

The Ten Commandments¹

אֲנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ
your God Adonai² I am

אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים
from the house of slaves³ from the land of Egypt brought you out who

לֹא יִהְיֶה-לְּךָ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים עַל-פְּנֵי
before me other gods you shall have Not⁴

לֹא תִשָּׂא אֶת-שֵׁם-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשׁוֹאֵן
to vanity Your God the Name of Adonai you shall take Not⁵

זָכוֹר אֶת-יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ
for holiness the Sabbath day Remember⁶

¹ The Ten Commandments are ten "words" or "utterances" (*aseret ha-dibrot*) that were later inscribed on two tablets of stone (*luchot*) by the finger of God (Exod. 31:18; 32:15). The earliest Jewish sages (i.e., pre-Mishnah interpreters) said that the Ten Commandments were not written five on one tablet and five on the other, but rather were written with all ten commandments written on both of the tablets. In other words, the Ten Commandments were given in duplicate form, and both tablets (i.e., copies of the contract) were deposited in the Holy Ark (and later at the Temple) to represent the terms of the agreement for both parties. This is similar to other ancient Near East treaties where one copy was given to the king and the other copy was given to the vassal.

² The name *YHVH* (יהוה) represents God's attributes of love and mercy (*מְרִיחַ הַרְחָמִים*), in contradistinction to the name *Elohim* (אֱלֹהִים), which represents God's attribute of justice and power as our Creator. The first commandment (*mitzvah*) is the belief that the LORD God exists: "I am the LORD *your* (singular) God..." Note that the more common word for "I" is *ani* (אני); the word *anokhi* (אֲנֹכִי) is used to indicate exclusivity: "I (alone) am the LORD your God." God speaks to each of us as individuals created in His image.

³ The appositive description identifies יהוה אֱלֹהִים as Israel's Deliverer, who ransomed His people from Egypt, "the house of slaves" by the blood of the Passover lamb during the great Exodus.

⁴ Literally, "There shall not be to you the gods of others," interpreted as a prohibition of all idolatry. Rashi renders *Elohim acheirim* as "stranger-like gods" because the idols are like strangers to their worshippers. All power belongs to the LORD God alone, who treats His worshippers with love and respect. Note that this commandment goes from Exod. 20:3-6 and includes the prohibition of creating "graven images" or other "likenesses" of the realm of the divine. God as *El Kanna*, a "Jealous God," means that His love for people is non-negotiable. Idolatry is a form of spiritual adultery.

⁵ Literally, "You shall not carry [or 'take'] the Name of the LORD your God for vanity." The sages take this to mean that it is prohibited to falsely swear (in an oath) or to otherwise use the Name of the LORD for invalid purposes or in a trivial manner. The Talmud (*Terumah 3b, Nedarim 10b*) states that it is forbidden to mention God's Name unnecessarily at any time. The midrash states that "carrying" the Name in vain means acting unworthily as God's representative upon the earth.

⁶ The full text for the Fourth Commandment is from Exodus 20:8-11. The Sabbath day is considered a sign (*אוֹת*) and perpetual acknowledgement that the LORD God is our Creator. (*continued...*)

כְּבֹד אֶת-אָבִיךָ וְאֶת-אִמְךָ
Honor!⁷ your father and your mother

לֹא תִרְצַח:
Not you shall murder⁸

לֹא תִנְאַף:
Not you shall commit
adultery⁹

לֹא תִגְנוֹב:
Not you shall steal¹⁰

לֹא-תַעֲנֶה בְּרֵעֶךָ עֵד שָׁקֵר:
not you shall bear against your witness¹¹ false
neighbor

לֹא תַחְמֹד בֵּית רֵעֶךָ
Not you shall house of your neighbor
covet¹²

The rabbis interpret “resting” on the Sabbath as abstaining from the 39 categories of work (מלאכה) that are defined in tractate *Shabbat* the Mishnah. These categories are based on the actions necessary for the erection of the Mishkan (Tabernacle) and its contents (the Tabernacle is regarded as a “blueprint” for creative action). It should be noted that “sanctifying” the Sabbath is a technical term for the rabbis referring primarily to candle lighting and the recitation of Kiddush. For Messianic believers, Yeshua the Mashiach is the LORD of the Sabbath (אֲדוֹן הַשַּׁבָּת).

⁷ Giving honor to one’s parents is regarded as giving honor to God Himself (cp. Lev. 19:3). The word “honor” (*kavod*) means that we should regard our obligations to our parents with seriousness and weight. Note that the full text of the verse states that the reward for honoring your parents is long life (see Eph. 6:2).

⁸ This is a prohibition against premeditated murder, not killing *per se*. Note, however, that “murder” is interpreted in Jewish tradition to include intentionally shaming another person, sexually abusing another person, refusing to offer hospitality for others, causing someone to lose their job, and so on.

⁹ Adultery refers to sexual union between a married person and someone other than his or her spouse. The penalty for adultery was severe (see Deut. 22:22, Lev. 20:10). The word תִנְאַף is thought to be a contraction of the phrase תִן אָף, “make anger,” alluding to the wrath of God that surrounds this sin. Yeshua taught that even looking at a woman with lust in the heart amounted to adultery (Matt. 5:28).

¹⁰ Stealing, in the sense of the Hebrew word *ganav*, refers to both the act of carrying off by stealth that which is not one’s own (i.e., theft), but also to the deceptive inner disposition that accompanies the action.

¹¹ This commandment prohibits swearing falsely against your neighbor in matters of law and civil proceedings, though it implicitly indicates the responsibility to be a witness of the truth at all times.

¹² The word translated *covet* usually refers to selfish desire or lust (e.g., “Lust not after her beauty in thine heart...” Prov. 6:25), and thus speaks directly to the heart’s inmost intention, which, even if unacknowledged by ourselves, is *always* revealed before God: “Your Father who sees in secret” (Mt. 6:6).