

THE 12 COMMANDMENTS THE MYSTERY OF THE GRAVEN STONES

by
Woodrow Edgar Nichols, Jr.

Before the Ten Commandments were engraved on stone, they were Spoken aloud by YHWH from the Holy Mountain, which frightened the people so much they elected Moses to be their permanent mediator between them and YHWH. (Exodus 20:1-19.) The Commandments are specifically stated to have been Ten in number. (Exodus 34:28.) However, by any honest count, there are at least 12 of them, and if, in the Jewish manner, the introduction is counted as a separate commandment, there are 13. This is why there are at least three different versions of the “Ten” Commandments: the Roman Catholic; the Protestant; and the Jewish.

In these three versions, one thing is common: more than one commandment is combined in order for the number to come out right. The truth of this will become apparent in the study below. First, we will quote the “Giving of the Law” passage as it appears in Exodus, then compare it with its distant cousin in Deuteronomy. Finally, we will list the commandments one by one so that their true number will be revealed.

A. The Commandments as they appear in Exodus:

“And Elohim Spake all these Words, Saying, I am YHWH thy Elohim, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the House of Bondage. Thou shalt have no other elohim before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in Heaven above, or that is in the Earth beneath, or that is in the Water under the Earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I YHWH thy Elohim am a jealous Elohim, visiting the Iniquity of the fathers upon the children of the third and fourth

generation of them that Hate me; and showing Mercy unto thousands of them that Love me, and keep my commandments.

“Thou thou shalt not take the Name of YHWH in vain; for YHWH will not hold him Guiltless that taketh his Name in vain. Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it Holy. Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work: but the Seventh Day is the Sabbath of YHWH thy Elohim: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates. For in Six Days YHWH Made Heaven and Earth, the Sea, and all that in them is, and rested the Seventh Day, and Hallowed it.

“Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which YHWH thy Elohim giveth thee. Thou shalt not Murder. Thou shalt not commit Adultery. Thou shalt not Steal. Thou shalt not bear False Witness against thy Neighbor.

“Thou shalt not Covet thy Neighbor’s house, thou shalt not Covet thy Neighbor’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor any thing that is thy Neighbor’s.” Exodus 20:1-17

There are several things that are noteworthy in this version. First, if the commandment against graven images is removed from the text, the commandment before that, prohibiting having any other elohim before YHWH, and the one following it, the one prohibiting the bowing down and serving them, flow seamlessly together. In other words, the commandment against graven images could have been added at some later date and then inserted between the other two.

There is strong evidence for this. First, it is unlikely such a commandment could have existed at the time of Moses, for, even though he destroyed the graven image of the golden calf made by his brother, Aaron, he himself made graven images. He made a graven image of a bronze Serpent on a pole, and he ordered to be made graven images of golden Cherubim, which were Heavenly flying Sphinxes, to guard the Mercy Seat of the Ark of the Covenant. (Numbers 21:9; Exodus 25:18.)

Second, it is unlikely that such a commandment existed at the time of King Solomon, for the two graven tables of stone were still inside the Ark when he placed it inside the House of YHWH, in the Most Holy Place, which was guarded by an additional two enormous golden Cherubim which he had made. (1 Kings 6:23-28; 8:1-9.)

The next thing that is noteworthy is the long litany on the Sabbath, which connects this commandment directly to the creation account in Genesis 1, which, even though it appears first, was actually composed after the separate creation account of Genesis 2. This is evidence that this commandment also could have been added to the original Ten.

B. The Commandments as they appear in Deuteronomy.

“YHWH our Elohim Made a Covenant with us in Horeb. YHWH Made not this Covenant with our fathers, but with us, who are all of us here alive this day. YHWH Talked with you Face to Face in the Mount of the midst of the Fire, (I stood between YHWH and you at that time, to show you the Word of YHWH: for ye were afraid by reason of the Fire, and went not up into the Mount;) Saying, I am YHWH thy Elohim, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the House of Bondage.

“Thou shalt have none other elohim before me. Thou shalt not made thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in Heaven above, or that is in the Earth beneath, or that is in the Waters beneath the Earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them: for I YHWH thy Elohim am a jealous Elohim, visiting the Iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that Hate me, and showing Mercy unto thousands of them that Love me and keep my commandments.

“Thou shalt not take the Name of YHWH thy Elohim in vain: for YHWH will not hold him Guiltless that taketh his Name in vain. Keep the Sabbath Day to Sanctify it, as YHWH thy Elohim hath commanded thee. Six Days thou shalt labor, and do all thy work: but the Seventh Day is the Sabbath of YHWH thy Elohim: in it thou shalt no do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thine ox, nor thine donkey, nor any of thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou. And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that YHWH thy Elohim brought thee out hence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore YHWH thy Elohim

commanded thee to keep the Sabbath Day.

“Honor thy father and thy mother, as YHWH thy Elohim hath commanded thee; that thy days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with thee, in the land which YHWH thy Elohim giveth thee. Thou shalt not Murder. Neither shalt thou commit Adultery. Neither shalt thou Steal. Neither shalt thou bear False Witness against thy Neighbor.

“Neither shalt thou Desire thy Neighbor’s wife, neither shalt thou Covet thy Neighbor’s house, his field, or his manservant, or his maidservant, his ox, or his donkey, or any thing that is thy Neighbor’s.” Deuteronomy 5:2-21

Although this version is essentially the same as the one in Exodus, there are a couple of things that stand out. First, there is even more of a litany on the Sabbath than the one in Exodus. And second, the Desire/Covet commandments appear in a different order. In Exodus, the commandment, “Thou shalt not Covet thy Neighbor’s house,” appears first, while in Deuteronomy, the commandment, “Neither shalt thou Desire thy Neighbor’s wife,” appears first. This could indicate a difference in priorities at the times the different versions were written.

Thus, in both versions, it is just a matter of how you wish to combine certain of the commandments in order to come up with the magic number of Ten. Why this combining is necessary will now be revealed.

C. The Commandments listed one by one.

We will now list each commandment, one by one, in a simplified manner. We will also stick to the order and language of the Exodus account. We will not count the introduction as a commandment, but if you wish to, just add another number to the list.

1) Thou shalt have no other Elohim before me.

2) Thou shalt not make any graven image.

3) Thou shalt not bow down to them, nor serve them.

- 4) Thou shalt not take the Name of YHWH in vain.**
- 5) Remember the Sabbath Day.**
- 6) Honor thy father and thy mother.**
- 7) Thou shalt not Murder.**
- 8) Thou shalt not commit Adultery.**
- 9) Thou shalt not Steal.**
- 10) Thou shalt not bear False Testimony.**
- 11) Thou shalt not Covet thy Neighbor's house.**
- 12) Thou shalt not Covet thy Neighbor's wife, etc.**

In most of the combined versions, the graven images and the bowing down and serving commandments are combined, as are the coveting commandments, forcing the number to come out to Ten. But if you count them one by one, the number comes out to 12. If the original Ten commandments were separate and listed one by one, five on each table of stone, then two have been added. Which two?

The answer would be easy if we could open the Ark of the Covenant and examine the Testimony, the two graven tables of stone inside, but, unfortunately, after they were placed inside the Oracle by Solomon, they are never mentioned again in Scripture. We are told that in the fifth year of the Reign of Solomon's son, King Rehoboam, that Pharaoh Shishak "took away the treasures of the House of YHWH, and the treasures of the King's House; he even took away all." (1 Kings 14:25-26.) If this included the Ark, then the Testimony of the Original Ten Commandments has been lost in the sands of time.

However, we do know that King Hezekiah destroyed the bronze Serpent that Moses had made, signifying a change in religious practice. (2 Kings 18:4.) A new commandment prohibiting graven images would have been a sufficient legal justification for such an act. There is no mention about the fate of the enormous golden Cherubim that Solomon had made, but they too were probably taken away by Pharaoh Shishak, thus saving Hezekiah the further embarrassment of having to destroy more graven images inside the Temple.

Moreover, in the days of King Josiah, a mysterious Book of the Law was discovered inside the Temple, which most scholars believe was the Book of Deuteronomy. (2 Kings 22:8-10.) It is more than likely that when this New Law was read to the King and then to the people, it contained the now familiar 12 Commandments, rather than the Original Ten.