The "Ten words"

James R. Luck Jr

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by

James R. Luck, Jr.

Honors Thesis

in

Department of Religion
University of Richmond
Richmond, VA

April 15, 1988

Advisor: Dr. Frank E. Eakin, Jr.
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"...and much study is a weariness of the flesh."

Qoheleth 12:12
One of the most exciting trends in the field of religion today is the continuing development of the late-in-coming Jewish-Christian dialogue. It is hoped that as the two groups continue to approach each other in open inquiry - emphasizing both those beliefs that unite the groups in spirit, as well as those which distinguish them as separate faiths - the resulting experience would enhance the lives of Jews and Christians alike.

One of the fields of academic study which naturally lends itself to this type of dialogue is the Hebrew Scriptures; more familiar in the Christian context as the "Old Testament." Speaking from a Christian context, however, the masses of the Christian faith have truly entered into a love-hate relationship with this body of literature. There is no better example of this relationship than that of Luther. Luther himself designated Hebrew Law "der Juden Sachsenspiegel" (the mirror of what is Jewish), and that which is no longer applicable to Christians.\(^1\) Yet at the same time, Luther made the "ten words" the first of the five main divisions of his Shorter Catechism.\(^2\)

While the Hebrew Scriptures have been deemed worthy of canonical status within the Christian faith, in actuality this material often holds a pseudo-canonical status, especially in

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light of the Christian "New Testament." The very name attributed by Christians to the Hebrew material reflects just such an understanding; the "Old Testament." While regarding it as a testament of God's word, the average Christian stereotype of the material still reflects understandings of a book of "laws" and ancient covenants which have been superseded with the coming of the Christ in Jesus. Yet, until the Hebrew Scriptures are allowed to speak for themselves, independent of the New Testament, not only will insights into the material be lost, but 1) any sort of dialogue with the Jewish faith will be seriously hindered and 2) Christianity will continue to foster - even if only indirectly - the very roots of anti-Judaism.

There is no better example of a passage within the Hebrew Scriptures that is interpreted differently by Jewish and Christian groups than Exodus 20:1-17, the Decalogue. While the "ten words" are one of the more important and well known passages within the Hebrew Scriptures, if not in practice then traditionally for Christianity. For modern Judaism, however, the Decalogue, as seen within the context of the Sinai revelation, represents a summation of the Jewish faith. As this paper seeks to examine and interpret this passage of Scripture for both the Jewish and Christian reader, it is hoped that the present work will not only contribute to the growing Jewish-Christian dialogue, but that it will provide both faiths with new insights into the nature of both Exodus 20:1-17 and the Hebrew Scriptures in their entirety.
In accordance with the goals and hopes of this author, the use of the term "Old Testament" will be strictly avoided in this presentation. The designations that remain available for the Christian exegete, however, are problematic. Though this material is easily enough referred to as the "Jewish Scriptures," this material has been placed within both the Jewish and Christian canons. Though the term "Hebrew Scriptures" could designate several bodies of literature, e.g., the Talmud, it would seem that this particular designation for the material under consideration would receive the greatest amount of acceptability from both Jewish and Christian audiences. It is for these same reasons that the use of the chronological designations B.C.E. (before the common era) and C.E. (common era) will be used in lieu of the more traditional A.D. (anno domini, "Year of our Lord") and B.C. (before Christ).

It is only now having finished this project that I have come to truly realize the vast nature and scope of any investigation of the Decalogue as a whole. Although the presentation is a lengthy one, there is still a great deal of material which has been left unsaid. Any one of the verses or issues (e.g., the aniconic prohibition of verse 4) could have been investigated in far greater detail. It is hoped, however, that the present research will not only provided an introduction to some of the issues involved in a study of the Decalogue, but that it has stimulated a desire on the part of the reader for further investigation and inquiry.
While I have many to thank for their help in the completion of this project, I am particularly indebted to Dr. Frank E. Eakin, Jr. While the final draft of this paper represents the end-product of my own research and effort, the completion of this project would not have been possible without Dr. Eakin's numerous comments and suggestions. However, I have not only to thank Dr. Eakin for his patient help with the particulars of this project, but for my continuing interest in theological studies and especially Jewish-Christian affairs. It is to his love of teaching and the study of religion to which this paper is dedicated.
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### Transliteration Table

**Consonants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Represented in Transliteration by</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Pronounced as</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>א</td>
<td>'aleph</td>
<td>'aleph</td>
<td>(silent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ב (ב)</td>
<td>b, v</td>
<td>Beth</td>
<td>B in boy, V in very</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ג (ג)</td>
<td>g, gh</td>
<td>Gimel</td>
<td>G in go</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ד (ד)</td>
<td>d, dh</td>
<td>Däleth</td>
<td>D in day, TH in them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ה</td>
<td>h</td>
<td>He</td>
<td>H in hat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ו</td>
<td>w</td>
<td>Wäw</td>
<td>W in way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ז</td>
<td>z</td>
<td>Zayin</td>
<td>Z in zeal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ח</td>
<td>ch</td>
<td>Cheth</td>
<td>CH in &quot;loch,&quot; &quot;buch&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ט</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>Teth</td>
<td>T in toy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>י</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>Yodh</td>
<td>Y in yet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ק (כ)</td>
<td>k, kh</td>
<td>Kaph</td>
<td>K in keep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ל</td>
<td>l</td>
<td>Lämëdh</td>
<td>L in let</td>
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<td>n</td>
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<td>'ayin</td>
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<td>p, ph</td>
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<td>ts</td>
<td>TSädhe</td>
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<td>ק</td>
<td>q</td>
<td>Qoph</td>
<td>Q in oblique</td>
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<td>r</td>
<td>Resh</td>
<td>R in run</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s</td>
<td>sin</td>
<td>S in so</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sh</td>
<td>shin</td>
<td>SH in shell</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t th</td>
<td>taw</td>
<td>T in to, TH in think</td>
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**Vowels**

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<th>Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pathach</td>
<td>ā</td>
<td>a in hat</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kāmets</td>
<td>ā (ā)</td>
<td>a in father</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seghol</td>
<td>è</td>
<td>e in met</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hireq</td>
<td>ĩ</td>
<td>i in pin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TSere</td>
<td>ê</td>
<td>e in they</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chireq Yodh</td>
<td>Ĭ</td>
<td>i in machine</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TSere Yodh</td>
<td>ê</td>
<td>e in they</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Qamets Chatuph | ō | o in not |
| Qibbuts | ũ | u in put |
| Holem (defective) | ō | o in roll |
| Holem (full) | ŵ | o in roll |
| Shureq | ũ | u in true |
### Half-vowels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sound</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ꜩ</td>
<td>Shewa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ꜫ</td>
<td>Haiph Pathach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ꜭ</td>
<td>Haiph Seghol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ꜭ</td>
<td>Haiph Qamets</td>
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</table>
Of all the passages within the Hebrew Scriptures, contemporary society is perhaps the most familiar with and amenably inclined towards the "ten words." Be that as it may, as so often the case with the Biblical text, the materials as originally formulated and as ultimately canonized are misunderstood because the interpreter's context and presuppositions are imposed upon the passages. Not only do the "ten words" suffer from our limited abilities to interpret their meanings, but the study of the Hebrew scriptures in general is often tainted within the Christian community by postulations of "Jewish legalism" and perceptions of ancient covenants which are no longer viable.

In order to escape the apathy of familiarity and the presuppositions of our own context, we must practice exegesis as opposed to eisegesis, especially when dealing with sacred writings. "The term 'exegesis'...comes from the Greek word exegeomai which basically [means] 'to lead out of'." Thus, when this term is applied to the Biblical text, it refers to a "reading out of" the material, or an attempt to be as objective as possible in interpreting the text. This type of interpretation is not to be confused with eisegesis, or a 'reading (of perspective) into' the scripture. Because "the Bible as sacred scripture has been surrounded by tradition and

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traditional interpretations of various sorts... [readers are frequently guilty of participating in eisegesis for they] read the text in light of the tradition without any critical judgement or without letting the text speak afresh and on its own."\(^5\)

Realizing that "exegesis does not allow us to master the text so much as to enter it,"\(^6\) this paper is an attempt to enter into Exodus 20:1-17, "the ten words." To accomplish this, an analysis of the material's historical and literary settings, as well as its origins, is initially necessary. Only when the various traditions associated with the material are investigated as fully as possible will the text have the freedom to speak with significance, meaning, and authority.

Once the background of these passages has been enunciated, the individual verses will be analyzed. Perhaps the greatest hindrance in obtaining a comprehensive understanding of the Biblical material is that of language. Even when accurate translations of the scriptures are used, we are still reading the material through the eyes of another. An interpretation of this material in English, even if done in exegetical fashion, is still only a second-level interpretation at best, for it is impossible to escape the prejudices and presuppositions of the translator. Approaching the material from a second-hand level also renders it quite impossible for the exegete to become aware of the syntax

5 Hayes and Holladay, p. 18.

6 Hayes and Holladay, p. 24.
and various nuances which are often only discerned when the passages are read in Hebrew, as would be the case with the "ten words." As a result, an examination of the passage in Hebrew is necessary in a paper of this nature. In order to be as thorough as possible, both a literal and smooth translation will be provided as well as an examination of both significant words and syntax.

At this point it will then be possible to engage in a verse-by-verse interpretation of the material, not only as to its significance in its own context but also as regards its understanding in contemporary Jewish and Christian communities. Exegesis of this nature is a strenuous and exacting effort at best. Regardless, it is a task which will not completely render the material free of the writer's own biases. However, using the works of those who have come before and the tools of modern research, it is hoped that this exegesis will allow material of such significance to speak in a clearer and more meaningful fashion.

For the average layperson, the scripture found in Exodus 20:1-17 is designated "the ten commandments." The actual term, however, is derived from Exodus 34:28 where it is recorded that Moses "wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten commandments." But, as properly indicated by the notation in the Revised Standard Version, the Hebrew word dāḇār (דבער), which has been translated as commandment, actually means "word." That is, the phrase is more properly translated as the "ten words"-
the terminology used in contemporary Jewish communities - rather than the "ten commandments." Not only is this reference to "commandments" an improper translation, but it is an example of the effect which translation has on exegesis. The English use of "commandments" rather than "words" has had much to do with the limited and legalistic understandings with which the Christian community has traditionally understood Judaism and the Hebrew Scriptures.

It is from the "the ten words" that "the decalogue" has its origin. The etymology of "decalogue" is found in the Greek words deca, meaning "ten," and logos, meaning "word." Since the second century C.E. when the term was used by Irenaeus of Lyons, the phrase has become synonymous with the covenantal conditions found in Exodus 20:1-17.

The covenantal stipulations as found in Exodus 20:1-17 have often been referred to as the "heart" of the Hebrew Scriptures. However, in order to understand the significance of this statement, an examination of the passage's setting within the Hebrew Scriptures is appropriate. The Hebrew canon ("Old Testament") is divided into three parts: the Instruction (Torah) also known by the term Pentateuch, the Prophets (Nevi'im), and the Writings (Kethuvim). These three parts of the Hebrew Scriptures are often referred to holistically by the acronym "TeNaKh," which is derived from the first Hebrew letter in each

7 Frank E. Eakin, Jr. "The Decalogue and the Exodus Event," Lecture one of a series of four given in the summer 1984 at the University of Richmond Pastor's Conference.
of the three individual parts. "The first two parts of the canon were essentially canonized by tradition, or practice, the [Torah] roughly by 400 [B.C.E.] and the [Nevi'îm] by 200 [B.C.E.]." The Kethuvim on the other hand was formulated in 90 C.E. by a group of Jewish leaders in Jamnia. The decisions of the group as to what was to be included within their canon were influenced by the destruction of the temple in 70 C.E., the emergence of "Christian" writings, and the vast assortment of apocalyptic writings which were in circulation. By establishing firmly what writings were to be authoritative for the Jewish people, these leaders were able to instill a degree of stability within Judaism.

Despite the inclusion of the Nevi'îm and Kethuvim within the Hebrew canon, the writings included within these sections were never regarded with the authority which Judaism accorded the five books of the Torah. The word "Torah," often translated as "law," should actually be translated "Instruction" as done earlier. The Torah should not be understood as a set of rigid laws; rather, it is a set of instructions indicating what is necessary


9 Eakin, We Believe in One God, p. 15.

10 נֵבְיִים or Torah is a feminine noun most likely derived from the verb נָבַה. It is translated in the Brown, Driver, and Briggs Hebrew-English Lexicon (hereafter referred to as BDB) as "direction," "instruction," and "law." However, the word "law" is not used holistically by BDB, but only to refer to special laws and codes. See Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), p. 435.
to live life to its fullest. Since the Torah's promulgation "by Ezra as the authoritative basis of the post-exilic covenant community [in approximately 428 B.C.E.],"¹¹ these instructions have become the very essence of the Judaic faith.

The "ten words" are found within the passages of the second book of the Torah, Exodus. The name of this book in English is derived from the Greek translation of the Hebrew canon known as the Septuagint. The Alexandrian translators chose not to use the Hebrew designation for the book, but rather opted for Exodus (ἐκοδόσα), which means "a going out"¹² and is meant to be indicative of the contents of the book. On the other hand, in the Hebrew canon this book is referred to as Semot, deriving its name from the first words of the text we'elveh semot (וְאֵלֵּה 세ֹמְת), "These (are) the names,"¹³ as do the other books of the Torah.

In order to understand the development and history of this book, it will also be necessary to examine the literary sources contained within the writing as we now have it. Despite the fact that there are few passages to support traditional Mosaic author-

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ship, the book of Exodus, as well as the other books of the Torah, are still believed by many to have been written by Moses. From approximately 250 C.E. when the tradition of Mosaic authorship began, there was no challenge to this belief until it was called into question by two rabbis, Isaac and Ibn Ezra, in the eleventh century. However, the question of Pentateuchal authorship was not significantly raised again until 1520, when Carlstadt published his *De Canonics Scripturis*. Whereas the work of Isaac and Ibn Ezra did not produce any significant results, Carlstadt’s work opened up over two centuries of critical research into the origins of the Torah.

Among the difficulties noted by scholars concerning Mosaic authorship during this early period of Pentateuchal criticism, were a) the existence of multiple narratives portraying the same incident, b) inconsistencies within narratives, as well as c) chronological difficulties. Recognizing these inconsistencies, it became impossible to assume that the Torah was the work of one man, but rather it was the end-product of a number of compiled literary sources. Consequently, a number of documentary

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14 Passages that refer to "the law of Moses" are found in II Chr. 23:18; 30:16; Ezra 3:2; 7:6; Neh. 8:1; and to the "the book of Moses" in II Chr. 35:12; Ezra 6:18; Neh. 13:1. Note however that the composition of all of these sources is rather late and thus inappropriate as evidence for Mosaic authorship. See Cuthbert A. Simpson. "The Growth of the Hexateuch," in *The Interpreter's Bible*, ed. G. A. Buttrick (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980), I, p. 185.

15 Simpson, p. 185.

16 Simpson, p. 185
hypotheses emerged which attempted to explain and identify the use of various sources within the Torah. Perhaps the most known and accepted of the documentary hypotheses concerning Pentateuchal authorship comes from the works of Ernest Graf, Abraham Kuenen, Eduard Reuss, and especially that of Julius Wellhausen. Today this theory is commonly referred to as the Graf-Wellhausen Hypothesis. This hypothesis proposes that the Torah is a product of four separate written sources as indicated by the chart on the following page. The two documents J and E were combined into a single narrative, JE, by a redactor known as RJE sometime before the inclusion of the D document. The combination of JE with D by a redactor RD likewise came about some time before the editorial addition of P. The Torah as we now have it was put into its final form by at least 400 B.C.E.

Since the publication of Graf's work in 1865-66, the Graf-Wellhausen hypothesis has served as the foundation for the continuing critical study of the Torah. Since this hypothesis has emerged, other sources have been indicated (e.g., G which

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17 The emphasis of today's modern studies concerning Pentateuchal criticism is found in the study of the emergence and compilations of the oral traditions of the Pentateuch (form criticism and traditio-historical criticism) and the formulations and editions of the material in its final redacted form (redaction criticism, rhetorical criticism, canonical criticism). Concerning introductions related to these various disciplines of Biblical exegesis, see the 1971 Old Testament Series by Fortress Press (N. C. Habel, Literary Criticism of the Old Testament; Ralph Klien, Textual Criticism of the Old Testament; Walter Rast, Tradition History and the Old Testament; and Gene Tucker, Form Criticism of the Old Testament) as well as Hayes and Holladay.
Period of Oral Tradition: there is no record of the development of the various stratum of oral traditions which were eventually recorded in written form.

c. 1290? - ?

J A Judean source which developed from the time of the early monarchy. The J source is reflected in its simplistic style and anthropomorphic understandings, its primary concern with southern traditions, as well as its exclusive preference for the divine name Yahweh (sometimes spelled Jahweh).

c. 950 B.C.E.

E A source which is fond of repetition, favors the use of the divine name Elohim, and reflects the interests of the northern kingdom Israel.

c. 850 B.C.E.

D A source primarily represented in the book of Deuteronomy, which reflects the style and theology of the period of Josiah's deuteronomistic reform (worship centralization, etc.) in c. 621 B.C.E., albeit much of the material may have derived as early as 850 B.C.E.

c. 650 B.C.E.

P A source which arises during the exilic period in Babylon, i.e., after 597 B.C.E. This source is marked by the cultic and doctrinal interests of the priestly circle with their greater sophistication of theological thought.

c. 550 B.C.E.
represents the original oral tradition as seen by Grundlage) and a separation of strands within the sources (e.g., J¹ and J², Pᴬ and Pᴮ, etc.) have been proposed and widely accepted. Though the research and hypotheses concerning the literary strains of the Torah are extremely complicated, for the purpose of this paper, a basic understanding of the Graf-Wellhausen hypothesis as shown on the previous page will be satisfactory.

Though several literary strands are found in the book of Exodus, there is but one thematic strand: Yahweh the God of history acted through the exodus event, releasing the Hebrew people from Egyptian bondage in order to offer them a covenantal relationship with him. For Israel, the meaning of which is "God

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"the exodus event [i.e., the entire spectrum of Yahweh's activity among the Hebrew people as recorded in Exodus chapter 3-24] is the *sine qua non* for understanding the existence of Israel as a people and the [Hebrew scriptures] as their literary record." In order for the reader to understand this statement, the exodus event must be investigated in some detail.

The exodus event is a narrative in two parts beginning with the commissioning of Moses in chapter three and progressing through to the ratification of the covenant in chapter 24. The focus of the exodus event centers upon the actual exodus from Egypt, on the one hand, and the covenantal drama between the Hebrews and the *Elohim YHWH* enacted out at Mount Sinai on the other.

According to the literary record, the process of leaving Egypt begins with the calling of Moses, a herdsman, but the "one [who is also] depicted as the progenitor of the people later to be called Israel." Having heard the cries of a people the book records as already being his own (3:7), the *Elohim YHWH* tells

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22 Referred to by the E source as Mount Horeb.

Moses that he is to be the instrument by whom YHWH will "bring forth [his] people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt" (3:10).24 "The passages also record that it is at this time that the Elohim YHWH introduces himself to the Hebrews as the God of their fathers, though he had not made himself known to them by this name.

The process by which YHWH redeemed his people was fulfilled after Moses's calling in the historical arena, - as shown in the plague narratives (7:14 - 11:10) and the crossing at the Sea of Reeds (13:17 - 14:31) - resulting in the Hebrew exodus from Egypt. Though in its present form this material is the product of several sources, nonetheless the narratives in this first section are an affirmation that YHWH alone controlled history, most especially the path which would lead the Hebrew people to the drama with YHWH at Mount Sinai.

24 It is important to remember here that it is only after the exodus event with the enactment of the covenant at Sinai that we may talk of a nation Israel. But, despite the fact that by this point in the exodus narrative the Hebrew people have not yet entered into this covenant with YHWH, the author still confesses the "sons of Israel" to be the people of Yahweh. The exodus material which is present here is not to be understood as historie, the german word for the type of history which emphasizes facts, figures, and more objective data. Rather, it is better characterized by the german designation heilsgeschichte, meaning salvation history. It is an after the fact attempt on the part of the author to profess the significance of the exodus event; i.e., even before the people had accepted Yahweh as their own, he was acting so as to bring salvation to "his own." Nevertheless, in the words of Eakin, "[The Hebrews] were a very proud people and it strikes me as very unlikely that this very proud people would have created such ignoble beginnings for their people were there not some germ of historical reliability to that tradition." 'The Decalogue' Lecture 1 of the University of Richmond's Pastor Conference, 1984.
While the Elohim YHWH had led the Hebrews out of Egypt, there was as yet nothing which committed the two respective parties to each other. The journey to Sinai, however, was to remedy this situation. It is at this place that the nation Israel is born as the Hebrew people enacted the covenant presented to them from their liberating God YHWH (24:1-8) One might conjecture that the very heart of this covenant is found in the Decalogue of chapter 20, though, as we shall see, this is not agreed upon by all. Nonetheless, it is in this event and in this covenant that Israel has her beginnings, and it is this event through which all others are to be interpreted. Thus, even the patriarchal narratives of Genesis are only important in so far as they contain the narratives of the spiritual forbearers of the people "Israel."

Having elaborated on the development and purpose of the Book of Exodus, the immediate concern at hand; an investigation of Exodus 20:1-17, the Decalogue, may take place. As stated earlier, in order to embrace any understanding of this material with confidence, familiarity with the Hebrew text is necessitated.

The Hebrew text that is provided on the next page is that of the Masoretic text. This material has been so named for it comes from the Masoretes, or those who transmitted the textual tradition, the Masorah (םָּרָה). These sixth and seventh century Jewish scholars who, in seeking to ascertain and preserve the Hebrew text, introduced what is called a pointed text (דַּגֵּּב).
as opposed to \( \hat{s}x \). While the original manuscripts were composed only of consonants, in order to simplify an understanding of the texts, the Masoretes added points to clarify both vowels and accents.

The translation that will be provided is the author's own, taken from his own understanding of the material as seen in the forthcoming verse-by-verse exegesis.
לוכד אלים אמט אל-מקברים עשה

לא גישה יuden אל-ליהים אמט אל-מקבר
לא עשה-אלב עשל ידע אל-ליהים-
עשיתם מ בעזרת ידע ידע ב anunci
לאמר نفسכם המ本站 למקד

לאת- }>לתאום אל-לייה אלב.kill קר
יגיה אל-לייה אלב פשה ידע אל-לייה-
על-דיבים על-שלפשים ועל-כמעטים יתנזרו:
ועשתם פשה ידע אל-לייה אלב פשה.

מצטערתי: מ
לאת תושא את-שומך-יונה אל-לייה פשב קר ע
 negocio גיה יד וה ידע את-שומך פשב: מ
ובור את-רומם שבוש למקבר
שפת לבם משבר והם ידע אל-לייה
ורומ משבר יעה ולחנה אל-לייה
לא-משתフェ משלי אל-לייה פשה ידעucha-
עשיתם למקבר ובעצוב-
fat אל-לייה
כי שפת-בכים עשת ידוה את-ראפשם וראפשם
את- IDbוס גיה אל-ליהים-שבר-ים גיה היבם-
על-זבר עבור גיה את-ידם שבלה יתקף: מ
בכר את-איבר ראה ישראל למקבר יתקף
lycer על-תפתות אשת-יה יתיה אל-לייה גוד טב:

לאת: מ
לאת: מ
And God spoke all these words saying:

1 I am YHWH your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt; out of the house of slavery.

3 You shall have no other Gods before me.

4 You shall not make any image, or any likeness, of that which is in the heavens above, or that which is in the earth beneath, or that which is in the waters below the earth.

The Hebrew word YHWH is consciously transliterated here, rather than translated "LORD" as do most versions. It is hoped that this conscious decision would emphasize the "name" of the particular God of the Israelites, as well as Yahwism's monolatry. This emphasis may be also discerned elsewhere in my translation as I have consciously translated 'Elohim "God" when it refers to YHWH, and "Gods" when the word refers to the other "beings" of the heavens. The latter instance of translation is consciously capitalized so as to emphasize the divine nature of the reference. These thoughts will be further elaborated upon in the word studies.
5 You shall not bow down to them, nor serve them, for YHWH your God is a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon their sons, and upon the third and fourth generations of those who hate me; 6 but showing lovingkindness to the thousands who love Me and keep My commandments.

7 You shall not use the name of YHWH your God for vanity's sake, for he will not acquit those who use his name in vain.

8 Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9 For six days you shall do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is the Sabbath to YHWH your God; on it you shall not work, neither you nor your son, nor your daughter, your manservant nor your maidservant, nor your cattle, nor the stranger who is in your gates. 11 For in six days YHWH made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, but on the seventh day he rested; therefore YHWH blessed the Sabbath day and set it apart.

12 You shall honor your father and your mother so that your days may be long upon the land which YHWH your God gave to you.

13 You shall not murder.

14 You shall not commit adultery.

15 You shall not steal.

16 You shall not utter false witnesses against your neighbor.

17 You shall not covet your neighbor's house, nor his wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his oxen, nor his ass or anything which belongs to him.
In chapter 19 the material portrays the arrival of the Hebrew people at Sinai where they were to stay for eleven months. The Sinai wilderness plays an extremely prominent role in the Torah. The Torah's account of the events at Sinai stretch from the beginning of this chapter in Exodus through the tenth chapter of the book of Numbers. As mentioned before, it is in this bulk of material that Israel has her beginnings and receives the various codes of law from YHWH (not just the Decalogue) which will sustain Israel's co-existence with her God.25

A discussion of this material cannot precede, however, until the varying aspects of Hebraic law are investigated.26 Within the Hebrew text A. Alt discerned two distinct forms of law: casuistic and apodictic. The first is very specific and elaborate in its style and orientation, distinguished by its conditional "if-then" phraseology. Large portions of the Book of the Covenant (Exodus 20:23 - 23:16) are written in this casuistic style. In his works, Alt further argued that "...casuistic law grew out of the normal legal procedure of secular, lay

25 In light of this fact, it is good commentary on Judaism's refusal to exalt places into sacred sites that Jewish tradition has not held a firm understanding of the location of Mount Sinai.

justice...."27

In contrast to casuistic law, the apodictic variety, while taking on numerous forms is usually "characterized by an unconditional, imperative style, usually in the second person, expressed in the negative without an explicit stipulation of punishment."28 This form of law is also distinguished by its brevity, force, and memorable wording, often found in short series of ten or twelve statements at the most.29 Apodictic law, unlike its casuistic counterpart, is not limited in its context to a civil setting; but rather, it often serves in a covenantal and cultic capacity. Concerning its origins, Alt argued that it was apodictic law that was unique to Israel and provided "true Israelite law."30

In 1954, G. E. Mendenhall in his essay "Law and Covenant"31 presented a different understanding of the apodictic texts, arguing that the covenant texts found in the biblical material were similar in both style and content to a group of Hittite

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28 Childs, p. 389.


30 See A. Alt "The Origins of Israelite Law,...; Childs, p. 389.

state treaties, most especially the Hammurabi Codex of about 1700 [B.C.E.].\(^{32}\) While there has been a great deal of opposition to Mendenhall's theory (Gese, Nötscher, Gerstenberger, etc.),\(^{33}\) considering the similarity between the covenant material and these Hittite treaties, Mendenhall's theory cannot be easily discarded.

Like the Hebraic covenantal material, the Hittite materials were suzerainty treaties established between two unequal parties, a superior and an inferior. These treaties would be in contrast to parity treaties, or treaties established between equals. Further similarities between the materials emerge when the Hittite treaties are further examined:

[the] covenants were usually of a tripartite construction: they began with a preamble and a historical prologue (listing blessings bestowed by the sovereign); then followed stipulations (including the promise by the protected not to enter into a treaty with anyone but the protector); then a public reading listing of witnesses, and sanctions (like curses and blessings).\(^{34}\)

Concerning this investigation, the "ten words" are to be seen as a series of pure apodictic clauses, i.e., they differ from other law codes in that only one style of law code is present. Within the Torah's accounts of the Sinai revelations,


\(^{33}\) Childs, p. 390.

however, a number of traditions have come together to shape its final form. As stated by von Rad:

The decisive and pre-eminent factor in the coalescing and aggregation of the many traditions was their common attachment to a place (Sinai), and to a person (Moses). Thus, in the end, there came together and were ranged side by side, often without any connection being made between them, bodies of material of the utmost diversity, in fact, everything that Israel somehow and at some time derived from the revelation at Sinai. 35

The Decalogue, and the traditions which surround it, is no exception. Consequently, the focus shifts to an examination of the Decalogue's development and literary context.

Because such a large number of independent and multiple sources have become intertwined, the original constitution of the Decalogue is unclear. Before the contents of the "ten words" are dealt with, however, the exegete must first come to terms with the fact that the numerical designation from which the passage draws its name is somewhat contrived. First, as the chart on the following page attests, 36 the categorizing of Exodus 20 into ten statements has been understood differently by various traditions. Second, while the traditions agree concerning the number of statements found within the Decalogue, the material itself does not assign a numerical designation to its statements.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Judaism</th>
<th>Most of Protestantism. From Philo and Josephus to the ancient Church; Greek Orthodox; Reformed traditions.</th>
<th>Augustine; Roman Catholic; and Lutheran</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>vs. 1. I am the LORD</td>
<td>vs. 3. No other gods</td>
<td>vss. 3-6. No other gods and no images</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>vss. 3-6. No other Gods &amp; no images</td>
<td>vss. 4-6. No images</td>
<td>vs. 7. Name of the LORD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>vs. 7. Name of the LORD</td>
<td></td>
<td>vs. 8. Sabbath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>vs. 8. Sabbath</td>
<td></td>
<td>vs. 12. Parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>vs. 12. Parents</td>
<td></td>
<td>vs. 13. Murder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI</td>
<td>vs. 13. Murder</td>
<td></td>
<td>vs. 14. Adultery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII</td>
<td>vs. 14. Adultery (vs.13)*</td>
<td></td>
<td>vs. 15. Stealing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII</td>
<td>vs. 15. Stealing (vs.13)</td>
<td></td>
<td>vs. 16. False Witness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IX</td>
<td>vs. 16. False Witness (vs.13)</td>
<td></td>
<td>vs. 17a. Covetousness (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>vs. 17. Covetousness (vs.14)</td>
<td></td>
<td>vs. 17b. Covetousness (2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The verse division differs in the Jewish tradition
The biblical text does speak of the "ten words" in two places, Exodus 34:28 and Deuteronomy 4:13, but nonetheless in their context these phrases do not necessarily refer to the Decalogue of Exodus 20. Although Napier states "that [while] the present form of the text means to present a list of ten commandments is certain," the material is just too ambiguous to support such absolute statements.

So why the number ten? According to Childs, "though there is indication of other series of tens [e.g. Lev. 9], the same difficulty of isolating this number persists in these cases also." Childs concludes from this that, while the number ten became a model for law codes within Israel, it probably did not do so until a later time. Eduard Nielsen, on the other hand, assumes the validity of the number ten, stating that "the number ten did have some kind of religious meaning [and] is to be deduced from the three explicit descriptions of sanctuaries which we have in the Old Testament, namely Exodus 25ff., I Kings 6ff., and Ezekiel 40ff." Not only would Nielsen see religious meaning behind the number ten but, as he states, "as it occurs in the [D]ecalogue the number ten is simply to be explained as being, from a pedagogic point of view, the supremely practical number, the number which a man could count on his fingers [so

37 Childs, p. 395.
38 Childs, p. 395.
As we continue to investigate Exodus 20, we shall return to the question of the numbering of the statements of the Decalogue, but it would appear that any numbering will be, at least to some extent, tradition which has been imposed upon the material.

Concerning the Decalogue's original context and purpose, although the bases for the Sinai covenant have traditionally been found in Exodus 20, as mentioned earlier, not even this is accepted by all scholars. Instead, these scholars look to other law codes within the Torah for the stipulations of the Sinai covenant.

Perhaps the most familiar passage with which the Decalogue is compared is the "other" decalogue of Deuteronomy 5. With the exception of the rationale for Sabbath observance and their literary styles, these two decalogues are quite similar. The relationship between the Deuteronomy 5 and Exodus 20 decalogues, however, will be addressed within the paper's commentary section.

In addition to these two versions of the Decalogue, there is also the extra-biblical Nash-Papyrus text which was discovered in Egypt in 1902. This sheet of papyrus, which uses Hebrew square characters without vowels, dates from about the second century B.C.E. and gives the decalogue and Deuteronomy 6.4f. This document corresponds to the style of Exodus 20 at times and to

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40 Nielsen, p. 32.
Deuteronomy 5 at others. This version, however, is generally accepted as being one which developed from the already existent Exodus and Deuteronomy decalogues, and thus it does not assist us in our form-source critical problem.

As alluded to earlier, scholars have also theorized that the original stipulations of the covenant were found in other "decalogues" of the Torah, most especially Exodus 34:14-26, which in its present literary context is presented as the replacement for the original decalogue which Moses broke. Foremost among these scholars were J. W. von Goethe and Julian Wellhausen.

Exodus 34 differs significantly from the Exodus 20 Decalogue in that its orientation is ritual in nature as compared to the ethical demands of the latter. Consequently, Exodus 34:14-26 is often referred to as the "Ritual" or "Cultic" decalogue, and Exodus 20 as the "Ethical" Decalogue. While the material


42 The text of these verses in Exodus 34 is provided in Appendix I. All biblical verses are taken from the New Oxford Annotated Bible, Revised Standard Version, ed. Herbert G. May and Bruce M. Metzger (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).


44 As the "Ritual" decalogue proceeds from the pen of J, and the "Ethical" Decalogue is found within an E framework, the two decalogues are also often respectively referred to as the "Yahwistic" and "Elohist" decalogues.
within Exodus 34 is referred to as a "decalogue," the discernment of ten statements within this material's present form is extremely difficult. In fact, the material is probably better understood as a dodecalogue, i.e., a series of twelve statements with the statement in verse 28 concerning the "ten words" generally accepted as being redactional in nature.

One of the arguments for the "Ritual" decalogue is its age. Generally accepted as a product of the J writer, this would date the document in approximately the tenth century B.C.E. This theory has more in its favor, however, than just the antiquity of the literary material. First, the material is set in a covenantal framework, beginning in verse 10f. and concluding in verse 28 as YHWH commands Moses to write down the words, the "ten words" which he had spoken. Second, while Exodus 34 may not have the universal validity and applicability that the Exodus 20 Decalogue seemingly has, nonetheless many have held that the ritual nature of the material would be more appropriate to the enactment of the Sinai covenant.

This theory, however, is also not without its difficulties. First, parallels to the material found in Exodus 34 are present throughout the Book of the Covenant (Exodus 20:22 - 23:19), parallels which are generally accepted as being older than those

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45 Dale Patrick's quote that the material in Exodus 34 "...does not fit the description of commandment at all, and they do not have the necessary number (p. 37)" is a perfect example of the presuppositions that emerge when discussing the originality of the Decalogue of Exodus 20 and the number ten. See Dale Patrick, *Old Testament Law* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985), pp. 35-36.
which are found in the "Ritual" decalogue. In addition, in Exodus 34 "the commandment of Sabbath rest is rendered more stringent by being made applicable even to the seasons of ploughing and harvesting, the times of most pressing work in the fields,"46 thus indicating the probable work of a later, perhaps priestly hand. This particular question concerning the Sabbath day will be elaborated on further in the paper's commentary section.

As the material now stands, most scholars would see Exodus 34 as the J parallel to the E Decalogue of Exodus 20. The historical inconsistency that is involved between these materials most likely arises as an attempt to reconcile the existence of similar but multiple sources of the covenant stipulations.47

While the arguments against the Exodus 34 passages seem the stronger, even working from the premise that the Exodus 34 passage is younger than the present form of the Exodus 20 Decalogue, the originality of the latter cannot be assumed.

While there is perhaps no agreement as to what constituted the original words of the covenant, that the Decalogue of Exodus 20 in its present form did not is generally accepted. Discovering the original sitz im leben of the material, however, is an exacting, if not impossible task. What we now have is a form which already assumes the existence of the covenant, as well

46 Buber, On the Bible, p. 95.

47 Ronald E. Clements, "Exodus," in The Cambridge Bible Commentary, ed. by P. R. Ackroyd et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), p. 120.
as a form which has been greatly expanded over time. In Patrick's words:

The Elohistic Decalogue represents a level of abstraction that one would expect not at the beginning of Israel's legal history, but at a further stage of development, say, from the end of the period of the Judges through the first two centuries of the monarchy. There is in the Ten Commandments a highly sophisticated attempt to summarize the basic postulates of Israelite law. 48

The Decalogue's present position within its literary context is problematic at best. The Decalogue seems to interrupt the flow of thought from Exodus 19:25 to 20:18, 49 and indeed most scholars do believe that the "ten words" are found within an Elohistic narrative. While the Decalogue is generally accepted as being found within an E framework, the Decalogue itself is hardly from the pen of the Elohist, although there is no consensus as to the pen from which it did emerge.

It is recognized that the text of the "ten words" contains expressions that are otherwise distinctive to the writings of the Deuteronomic school, e.g., "YHWH your God," "...those who love me and keep my commandments," etc. Many source critics have even speculated that the whole of the Decalogue was originally a creation of the Deuteronomic circle, the material being inserted

48 Patrick, p. 40

49 This literary framework is being provided in Appendix II.
into an E narrative. At the same time, the possibility cannot be excluded that at the Decalogue's core is the hand of an Elohist writer. While there is no consensus concerning the writing of the Decalogue, nonetheless we may safely work from the premise that the "ten words" have been expanded over a period of time by deuteronomistic and priestly writers alike.

In its present form the Decalogue's literary style is not unified. The material consists of seven prohibitions, and two positive statements. "[Though] the juxtaposition of positive and negative laws in a series is a characteristic feature of all Old Testament Law (cf. Ex.34:14ff.; Lev.19:14ff.; Deut. 14:11ff.)," most (e.g., Gerstenberger, Nielsen, etc.) would see within the Decalogue an original foundation consisting of a series of brief prohibitive sayings such as the "thou shall not" statements of verses 13f. The statements themselves vary from the brevity of verses 13 through 15 to the elaborate rationale for Sabbath observance found in verses 8 through 11. Neither does the Decalogue show syntactical unity. Although the Decalogue consistently refers to the addressee in the second person, the material addresses God in the first person for the first seven verses and thereafter switches to third person.

There have been many attempts to reconstruct "the" original Decalogue, none of which are problem free. One of the stronger attempts has been by Rabast who works from the assumption that

50 Patrick, pp. 35-36.

51 Childs, p. 394.
the oldest Hebrew statutes were worded metrically. The consequences of this theory result not in a decalogue, but rather a dodecalogue. ⁵² Hans Schmidt advocated that the two positive commands are alien to the text. Rather than attempt a formulation of these statements in the negative, however, Schmidt excises them from the text altogether. ⁵³

Attempts at reconstructing and understanding the Decalogue are further complicated by questions of dating. "Often this has meant working from a prior concept of Israel's religious

⁵² Stamm, p. 20. See K. Rabast, Das apodiktische Recht im Deuteronomium und im Helligkeitsgesetz (Berlin: 1949), p. 35ff. Rabast's Dodecalogue is as follows:

I. I, Yahweh, am your God
II. You shall have no other God beside me.
III. You shall not make yourself an image.
IV. You shall not worship them.
V. You shall not misuse my name.
VI. You shall not do any work on the Sabbath.
VII. You shall not curse your father and your mother.
VIII. You shall not kill a man in his person.
IX. You shall not commit adultery with the wife of your neighbor.
X. You shall not steal a man or a woman.
XI. You shall not be a false witness against your neighbors.
XII. You shall not covet the property of your neighbor.

⁵³ Nielsen, p. 79. See Hans Schmidt, "Moses und der Dekalog," Eucharisterion 1, 1923, pp. 78-119. Schmidt's decalogue was as follows:

I. Thou shalt not have any other god besides me.
II. Thou shalt not adore them.
III. Thou shalt not serve them.
IV. Thou shalt not make any carved image.
V. Thou shalt not pronounce the name "Yahweh" sacrilegiously.
VI. Thou shalt not kill.
VII. Thou shalt not commit adultery.
VIII. Thou shalt not steal.
IX. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.
X. Thou shalt not covet any of the possessions of thy neighbor.
development, such as the assumption that an ethical consciousness was first introduced into Israel by the prophets! Yet, as stated by Mowinckel, "the moral commandments of the Decalogue belong to those basic laws with which even the most primitive of societies cannot dispense." For many years a relationship between the Decalogue and Moses was categorically denied, but in recent times, the spirit of the Decalogue, if not parts of the Decalogue itself, has been ascribed to the traditions which surround the figure of Moses by a number of scholars. "[Moses] is certainly responsible for the exclusive Yahwism that was generated, whether or not the actual wording can be attributed to him." At the same time, concerning the deuteronomic appearance of the Decalogue:

As shown by the divergent results attained by critics who have reconstructed the supposed original version of this code, such attempts to reach an original non-Deuteronomic text are necessarily subjective. The fact remains that even H. Schmidt, who takes the greatest liberties with the text and actually eliminates the two Commandments on respecting one's parents and on the Sabbath, cannot obliterate the Deuteronomic idioms entirely from his alleged original decalogue. And this fact stubbornly precludes the attribution of the Ten Commandments to Moses. For not only is the language Deuteronomic but also the ideas, no matter how much

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54 Childs, p. 393.


they may be condensed.57

The dating of the material, however, will be elaborated upon as the individual statements of the Decalogue are discussed within this paper's commentary section.

The statements of the Decalogue concern themselves with both vertical and horizontal relationships, i.e., relationships between God and humankind as well as between humans. Although it is usually thought that the materials respond to these respective relationships equally - the first five concerned with the vertical and the latter five with the horizontal - nonetheless, we must be careful not to create artificial divisions within the material. In Hebrew thought there was no distinction made between secular and sacred thought as is done in the twentieth century. Even the horizontal relationship is in its truest sense a man-to-man-to-God relationship. Rabbi Hillel, a first century C.E. rabbi, was once asked to surmise what it meant to be Jewish while standing on one leg. He replied by saying, "what is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor,... the rest is commentary, go and study." While the importance of the Decalogue will be further elaborated upon in the presentation's commentary and conclusion, herein lies the importance of the Decalogue in its final setting: the importance of the covenantal relationships between the people of Israel and their God and the

Having elaborated on the development and purpose of the Decalogue we may begin to explore a verse-by-verse investigation of the material. Concerning the translation and commentary section that follow in the next few pages, a literal and smooth translation of each verse will be provided respectively at the beginning and end of each section. As for the actual Hebrew words, the individual references provided come from the Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew-English Lexicon of the Old Testament. The number at the bottom of each reference refers to its corresponding page in BDB, while the * indicates that the word will be examined in depth at the end of the verse. For those not familiar with the Hebrew text, the text and words are read from right to left.
Exodus 20:1

**Literal Translation:**

And spoke God all the words these to say...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>לֵאָה</td>
<td>is the mark of the accusative, indicating that the following word(s) is the direct object.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>יְהֹוָה</td>
<td>Plural masculine noun for &quot;God&quot; but translated singularly. See word study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>יְשֵׁר</td>
<td>This is the Pi'el, third masculine singular imperfect form of its root verb כָּבֶר meaning &quot;and then spoke.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>קָלָּ֔הָּ</td>
<td>Qal infinitive construct form of the verb root meaning &quot;utter&quot; or &quot;say.&quot; The כָּבֶר is the preposition meaning &quot;to.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>לֶהֹזֶר</td>
<td>is the article &quot;the.&quot; מְלָאָ֖ה is the plural pronoun for &quot;these.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>כָּל-ְתִּמִּרְבָּ֑ים</td>
<td>is the singular masculine noun for &quot;once,&quot; &quot;the whole,&quot; or &quot;all&quot; as found in its construct form.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>הַּעֲלֶה</td>
<td>is the article &quot;the.&quot; קָל is the plural masculine noun for &quot;words.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>קָּלָ֑הֶֽה</td>
<td>to say</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>כָּל-ְתִּמִּרְבָּ֑ים</td>
<td>the these</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>קָּלָ֑הֶֽה</td>
<td>all the words</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

*Waydaber* 180

*Eth* (is not translated) 84

* Elohim * 43

*Le'mor* 55

*Hā'elleh* 41

*Kāl - had'varim* 481/182
Elohim is the masculine noun for "God" and occurs 2,570 times within the Hebrew text.\textsuperscript{58} Two other words are found in this material for "God," including Eloah, a poetic form, as well as El, which often appears with other terms such as El Elyon (God most high), El Bethel (God of Bethel), El Shaddai (usually rendered God Almighty), and as a part of proper names such as Israel.\textsuperscript{59} In general all three words are interchangeable.

Elohim, a noun found in the plural form, has generated extensive commentary among conservative Christians. Understanding the use of the plural to be indicative of the Christian trinity, the very word for "God" has been used by these groups to show that the Jewish people fail to understand their own scriptures. An examination of the material in its own light, however, produces remarkably different results. Although Elohim is often found within the biblical material referring to the Gods of other nations, in its present context this designation should be considered as the "plural of majesty." In reference to the Gods (YHWH, Asheroth, or others) and sometimes to royalty, it was not uncommon in the ancient Near East to refer to such in the


\textsuperscript{59} Plaut, I, p. 23.
plural so as to emphasize their majestic nature.

Evidence also indicates that as Israelite thought concerning God became more monotheistic, and consequently more universalistic, the rendering of the generic term *Elohim* came to replace the national designation for the Israelite God, *YHWH* (see next verse for reference on *YHWH*).

In ancient Egyptian thought 'word' and 'thing' were identical, and it was understood that giving a name was a creative act, i.e., word becomes reality.60 This same principle equally applies to Hebrew thought. While no etymology has met with consensus concerning *dāber*, it is interesting to note that it (as well as several other words) is derived from the same root as *dibher*, the Hebrew word to speak.61 As found in verse 1, the process of God's speaking transforms what is said, i.e., the "ten words", into reality. Consequently, the Decalogue, and in its bigger picture the *Torah*, becomes the reality of God's presence among the people. It is also important to note here Plaut's comment that "words" as an expression is much broader than that of "commandments."62

60 Botterweck, I, p. 87
61 Botterweck, I, p. 94.
62 Plaut, II, p. 223.
Commentary on 20:1

The introductory phrase, 'and God spoke all these words saying...,' is a unique feature of the Decalogue in its present form, for the divine words of the covenant will not be mediated through Moses but directly by God.63

Smooth Translation of 20:1

And God spoke all these words saying...

Exodus 20:2

Literal Translation:

I YHWH your God who brought out you from land Egypt house of.

This is the plural noun for "God" affixed with the second masculine singular suffix meaning "your." The ^ divides the verse into two different parts of emphasis.

'Eloheika YHWH * 'anokhi

your God 217 I

43 217 59

63 Childs, pp. 393-4.
Exodus 20:2 continued -

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>יִנְשֶׁר</th>
<th>בְּשֵׁלָה</th>
<th>מֶּ֫רֵדֵס</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>is the preposition &quot;from&quot; while יִנְשֶׁר is the construct form of the feminine noun for &quot;earth&quot; or as in this case &quot;land.&quot;</td>
<td>Taken from the verb root אִשָּׁה meaning &quot;to cause to come out.&quot; It is in the Hiph' il perfect form with the second masculine singular suffix.</td>
<td>Is the relative pronoun meaning in this instance &quot;who.&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>me'erets</th>
<th>hots'thik</th>
<th>e'sher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>from land</td>
<td>brought you out</td>
<td>who</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75</td>
<td>424</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>יָבָדִים</th>
<th>בִּיבֲה</th>
<th>מִיטְּרַיִם</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plural masculine noun meaning &quot;slaves.&quot;</td>
<td>יָבָדִים</td>
<td>Proper noun meaning &quot;Egyptian.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>is the preposition &quot;from&quot; while יָבָדִים is the masculine noun &quot;house&quot; in its construct form.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>'eḇādim</th>
<th>mibēth</th>
<th>mitsrayim</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>slaves</td>
<td>house of</td>
<td>Egypt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>713</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>595</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Word Studies on 20:2 -**

The use of a personal name for the divinity in the biblical material is to be understood in light of the theological understandings of the community at hand. Not until
approximately the time of the exile was pure monotheistic thought found within Israelite worship. Rather, until this time Hebrew thought can be characterized by the term monolatry; i.e., while acknowledging the existence of many Gods, the God that they exclusively worshipped was YHWH.

Concerning the etymology of the name "YHWH," while no one explanation can be espoused with rigid certainty, the name is most likely derived from Exodus 3:14, when the divinity said "eheye asher eheye." This is translated in the Jerusalem Bible as "I will ever be what I am now," but it is also often translated by others as "I am what I am." "In ancient Near Eastern culture an individual's name was recognized as the embodiment of his personality, the essence of his strength."\(^6^4\) Thus, what many have advocated is that the name "YHWH" comes from the Hi'phil (causative active) form of the Hebrew verb to be, and therefore it is to be understood as "the one who brings into being." (See BDB for further information.)

"YHWH" has caused a great deal of theological speculation and the ambiguity surrounding the pronunciation of the divine name has also rendered numerous problems. During the post-exilic period, the vocalization of the sacred name, often referred to as the sacred tetragrammaton, was allowable only on the annually celebrated Day of Atonement, or Yom Kippur. Even on this day, however, only the High Priest, as he approached the innermost part of the Temple, the Holy of Holies, was allowed to utter the

sacred name on behalf of the people. Consequently, "Adonai," meaning "my Lord," was substituted for the sacred name.

As the divine name was only spoken at the Temple, the vocalization of $YHWH$ was lost resultant to the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. Although a written record would prevent this from happening in most circumstances, the Hebrew language did not use written vowels until they were added by the Masoretes in the sixth and seventh century C.E., nullifying any possibility of acquiring the pronunciation of the divine name from the written materials.

"Jehovah" has often been used to refer to the divine name since it was introduced by Galatinus in 1520. The word, however, is actually a hybrid that is derived from the German spelling for $\text{JHVH}$, in combination with the vowels from "Adonai" (Jahovah). Though modern scholarship has discerned that the name is to be pronounced as "Yahweh," a certain amount of ambiguity will probably always be involved.

Commentary on 20:2

Within the phrase "I $YHWH$ your God" the verb "to be" is not found and thus must be assumed within the text. However, the material can be read as "I am $YHWH$ your God," or "I $YHWH$ am your God." The latter translation, "[though] syntactically possible, seems less likely after Zimmerli's exhaustive form critical study ('Ich bin Jahwe,' Gottes Offenbarung, pp.

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65 BDB, p. 218.
Smooth Translation of 20:2

I am YHWH your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

Exodus 20:3

Literal translation:

Not have to you Gods another before my faces.

This is the plural masculine noun for "Gods" which is here to be translated as being plural. See word study.

Elohim

yihyeh - lekā

lo'

Gods
to you have
not
43
224
518

is the preposition "before" tied to the masculine noun "face."

'al - pānā'

before face
752/815

Is the plural adjective meaning "another."

'ēcharim

another
29

66 Childs, p. 387.
Word Studies on 20:3

While pni is often used in reference to the actual face of both persons and animals within the Hebrew text, in its present context the word alludes to the "presence" of an individual; in this case the presence of God. Nonetheless, an understanding of the origins of this word may be as exegetical in its nature as it is philological. The possibility exists that the word "face" may have originally been indicative of the presence of God as an actual face in the form of an idol or other iconography. This issue, however, will be examined later as the aniconic demands of the fourth verse are examined.

Commentary on 20:2-3, 5-6

While Christianity has generally held verse 3 as the first commandment, if we must indeed separate the Decalogue into separate commandments, it would seem that an affirmation of the third verse presupposes an affirmation of the second. Considering the covenantal context of the material, the understanding of the first stipulation held here is that which Eichrodt holds: "I am YHWH your God... You shall have no other Gods before me." Here is found an affirmation of the "saving

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68 Such notable scholars as Childs, Noth, and Harrleson advocate verse 2 as the prologue to the material.
God who [showed] His graciousness and His authority in the deliverance of [the Hebrew] people from Egyptian slavery. While Childs and others would recognize the importance of such a statement, they have only accorded the second verse the status of preamble. The statement, however, is seemingly more than just a prologue. In the words of Napier:

[the statement demands] know me and acknowledge me as the One without whom chaos would still embrace you, formless and void. Know me, for only in my Identity do you become an entity, only in my Identity can you be identified.... I am the Lord your God, who wrought this for you! Know me. Acknowledge me. Remember me. Know my identity.

This acknowledgment of YHWH as their God, however, is not a monotheistic affirmation. Although introductory reference was made to this discussion in the word studies of verse 2, at this point three terms need to be clarified: monotheism, henotheism, and monolatry. Monotheism is an affirmation that only one God exists, and consequently it refers to the exclusive worship of that God. Modern Judaism, Christianity and Islam are all representative of monotheistic religions. On the other hand, henotheism, as represented by the ancient Greeks, is an affirmation of many Gods "and the alternation of worship among the various deities as is expedient for the moment." Finally,

70 Plaut, p. 220.
71 Napier, p. 78.
72 Eakin, Religion and Culture, p. 69.
while monolatry is to be seen as the recognition of many Gods, it mandates at the same time the exclusive worship of only one of the Gods. It is in this light that Israel's worship should be understood until the emergence of pure monotheistic thought in approximately the fifth century B.C.E. These verses recognize YHWH as the redeeming God of Israel, and consequently affirm the exclusive relationship that exists between the two.

**Smooth Translation of 20:3**

*You shall have no other Gods before me.*

---

**Exodus 20:4**

**Literal Translation:**

*Not make to you image any likeness of that in the heavens above or that in the earth from beneath or that in the waters from beneath on earth.*

**pesel**

The Singular masculine noun for "idol" or "image" in its construct form.

**thae' sel - l'ok**

make to you

**lo'**

not

**il**

The adverb of negation.

**This is the preposition "to" with the second singular masculine pronoun suffix. It is tied to the Qal imperfect, second masculine form of the verb לְשׁוּב, meaning "to make."**
Exodus 20:4 continued-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>bashšāmāyim</th>
<th>ešer</th>
<th>wēkhāl - ṭemūnāh</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>in the heavens</td>
<td>that</td>
<td>any likeness of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1029</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>568</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>bāʾārets</th>
<th>wāʾēsher</th>
<th>mimmaʿal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>in the earth</td>
<td>or that</td>
<td>on above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>751</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The prefix י is the conjunction "or." Concerning י see verse 1. The preposition י is the preposition "in." The י takes the article "the" י as the vowel י. י resh is the plural masculine noun meaning "heavens" which is only found in the plural. The prefix י is the conjunction "and" connected to י the singular masculine noun meaning "heavens" which is only found in the plural.

See page 38.

The preposition י is the preposition "in." The י takes the article "the" י as the vowel י. י resh is the plural masculine noun meaning "heavens" which is only found in the plural.

The prefix י is the conjunction "or." Concerning י see verse 1. The preposition י is the preposition "on" while י acts as an adverb "above."
Exodus 20:4 continued-

בְּמַיָּמִים

is "in the."

See this verse.

wa'asher

or which

mit'achath

from beneath

בָּמַיָּמִים

See this verse.

לַאֲרֶץ

on earth

See this verse.

mit'achath

from beneath

Word Studies on 20:4

pesel is translated differently among several English translations: RSV - "graven image," NJPS - "sculptured image," NEB - "carved image," and NAB as "idols." The word's etymology is found in the verb meaning "to carve, or hew into shape," and refers to all repre-

73 See BDB, p. 820, for a full reference.
sentations be they made of wood, stone or metal." Whether the ephod, brazen serpent and other such manifestations are to be included under pesel is debated and will be taken up in the commentary.

**Commentary on 20:4**

This prohibition may be viewed in at least three different ways. First, the statement may be understood in the context of the first stipulation, i.e., not only will you not worship other Gods but also you shall not make images of them. Notice that the stipulation does not forbid image-making of YHWH, only of other divine beings. Second, this prohibition may be viewed in accordance with the understanding that the divine essence is so utterly distinct from humankind that its very nature cannot be represented by man (so Eichrodt).74 Third, in the ancient Near East, just as a name represented the very essence of a being, so too did an image. Likewise, it was thought that possession of an image gave control over that which the image represented. "Israel is forbidden any image so that the people cannot even make any attempt to gain power over God or that which is of God."75 In Noth's opinion, since the worship of other Gods has already been reckoned with in the material, this verse refers to

74 See Eichrodt, pp. 29-30.

75 Noth, pp. 162-3.
the making of images in Israel's cultic setting.\textsuperscript{76}

There has been much debate among scholars considering the dating of this stipulation. The argument as presented by Mowinckel\textsuperscript{77}, McNeile, and the school of thought which they represent, is that "as instituted by Moses, and until the seventh century, the Israelite cultus was not without representations of \textit{YHWH} that constituted images or ideals."\textsuperscript{78} It is further thought that the prohibition against images might not have become a part of Hebrew thought until the time of Hosea and the deuteronomistic reforms of the following century.\textsuperscript{79} Prohibitions against images are found in Exodus 20:23 and 34:17, material that Alt considers the oldest legal material in the Torah, and which provides an argument for the prohibition against such images as being far older than the Decalogue. It is not debated that the verse requires an aniconic cultus. However, when this became the case

\textsuperscript{76} Noth, p. 162.

It should be noted that Orthodox Christianity has taken the fourth verse as a prohibition of any images. Consequently, to this day within Russian Orthodoxy the taking of pictures is not allowed for it creates an image. It was this prohibition in the fourth verse that caused Orthodoxy to present its artwork as icons. As distorted two-dimensional representations, these paintings are not understood as images. While photography and paintings in the realistic style are not forbidden within certain denominations of modern Judaism, nonetheless within their synagogues individuals are not portrayed on stained glass as they are in the Christian traditions.


\textsuperscript{79} Rylaarsdam, p. 981.
and whether such items as the ark of the covenant (Numbers 10:35-36, etc.), ephod (Judges 8:26-27, etc.), teraphim (Judges 18:14, etc.), and the brazen serpent (Numbers 21:8-9, etc.) represent graven images is highly contested.

Several issues must be addressed as regards this presentation. First, considering the practical nature of the ancient Near Eastern mindset which dealt with the concrete and not with that which was abstract, image-making should not be seen as something foreign. Just as the anthropomorphic semantics of the ancient Hebrew reflected this practical nature, it would seem that image-making, at least early on, would do likewise.

Second, it would seem that the geographic proximity of the Phoenicians, Syrians, and Philistines, as well as that of Israel's Canaanite neighbors, would have contributed to foreign influences impacting Israelite worship. There is no doubt that many of the rites which accompanied the planting and harvest seasons were adopted by Israel from her neighbors. With the extensive use of idols in the worship of Baal, Hadad, Anat, etc., among these groups, it would seem strange if this aspect of religious worship were rejected in toto by Israelite practice.

Third, it would seem that the use of at least some types of images or representations were known in Israelite worship. These images, however may not have been limited to the ephod and

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80 The reader should refer to the following texts for an understanding of the material different from the one presented here: B. Childs, The Book of Exodus, pp. 404ff.; Buber, On the Bible, pp. 97ff.; G. von Rad, Old Testament Theology, I, pp. 212ff., as well as many others.
other such manifestations. In the words of Gray:

From the account of the reformation of Josiah (II Kings 23), it is apparent that many symbols of Canaanite worship and other pagan cults, like sun worship, had been in use in Jerusalem, and that even in the exilic period the miserable remnants of the Jerusalem community could resort to the use at least of drawings or reliefs of gods and cult animals, if not to actual idols in the ruins of the temple (Ezek. 8:10). 81

Gray also notes:

In the period of the Hebrew settlement the story of Micah in the Danite migration (Judg. 17-18) indicates that graven and molten images and other concrete objects such as the ephod were used, presumably in the cult of Yahweh. 82

Gray further argues that certain passages of the Masoretic text which are rendered "to appear before God" also represent an obvious modification of an original phrase meaning "to see the face of God" (e.g., Exod. 23:15; 34:23; Deut. 16:16; I Sam. 1:22; Ps. 42:3). 83

While it cannot be denied that most if not all of the cases of Israelite experimentation with idols were condemned, neither


82 J. Gray, "Idol," p. 674. For further elaboration of Israelite familiarity with idols, see the remaining of this article.

Ps. 42:3). 83

While it cannot be denied that most if not all of the cases of Israelite experimentation with idols were condemned, neither can it be denied that this phenomenon emerged from the hand of a later, perhaps deuteronomic, editor. Second, in the words of Julian Morgenstern:

...the Old Testament gives no full and adequate picture of the life of ancient Israel. Scarcely 5 percent of the Old Testament comes from the Northern Kingdom, and yet the Northern Kingdom probably contained at least 75 percent of the people of Israel. And the remaining 95 percent of the Old Testament gives only a very one-sided picture of the daily life, beliefs, and practices of the Southern Kingdom. For all this literature, vast though it may seem, and unquestionably nationalistic in character, is composed, with the exception of a few passages, entirely from a prophetic, priestly, or scribal point of view, instead of purely objective. A literal study of the Old Testament unfolds a picture of that ideal national and individual life which the prophets proclaimed and which the later priests and scribes sought to legislate and moralize into being, rather than that lived day by day. Between prophetic and priestly life and religion and folk-life and folk-religion there was a vast difference. 84

Even if a mandate against images was to be found at an early stage within Israelite law, this legislation would not necessarily reflect the popular practices of the day. It has been shown without doubt, that "the majority of the Israelites


images was completely banned from the Israelite cultus.

- The reference to "the heavens above,... the earth,... and the waters below" is indicative of ancient Near Eastern thought which conceived of a three-tiered cosmos. The following diagram is a representation of such a cosmos.86


Smooth Translation on 20:4

You shall not make any image, or any likeness, of that which is in the heavens above, or that which is in the earth beneath, or that which is in the waters below the earth.

86 For further understanding, reference should be made to Frank E. Eakin, Jr. The Religion and Culture of Israel, chapter three; E. A. Speiser, Genesis in the Anchor Bible Commentary series, or any other commentary dealing with the first chapter of the Book of Genesis.
Exodus 20:5

Literal Translation:

Not he bow down to them and not serve them for I YHWH your God jealous visit iniquity fathers upon sons upon third and upon fourth generations hate me.

\( \text{ano} \)h
serves as the conjunction "and" joined to the adverb "not."

\( \text{lah} \)em
is the preposition "to."

\( \text{lo} \)
is the adverb "not" (usually referred to as a particle of negation) connected to the Hithpael imperfect, second masculine singular form of the root verb אָנֹכֵ֣ה, meaning "to bow down."

\( \text{w} \)elo
and not

\( \text{l} \)ahem
to them

\( \text{l}o \)
not bow down

First singular common pronoun "I."

Conjunction "that," "for" or "when."

Hophal imperfect, second masculine form of the root verb אָנֹכֵ֣ה, meaning "to serve." The third masculine singular suffix "them" is also found. " divides the verse into two separate parts of emphasis.

\( \text{ano}k \)hi
I

\( \text{k} \)i
for

\( \text{th} \)ä'ävdem
serve

59

471

712
**Exodus 20:5 continued**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Masculine noun for &quot;God.&quot;</th>
<th>Construct form of the masculine noun meaning &quot;iniquity,&quot; &quot;guilt&quot; or &quot;punishment.&quot;</th>
<th>A masculine singular adjective meaning &quot;jealous&quot; but an adjective used only for a God.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>el</td>
<td>poqued</td>
<td>pannā'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>god</td>
<td>visiting</td>
<td>jealous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>823</td>
<td>888</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>&quot;Upon&quot; is again attached to the plural numerical masculine noun meaning &quot;three.&quot;</th>
<th>Lis the preposition &quot;upon&quot; which is connected to the plural masculine noun meaning &quot;sons.&quot;</th>
<th>Plural masculine noun meaning &quot;father,&quot; but with a feminine ending.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>'āl - shilleshim</td>
<td>'āl - bānim</td>
<td>'āvoch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>upon (the) third</td>
<td>upon (the) sons</td>
<td>fathers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>752/1025</td>
<td>752/119</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

See verse 2.
Exodus 20:5 continued-

Plural construct, Qal active participle of the verb "to hate" with the first common singular suffix pronoun for "me."

The с serves as the conjunction "and" which is joined to the preposition "upon." The second word is the plural masculine adjective which "pertains to the fourth," i.e., pertaining to the fourth generation.

971 hate me

and upon (the) fourth generation 752/917

Commentary on 20:5

- Concerning the phrase, "...visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon their sons...":

...this is not an assertion of divine vindictiveness, but a reflection of ancient legal practice in which all the members of a household were regarded as implicated in the guilt incurred by any one of their number. "the third and fourth generations" reflects the greatest probable extent of the range of members of any one family actually living together in one household.87

Smooth Translation of 20:5

You shall not bow down to them, nor serve them, for YHWH your God is a jealous god, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon their sons, and upon the third and fourth generations of those who hate me;

87 Clements, p. 124.
Exodus 20:6

**Literal Translation:**

... but making lovingkindness to thousands love me and keep of my commandments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>תַּלְפּוּת</th>
<th>Chesed</th>
<th>וּטָבָה</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>la'elaphim</em></td>
<td><em>chesed</em></td>
<td><em>we'oseh</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thousands</td>
<td>lovingkindness</td>
<td>but making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>338</td>
<td>793</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The plural feminine noun referring to YHWH's "lovingkindness" or "love." The Qal active participle meaning "to do," or "make."

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>מָזוֹן</th>
<th>שום</th>
<th>נָבָי</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>mitsothay</em></td>
<td><em>ulshomrey</em></td>
<td><em>1e'ohbay</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>my commandments</td>
<td>and keep of</td>
<td>love me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>846</td>
<td>1036</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While *chesed* is found 245 times within the Hebrew Scriptures, the word's actual

Word Studies on 20:6
etymology is unknown. It has been translated in many different ways: "love," "lovingkindness," "covenant fidelity," etc. In his article on chesed in The Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament, H.-J. Zobel demonstrates that there are three elements constitutive of the chesed concept: "it is active, social and enduring." It is active for it deals not just with an attitude, but the acts which emerge from such an attitude; social for there is always someone to whom chesed is shown and experienced by; enduring for "the intimate society of the community [in this case a covenant community] requires enduring and reliable kindness as an essential element of its protective function."

While Zobel demonstrates that the original sitz im leben of chesed is found in the family setting, this is essentially the concept upon which the Sinai covenant is based. It is chesed which YHWH expressed in the redemption of the exodus event and in the revelations of Sinai. "The covenant love of YHWH is... a faithful love, a steadfast, unshakable maintenance of the covenantal relationship." Chesed, however, has come not only to represent the acts of God, but the very essence of God's being, e.g., Psalm 144:2 "my kindness;" Jonah 2:9 "forsake their

88 Botterweck & Ringgren, V, p. 45.
89 Botterweck & Ringgren, V, p. 51.
90 Botterweck & Ringgren, V, p. 51.
kindness."

Smooth Translation of 20:6

...but showing lovingkindness to the thousands who love me 
'and keep my commandments.

Exodus 20:7

Literal Translation:

Not take up name YHWH your God for vanity for not leave unpunished YHWH who takes up his name for vanity.

The first word, is the mark of the accusative (see verse 1). The second, נ ש , is the masculine noun for "name," while the last word is the sacred tetragrammaton (see verse 2).
Exodus 20:7 continued -

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ki</td>
<td>The conjunction meaning &quot;that,&quot; &quot;for&quot; or &quot;when.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lashshāw</td>
<td>Preposition &quot;for.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Eloheika</td>
<td>Preposition &quot;for.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for</td>
<td>For emptiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>471</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>996</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See verse 2.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YHWH</td>
<td>The Piel imperfect, third masculine singular form of the root word meaning &quot;leave unpunished.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$'eniqqeh</td>
<td>Leave unpunished</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>217</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>667</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>518</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lo'</td>
<td>Not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See this verse.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Exodus 20:7 continued-

The direct object indicator is linked to the word "name" (see this verse). The is the third masculine singular suffix pronoun for "his."

The first word is the participle of relation meaning in this instance "who." The second is the Qal imperfect, third masculine singular form of the verb (see this verse).

Mark of the accusative. See verse 1.

See this verse (996)

lashshaw' meaning emptiness.

Commentary on 20:7

- As mentioned earlier, the name of a being or object represented its very essence. "To speak the name is to involve the person," and thus to command a certain amount of control over the person. More importantly, in the ancient Near Eastern mindset, to speak a name was to call upon and consequently to control the powers of that name. Consequently, this statement not only prohibits "the invocation of the LORD's name to support malevolent accusations, lying evidence," but possibly the use

92 Napier, p. 80.
of] magical spells and incantations."93

- It is probable that this stipulation resulted in the eventual Jewish prohibition against the speaking of the divine name in any circumstance.

**Smooth Translation of 20:7**

*You shall not use the name of YHWH, your God, for vanity's sake, for he will not acquit those who use his name in vain.*

---

**Exodus 20:8**

**Literal Translation:**

*Remember day the Sabbath to keep it holy.*

\[יָמִּים בְּקֹדֶשׁ\]

The direct object indicator is linked to the singular masculine noun for "day."

\[זָכַּחַר\]

Qal infinitive absolute of the root verb \( לָזַחַר \), meaning "to remember."

\('eth - yom\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>day</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>84/398</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(zākhūr\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>remember</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

93 Clements, p. 125.
Exodus 20:8 continued.

The prefix ַי, is the preposition "to," joined to the Piel infinitive construct form of the verb ְיִקְדֹּשׁ, meaning "to be set apart" or "kept holy." It is joined to the third masculine singular suffix "it."

1eqadshō

to keep holy

hashshabāth

the Sabbath

Word Studies on 20:8

In Hebraic thought, the word "holy" conveyed both a sense of uniqueness and separation. That which was holy, the divine, was ever separate from humankind. There could be no intermingling of the two.

While Shabbath is derived from the verb shavat, meaning ceased or rested, the word's similarity to or "seventh" should be noted. Thus while the Sabbath day is a day of rest, nonetheless as explicitly stated by the material, and as implied by the word itself, the seventh day is the Sabbath day. With the exception of a few Christian denominations, e.g., Seventh-day Adventists, etc., however, the Christian day of worship is Sunday, the first day of the week and obviously not the Sabbath.
Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

Exodus 20:9

Literal Translation:

Six days labor, and do all of your work,...

The Qal imperfect, second masculine singular form of the root verb נָבָד, meaning "labor."  

Plural form of the masculine noun for "day."

The construct form of the singular feminine noun , meaning "six."

and (you) labor
days
six

The construct form of the singular feminine noun, meaning "six."

The masculine noun for "once" or "all."

The prefix ′ is the preposition "and" joined to the Qal perfect, second masculine singular form of the root verb נָבָד, meaning "to do" or "make."

your work
all
and do

Smooth Translation of 20:9

For six days you shall labor and do all of your work,...
Exodus 20:10 continued -

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>בְּעֵיתֵךְ</th>
<th>'atāh</th>
<th>כָּל-מֶלֶךְ-כָּהָן</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>yvtk - yvnhk</td>
<td>you</td>
<td>khl - mēlā'kāh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and your son</td>
<td>and your daughter</td>
<td>any work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>143/119</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>481/521</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>בִּקְחֶם-טֶק</th>
<th>wa'māthk</th>
<th>'avdk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>yvehmtek</td>
<td>and your maidservant</td>
<td>your manservant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and your cattle</td>
<td>and your maidservant</td>
<td>712</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>בְּעֵית</th>
<th>The second masculine singular pronoun &quot;you.&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The singular feminine noun for &quot;daughter&quot;, both in the same frame as the prior word.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>בִּקְחֶם</th>
<th>Construct form of the feminine noun for &quot;maid servant&quot; in the same framework.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>כָּל-מַלֶּכֶת</th>
<th>The masculine noun, לְבָלֵד, for &quot;slave&quot; or &quot;servant&quot; is found in the same framework as &quot;son&quot; and &quot;daughter&quot; above without the conjunction.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>and your cattle</td>
<td>and your maidservant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Exodus 20:10 continued-

The preposition "in" has been merged to the construct plural form of the masculine noun (with the second masculine singular suffix-pronoun) meaning "gates."

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>bish'áreik</th>
<th>'ésher</th>
<th>wégherk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>in your gates</td>
<td>who</td>
<td>and your stranger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1044</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Smooth Translation of 20:10

... but the seventh day is the Sabbath to YHWH your God; on it you shall not work, neither you, nor your son, nor your daughter, your manservant nor your maidservant, nor your cattle, nor the stranger who is in your gates.
Exodus 20:11

Literal Translation:
For six days made YHWH the heavens and the earth the sea and all that in them and rested on the seventh therefore blessed YHWH day the Sabbath and set it apart.

The Qal perfect, third masculine singular form of the verb meaning "to do," or "to make," from the root verb 'asāh

The singular feminine noun for the number six in construct with and joined to the plural masculine noun for "days."

made

six days

for

and the earth

the heavens

See verse 5.
See verse 2.
See verses 1 and 4 respectively.

"and" is joined to the direct object indicator, with that word being tied to "the earth." See verse 4.

and the earth

the heavens

See verse 5.
See verse 2.
See verses 1 and 4 respectively.
Exodus 20:11 continued-

The first word is composed of the conjunction "and" which is joined to the direct object indicator. Concerning the second and third words, see verses 1 and 2 respectively. The final word is composed of the preposition "in" joined to the third masculine plural suffix-pronoun "them."

we'eth - kāl - 'ēsher - bām
and all that in them
84/481/81/(no reference)

The masculine noun "seventh." The marks a change of emphasis.

hāshbē'ēśēn

The preposition "in" with the article "the" being assumed by the vowel "ם" is "day." See verse 8.

bayyōm
in the day
398

The Qal imperfect, third masculine singular verb "to rest" from the root verb wayyānach

rested
628
Exodus 20:11 continued

The Piel perfect, third masculine singular verb "to consecrate" or "bless." Taken from the root יְהַבְּכֹר.

YHWH

berach

blessed

The first word is the preposition "upon" which is linked to the adverb "so, thus." The two words are translated into English as "therefore."

Therefore

See verse 2.

wayeqadshehu

set apart it

See verse 8.

See verse 8.

hashshabath

the Sabbath

'th - yôm

day

Commentary on verse 8-11

- vs.10: "Not do any work" - Jewish tradition eventually defined this statement in detail, establishing a catalog of thirty-nine main types of prohibited labor.94

94 Plaut, II, p. 232.
- If the Sabbath stipulation was originally composed as a negative prohibition, as most scholars believe, it would most likely take the form "You shall not do any work on the Sabbath day."

- Notice that within this stipulation the lower elements of society, be they slave or animal, are protected from possible exploitation that might arise from such a practice.

- Of the variations that exist between the Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 decalogues, the rationale for Sabbath worship is one of the most obvious. In Exodus 20, the people of Israel are to observe a day of rest just as their God YHWH rested after he made the world in six days. In Deuteronomy 5 the rationale is that the Sabbath is to be observed so that the Israelite people would not forget their days of bondage in Egypt. The latter tradition is most certainly the older. As mentioned earlier, within the covenant stipulations, the covenant was to be enacted on the basis of YHWH's deliverance of the Hebrew people. He was exalted not as a creator God or as a rain God, but as a God of history and redemption. The emphasis on the creative powers of God is indicative of the redactive work of the exilic or post-exilic Priestly circle. The stipulation as originally formulated created a sacred day to remind the people to remember what YHWH had done for them.

An examination, however, must be made concerning the probable development of the Sabbath tradition. While it is recognized that the word Sabbath is inseparably bonded with the
word "seventh, nonetheless certain questions must be asked: Was it possible for a nomadic people to observe a day of complete rest? While possible in an agricultural or urban setting, is it not impractical if not impossible, for a nomadic people to observe such a day? If our answers to these questions reflect a latter Sabbath tradition, then we assume as does Rowley "that the very name Sabbath has had a history, and [that] it may not have always had the same meaning wherever we meet it."95

Analogous days to the Sabbath are found throughout the ancient Near East. It was not uncommon to observe what may be termed "evil" or "taboo days." Within Babylonia, the seventh, fourteenth, twenty-first, and twenty-eight days of certain months were considered "evil days."96 On these days, the royalty and the privileged classes were not to move about or to act in any capacity whatsoever so as to avoid demons and the like. Nielsen suggests the possibility that the emergence of the positive form of the Sabbath stipulation is to be associated with the change of the Sabbath from a "taboo day" to that of a festival or holiday.97 A particular day known as sabbattu (note the similarities with Sabbath) was also observed in Babylonia and cannot be dismissed here, for it means "the day of quieting the

95 Rowley, p.110
96 Plaut, II, p. 233.
97 Nielsen, p. 103.
heart." However, in Julian Morgenstern's opinion, in all likelihood both the Babylonian sabbattu and the Hebrew Sabbath were derived from a common eastern semitic source.99

Other individuals have advocated that the Sabbath observance was originally based upon a lunar or some type of solar calendar based on the planet Saturn (note the English Saturday).100 Nonetheless, it seems likely that at least one of the traditions from which the Sabbath observance is derived are these ancient "days of omen." Morgenstern has also argued convincingly that the Sabbath observance was perhaps based on an agricultural calendar; one which was adopted after Israel's settlement among her Canaanite neighbors. This calendar was based upon a period of fifty days -seven seven-day weeks with an extra sacred day which was used as a time of celebration.101 That early Israel celebrated a day to remember the Exodus event and the covenant is likely. It does not seem possible that this holiday could have been regularly celebrated as a day of rest until, at the very earliest, the seventh century and perhaps as late as the time of the exile.


99 Morgenstern, p. 136.

100 Plaut, II, p. 233.

101 For further information on this calendar, refer to Morgenstern article in The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, IV, pp. 135ff.
Smooth Translation of 20:11

For six days YHWH made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, but on the seventh day he rested, therefore YHWH blessed the Sabbath day and set it apart.

Exodus 20:12

Literal Translation:

Honor your father and your mother so that long your days upon the land which YHWH your God gives to you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>נָאָרָאָבִךְ</th>
<th>נָאָרָאָבִךְ</th>
<th>כָּבֶד</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The direct object indicator, with the conjunction and attached to it, is linked to &quot;mother&quot; which is also found with the suffix-pronoun &quot;your.&quot; The ^ marks a change in emphasis.</td>
<td>The direct object indicator is linked to &quot;fathers&quot; with the second masculine singular suffix-pronoun &quot;your.&quot; See verse 5.</td>
<td>The infinitive absolute of the verb kabet, meaning &quot;honor.&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ w^e'eth - 'immech \]

and your mother

\[ 84/51 \]

\[ 'eth - 'avik \]

and your father

\[ 84/3 \]

\[ kabet \]

honor

\[ 457 \]
Exodus 20:12 continued-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Hebrew</th>
<th>Hebrew</th>
<th>Hebrew</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The word &quot;days&quot; is found here with the suffix-pronoun &quot;your.&quot; See verse 8.</td>
<td>יָמְאֵיךְ</td>
<td>יָאֵרְיָהְוּן</td>
<td>lְמָאָן</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>your days</td>
<td>be long</td>
<td>so that</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>398</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>775</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Hebrew</th>
<th>Hebrew</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The participle of relation is linked to &quot;YHWH.&quot; See verse 2.</td>
<td>בֵּשֵּׁר - YHWH</td>
<td>'al</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>which YHWH</td>
<td>upon</td>
<td>hāʼeḏāmāh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81/217</td>
<td>752</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Hebrew</th>
<th>Hebrew</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The preposition &quot;to,&quot; while the ֵנָ is the second masculine singular suffix-pronoun &quot;you.&quot;</td>
<td>לָק</td>
<td>יֵהוָהָ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to you</td>
<td>gave</td>
<td>'Eloheika</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>678</td>
<td>43</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Commentary on 20:12

- Note the assumption that the "land" has already been given to the Hebrew people. Compare the phrase "...in the land which YHWH your God gives," to the phrase in Deuteronomy which reads "is giving" or "will give."102

- Like the positive formulation of the Sabbath command, if this stipulation is to be understood as originally constructed with a negative formulation, it would perhaps read, "You shall not curse your parents." As the statement in its present context concerns itself with support of the parents in their elderly years, perhaps the statement could have been rendered, "You shall not abandon your parents."

- This particular stipulation may be interpreted in the context of both the horizontal and vertical relationship. Concerning the former, the statement would be interpreted in the context of the child to parent relationship. The issue at hand would be the care and support of parents in their latter years. In an ancient nomadic environment, being cared for in your latter years literally meant the difference between life and death. "The possession of the 'land' which 'your God gives' depends on the maintenance of family standards."103

The stipulation may also be understood, however, in the context of a God-to-human horizontal relationship, i.e. "that the writer is affirming that all life is ultimately dependent upon

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102 Rylaarsdam, p. 985.
103 Rylaarsdam, p. 985.
God. Since parents are the ones through whom the gift of life has been granted, no more appropriate manner of honoring God, the ultimate giver of life could be conceived than the honoring of parents. 104 In the words of Napier:

...in consideration of ancient Eastern modes of thought and the characteristic psychological identification one always made of his own life with the life of immediate and also more distant progenitors; in recognition of the meaning of Covenant, together with Israel's faith in God's creation and his continuing exercise of the powers and prerogatives of Creator and Sustainer - in acknowledgment of all this it is apparent that the intention of the fifth commandment is to establish and perpetuate not merely the parental but by and through the parental the divine claim upon every life in Israel. 105

Whether one is to see this stipulation as a vertical or horizontal prohibition, nonetheless the present literary form of the document seems to be well thought out as the fifth stipulation definitely acts as one of transition to the vertical prohibitions which follow.

Smooth Translation of 20:12

You shall honor your father and your mother so that your days may be long upon the land which YHWH your God gave to you.

104 Eakin, Religion and Culture, p. 72.
105 Napier, p. 83.
Exodus 20:13

Literal Translation:

Not murder.

The Qal imperfect, second masculine singular form of the verb, הֶןֶּלְנֵם, meaning "to kill" or "slay."

The adverb "not."

tirtsäch
murder 953

not 515

Word Studies on 20:13

This verb appears rather infrequently in the Old Testament (46 times) in comparison to the other common verbs employed (165 for hrg; 201 for hmyt- cited from Stamm-Andrew, op. cit., p. 98.)."106

Commentary on 20:13

- The order of the next three prohibitions - murder, adultery, and theft - is reversed in the Septuagint.107

- This short concise two-word saying, perhaps representative of the entire Decalogue in its earliest form, affirms God as the giver of life. But, this statement does not forbid all types of killing, i.e., "this means that in Israelite society it did not forbid the slaying of animals, capital punishment, or the killing

106 Childs, p. 419.

107 Rylaarsdam, p. 986.
of enemies in war" (note the translation 'You shall not murder' as opposed to 'You shall not kill'). Thus this prohibition would seem to refer the act of premeditated murder. However, as noted by Napier and others, "in Deuteronomy 4:42 the same word is used of one 'who kills his neighbor unintentionally'. Consequently, the stipulation prohibits unauthorized killings. Clements also feels that the context of the prohibition includes "the private taking of revenge on people suspected of murder without recourse to proper legal investigation and public trial."

Smooth Translation of 20:13

You shall not murder.

Exodus 20:14

Literal Translation:

Not commit adultery

The Qal imperfect, second masculine singular form of the verb, meaning "to commit adultery."

Lo' not

commit adultery

610 515

108 Rylaarsdam, p. 996.
109 Napier, p. 85.
110 Clements, p. 125.
Commentary on 20:14

- This prohibition, as does the latter half of the Decalogue, concerns itself with both 1) the human-to-human relationship, as well as 2) the God-to-human relationship. The preservation of the entire covenant community is being sought for the maintenance of the marital relationship "...ensures the preservation of the God-man relationship."111 Note however that "the verb on which the prohibition rests is used exclusively in the Old Testament of marital infidelity or adultery, not of fornication."112

Smooth Translation of 20:14

You shall not commit adultery.

Exodus 20:15

Literal Translation:

Not steal

The Qal imperfect, second masculine singular form of the verb, וְצֵלָה, meaning "to steal."

tignov

steal

170

lo'

not

515

111 Eakin, Religion and Culture, p. 72.
112 Rylaarsdam, p. 986.
Commentary on 20:15

- Once again this stipulation allows for a multi-faceted interpretation. As the statement does not confine its focus to a certain perspective as does verse 17, it is thought that the original context of this stipulation prohibits man-stealing and the enslavement of free-Israelites (so A. Alt, M. Noth et al.; cf. Exodus 21:16). In its present context however, the material may refer to both the stealing of persons, as well as the corruption of another's property; for the Decalogue seeks to preserve the sacredness of family, life, etc. It has also often been noted that in a nomadic society, life is dependent upon the few essential items which the group preserves. Consequently the violation of this property is to be seen as detrimental to the community in the same sense as the taking of another's life.

Smooth Translation of 20:15

You shall not steal.
Exodus 20:16.

**Literal Translation:**

_Not respond against your neighbor witness falsehood._

The adverb _not_ is linked to the Qal imperfect, second masculine singular form of the verb, _לֹא_ , meaning "to answer" or "respond."

_לֹא_ is the singular masculine noun for "friend" or "neighbor." The preposition _ל_ is joined to as a prefix, and means "against." The second masculine singular suffix-pronoun, meaning "your," is also found.

Not respond against your neighbor

946

not respond

773/518

against your neighbor

946

not respond

773/518

_שֶׁפֶר_ The singular masculine noun for "falsehood" or "deception."

falsehood

1055

_שֶׁפֶר_ The singular masculine noun for "witness."

witness

723

Commentary on 20:16

- The context of this prohibition is probably found in the ancient Near Eastern legal system. Consequently, the statement does not prohibit lying with broad brush strokes, but rather lying which would defame a fellow citizen's name; and not just that which occurs in the courts. Behind this stipulation the material is still concerned with the God-human relationship.
Human rights are God-given rights, and thus should be diligently preserved. The defamation of another's name is a violation of those rights and of the entire person. As the Midrash says, "Everything in the world was created by God, except the art of lying."\footnote{Plaut, I, p. 245.}

**Smooth Translation of 20:16**

You shall not utter false witnesses against your neighbor.

---

**Exodus 20:17**

**Literal Translation:**

Not covet house of your neighbor not desire wife of neighbor or his man-servant or his maid-servant or his oxen or his ass and all which belongs to your friend.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>בֵּית</th>
<th>תָּחְמוֹד</th>
<th>כָּל</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>house</td>
<td>covet</td>
<td>all which</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

108 326 518
Exodus 20:17 continued-

\[ \text{See this verse.} \]

\[ \text{The construct form of } \text{הָנָה} \text{, the singular feminine noun "wife"} \]

\[ \text{See this verse.} \]

\[ \text{is the singular masculine noun "neighbor" with the second masculine singular suffix-pronoun meaning "your." The ^ marks a change in emphasis.} \]

\[ \text{See this verse.} \]

\[ \text{The feminine noun "maidservant," } \text{is found in the same format as the preceding word.} \]

\[ \text{See this verse.} \]

\[ \text{The feminine noun "maidservant," } \text{is found in the same format as the preceding word.} \]

\[ \text{See this verse.} \]

\[ \text{or his maidservant} \]

\[ \text{or his manservant} \]

\[ \text{neighbor} \]
Exodus 20:17 continued-

The preposition "and," 1, is joined to "all." See verse 1.

The masculine noun for "ass" is likewise found in the same format.

The masculine noun for "oxen" is found in the same format as above.

and all 481

or his donkey 331

or his oxen 1004

Concerning 1, see this verse. The 1 acts as the prepositional phrase "belongs to" while 7 is the third masculine singular suffix-pronoun "your."

belongs to your neighbor 945

which 81

Word Studies on 20:17

: "house" is most likely an all-inclusive term here better understood as household, and thus indicative of the family and all the possessions of that household.

Commentary on 20:17

- This stipulation has most certainly been expanded, perhaps reading originally "You shall not covet another's household." The elaboration which has been made is in all likelihood the hand of a later editor.
- Within this stipulation it is affirmed that deeds and actions first begin as a result of inner motives. For the covenant stipulations to be preserved, the initiates must show a purity of heart as well as deed. If this is indeed the meaning of this stipulation, it seems out of place in light of the other stipulations. Consequently, many have seen the original form of this statement to be "thou shall not acquire illegally." Advocates of this position, however, would then have to reconcile the relationship between this stipulation and that which says, "You shall not steal." While this ethical stipulation appears in contrast with the others, unfortunately the alternative has too often taken the form of the legalistic understanding of many concerning this passage of scripture and the Hebrew Scriptures in their entirety; too often ethical norms have been inappropriately confined to the teachings of the New Testament. Considering, however, that too often humankind initiates the process by which desires are acquired, the stipulation is not at all alien to the teachings of the Decalogue.

Smooth Translation of 20:17

You shall not covet your neighbor's house, nor his wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his oxen, nor his ass or anything which belongs to your neighbor.

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Conclusion

While this examination of the Decalogue does not attempt to incorporate the entire spectrum of critical research in this field, it is hoped that the presentation has stimulated both personal insights and the desire for further inquiry. Regardless, some readers will perhaps leave this material confused, upset, or even angry concerning the approach to "Holy Scripture." To address these feelings, however, one deals not with differences of opinion concerning the Decalogue per se but with individual understandings of divine revelation, personal interpretation, and biblical authority.

While this paper does not address the questions of revelation, interpretation and authority (there is no short supply of material concerning these topics available), as an exegetical presentation this material provides opportunity for the biblical material to speak afresh and on its own. Before this can happen, however, the presuppositional baggage with which we are all burdened must be acknowledged.

First there are always those who desire to cloak the Bible in inappropriate garments. To describe the Bible as an inerrant, infallible document not only fails to understand the nature of the biblical material but also assumes that the fullness of the divine can be contained within a document formulated by human hands. As the Yahwist expresses in Genesis two and three, to be human, to be that which is other than God,
is to be less than perfect. However, despite our prejudices and our individual value structures, God has nonetheless chosen humankind to be the revealing agent of divine truth, a statement true whether one reads the traditional Hebrew Scriptures or the Christian Scriptures. The interpreter must remember, however;

[that the Bible] must be understood as a vehicle for proclaiming man's faith in Yahweh, the Lord of History, and for affirming man's understanding of the process by which God has revealed himself within the historical arena.... The Bible is a means for understanding God, but the Bible is not divine -- the Bible is not God.115

While the biblical material has and continues to express truth, one's capacity to understand that truth is forever burdened by the very nature of human existence. However, if one follows certain guidelines and continues to interpret the biblical material as regards its context, content, and continuity116, the opportunity is provided for the material to speak for itself. The ability to scrutinize critically both ourselves and our creator is what distinguishes humankind as a creation made in God's image.

Returning to the Decalogue, although society has incorporated at least the latter half of the Decalogue into its modern structures, it has failed to understand the importance and significance of the material. This is especially regrettable

115 Eakin, We Believe in One God, p. 117.
116 Eakin, We Believe in One God, p. 121.
as this lack of understanding has become a barrier for Jewish-Christian dialogue. For Christianity and Judaism to truly participate in open dialogue, both faiths must come to understand and appreciate the foundations upon which the other was built. Much of the initiative for this kind of dialogue however lies with Christianity for, in the words of Marin Buber:

The Ten Commandments are not part of an impersonal codex governing an association of men. They were uttered by an I and addressed to a Thou.¹¹⁷

The "ten words" are more than just a series of stipulations which govern society. These stipulations must also be understood as that which created and gave meaning and purpose to the Jewish faith. To do otherwise is to fail to understand the real meaning behind the "ten words" and for that matter, the Hebrew Scriptures in their entirety. The "I" was the God YHWH who uttered his word to Israel. While there is some ambivalence within Judaism concerning the relationship between the Decalogue and the rest of the Torah,¹¹⁸ most scholars would agree that the Decalogue in its present form represents a summation of the teachings of the Torah

¹¹⁷ Buber, On the Bible, p. 118.

¹¹⁸ "On the one hand, it was accepted as the very heart of the divine revelation at Sinai, which was given by God himself. It contained in essence all the laws of Torah.... [O]n the other hand, there is an apology directed against using the Decalogue at the expense of the other laws (Sifre on Deut. 1:3).... Benno Jacob certainly reflects the same basic Jewish attitude when he first praises the Decalogue as being uniquely given by God himself, but then adds, though all the laws are God-given and require the same amount of obedience." See Childs, p. 435.
and the revelations of the Sinai theophany. It is an affirmation
on the part of the Jewish people of the way in which God uniquely
revealed his message to his people and through them to the world.

E. Nielsen has stated a position contrary to that expressed
in this paper but one which must be acknowledged and ultimately
presuppositionally resolved:

Now a covenant which is, of its nature, confined to one
particular people can hardly have 'universal binding
force'. The Jewish people ('a wild and barren stock')
first attained true universality when the eternal
gardener grafted onto the stock the noble shoot that is
Jesus Christ.119

Since the *sitz im leben* of Exodus 20:1-17 must be understood and
interpreted in the context and purpose of the Sinai covenant,
Nielsen's statement leaves much to be desired. The universality
and superiority of Christianity are just a few of Nielsen's
presuppositions. As stated by Plaut, "the words [of the
Decalogue] were uttered not for one people alone, and not for one
age, but for all peoples and for all generations until the end of
time."120 It was a message for God's people, Israel, to take to
the *goyim*, the other nations of the world (Is. 42:6). Just as
Christianity affirms something unique, timeless, and universal in
the message of the historical Jesus, so too is the Decalogue an
affirmation of the Judaic faith. To affirm that the Sinai


revelation has been superseded by Jesus and/or his message and consequently the universality and superiority of Christianity is not only a failure to understand the message of the Hebrew Scriptures but it is also demonstrative of one's lack of appreciation for Jesus' Jewish identity.
Appendix I

Exodus 34:14-26

34 14 ...(for you shall worship no other god, for [YHWH], whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God), 15 lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and when they play the harlot after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and one invites you, you eat of his sacrifice, 16 and you take of their daughters for your sons, and their daughters play the harlot after their gods and make your sons play the harlot after their gods.

17 "You shall make for yourselves no molten gods."

18 "The feast of unleavened bread you shall keep. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you, at the time appointed in the month A'bib; for in the month Abib you came out from Egypt. 19 All that opens the womb is mine, all your male cattle, the firstlings of cow and sheep. 20 The firstling of an ass you shall redeem with a lamb, or if you will not redeem it you shall break its neck. All the first-born of your sons you shall redeem. And none shall appear before me empty."

21 "Six days you shall work, but on the seventh day you shall rest; in plowing time and in harvest you shall rest. 22 And you shall observe the feast of weeks, the first fruits of wheat harvest, and the feast of ingathering at the year's end. 23 Three times in the year shall all your males appear before [YHWH] God, the God of Israel. 24 For I will cast out nations
before you, and enlarge your borders; neither shall any man desire your land, when you go up to appear before [YHWH] your God three times in the year."

25 "You shall not offer the blood of my sacrifice with leaven; neither shall the sacrifice of the feast of the passover be left until the morning. 26 The first of the first fruits of your ground you shall bring to the house of [YHWH] your God. You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk."

27 And [YHWH] said to Moses, "Write these words; in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel." 28 And he was there with [YHWH] forty days and forty nights; he neither ate bread nor drank water. And he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten commandments.
Appendix II

Exodus 19:1-25, 20:18-21

19 1 On the third new moon, after the people of Israel had
gone forth out of the land of Egypt, on that day they came into
the wilderness of Sinai. 2 And when they set out from Reph’idim,
and came into the wilderness of Sinai, they encamped in the
wilderness; and there Israel encamped before the mountain. 3 And
Moses went up to God, and [YHWH] called to him out of the
mountain saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and
tell the people of Israel: 4 You have seen what I did to the
Egyptian, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to
myself. 5 Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my
covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for
all the earth is mine, 6 and you shall be to me a kingdom of
priests and a holy nation. These are the words which you shall
speak to the children of Israel."

7 So Moses came and called the elders of the people, and set
before them all these words which [YHWH] had commanded him. 8
And all the people answered together and said, "All that [YHWH]
has spoken we will do." And Moses reported the words of the
people to [YHWH]. 9 And [YHWH] said to Moses, "Lo, I am coming
to you in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak
with you, and may believe you forever."

Then Moses told the words of the people to [YHWH]. 10 And
[YHWH] said to Moses, "Go to the people, and consecrate them
today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments, 11 and be
ready by the third day; for on the third day [YHWH] will come down upon mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. 12 And you shall set bounds for the people round about, saying, 'Take heed that you do not go up into the mountain or touch the border of it; whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death: 13 no hand shall touch him, but he shall be stoned or shot; whether beast or man, he shall not live.' When the trumpet sounds a long blast, they shall come up to the mountain." 14 So Moses went down from the mountain to the people, and consecrated the people; and they washed their garments. 15 And he said to the people, "Be ready by the third day; do not go near a woman."

16 On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. 17 Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God; and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. 18 And Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because [YHWH] descended upon it in fire; and the smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. 19 And then the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him in thunder. 20 And [YHWH] came down upon Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain; and [YHWH] called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. 21 And [YHWH] said to Moses, "Go down and warn the people, lest they break through to [YHWH] to gaze and many of them perish. 22 And also let the priests, who come near to [YHWH], consecrate themselves,
llest YHWH break out upon them. 23 And Moses said to [YHWH], "The people cannot come up to mount Sinai; for thou thyself didst charge us, saying, 'Set bounds about the mountain and consecrate it.'" 24 And [YHWH] said to him, "Go down, and come up bringing Aaron with you; but do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to [YHWH], lest he break out against them. 25 So Moses went down to the people, and told them.

20 18 Now when all the people perceived the thunderings and the lightnings, and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled; and stood afar off. 19 And they said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will hear; but let not God speak to us, lest we die." 20 And Moses said to the people, "Do not fear; for God has come to prove you, and that the fear of him may be before your eyes, that you sin not."
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