekhinah*

God gave the Commandments and the entire Torah (written and oral = all rabbinic interpretation) to Moses at Mount Sinai

Introduction At Mount Sinai

whole world hushed in silence
God began to speak
with each word, the entire world filled with
a unique fragrance of spice
each word as it spread broke out into 70
languages, filling the earth

The First Commandment

I, Adonai your God, am the One

“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery”

Exodus 20:2 (NRSV)

“I, Adonai your God, [am the one] who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from a slavehouse

*Exodus 20:2 (tr. Eugene Borowitz, in **Broken Tablets**)*

The First Commandment

Topics:

Can God Command Belief?

A God who is an “I”

The Name of God

“Your “ God

God the “Bringer Out;” The Involved God

God the Liberator from Bondage

The First Commandment

Can God Command Belief?

Is this really a commandment?

How can God demand we believe when belief is not under our direct voluntary control?

Some have suggested the “first commandment” should be considered a preface to the actual commands that follow.

Maimonides: it is the first among the commandments, the essential pillar upon which all else rests

The First Commandment

A God who is an “I”

“**I** am the LORD your God. . .

an “I” speaks (first person, pronoun, singular)
one vs. the polytheism of the ancient world
an entity with characteristics of personhood
vs. the later Aristotle’s God as Pure Intellect
continuously contemplating perfection
(itself)
vs. the later Neoplatonic idea of “The Good”
or “the One:” above definition, structure,
limitation, intelligibility

The First Commandment

The Name of God

YHWH

hwhy

Hebrew letters *yod y*, *he h*, *waw W*, *he h*

Tetragrammaton

actual name of God

The First Commandment

The Name of God

spoken only by the high priest on the high holy days (Yom Kippur) in the temple in ancient Israel

Levite choirs increased their volumes to hide the sound

those in the temple threw themselves prostrate to the ground

No longer pronounced since the Romans destroyed the temple in 70 A.D.

No one now knows the correct pronunciation

The First Commandment

The Name of God

Because it is otherwise blasphemy to say the name of God, when a devout Jew encounters **YHWH** in the Hebrew scripture, they substitute a word that could not possibly sound like the real name of God -- **Adonai**, meaning “my LORD.”

The pronunciation of **YHWH** as “Yahweh” is a guess by Jewish scholars (Masoretes) some time before the 10th century.

The First Commandment

The Name of God

Christian bible translators in the 16th century combined the consonants of **YHWH** (poorly transliterated as “**JHVH**,” with the vowels of the substitute name **Adonai** to produce the artificial hybrid name Jehovah.

Devout Jews: saying aloud the approximation “Yahweh” is getting too close to the real name and hence is blasphemous.

Hallelujah = “Praise Yah”

The First Commandment

“Your” God

God is God of everyone and everything but the “your” here is a singular pronoun: God is addressing us as individuals.

implications:

- Adonai is “my” God in a very personal and intimate way
- to bring the fullness of life intended by the commandments, to fulfill God’s covenant with the people of God, we must respond as individuals, one by one

The First Commandment

God the “Bringer Out;” The Involved God

Adonai does not say:

“I am the LORD your God, all powerful, almighty, omniscient, omnipresent, who created you and the universe you live in. . .”

but

“who brought you out the land of Egypt. . .”

Why this description / emphasis?

The First Commandment God the “Bringer Out;” The Involved God

God is the “bringer out”

God is both transcendent and immanent in creation, a participant in the world and in our lives

“high and exalted beyond this world yet present within history”

The First Commandment God the “Bringer Out;” The Involved God

“The divine presence is incarnate in all the world. God is *ruach kol basar*; the spirit that resides in all flesh. That presence may be brought to consciousness in the mind of every human who is open to it, as it may be blocked out and negated entirely by the closing of the human heart, by cruelty, or by the denial of God’s image. The *Shechinah*, the divine presence in our world, does not dwell where she is not wanted.”

- *Arthur Green, in Seek My Face, Speak My Name*

The First Commandment

God the Liberator from Bondage

Can be a metaphor for anything that releases us from the many possible bondages that impede our freedom to act properly / live fully

- ghetto to emancipation
- despotism to democracy
- ignorance to knowledge
- unemployment to job
- discrimination to equality
- illness to health
- neurosis to maturity
- depression to hope

The First Commandment God the Liberator from Bondage

Whenever we are so freed, it is through the
God who liberates from bondage, who
brings us out of slavery

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