

# **The Ten Words**

**Thoughts on Exodus 20:1–17**

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## The Ten Words

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Traditionally, in Christian circles, the Ten Words are called the “Ten Commandments.” However, the biblical text uses the expression עֲשֶׂרֶת הַדְּבָרִים, *‘aseret hadevarim*, “Ten Words” when referring to what God inscribed on the two tablets which Moses brought down from Mt. Sinai. In fact, referring to these as Ten Words allows a more accurate enumeration of the Ten since the first Word is not a commandment at all, but the necessary titulature or authoritative title of the One making the covenant, of which the Ten Words is the written document.

This is because the Torah as a whole, and the Ten Words in particular, are patterned after the Suzerain-Vassal treaties or covenants common in the Ancient Near East. Such covenants were enacted between a Great King and a Vassal king who would rule a given region for and on behalf of the Great King. This type of covenant required obedience and allegiance from the Vassal king for which he would receive support and protection from the Great King. Included in the treaty or covenant, however, were clear and decisive penalties if ever the Vassal were to renege on his duties or even rebel against the authority of the Great King in hopes of establishing himself as his own sovereign.

Characteristic of these Suzerain-Vassal treaties of the Ancient Near East was that the Great King, who was enacting the treaty or covenant, would first give his own title along with a short history of his relationship to the Vassal king. Thus, in our biblical text, the Ten Words begin, not with a commandment, but with the identification of the Great King:

*I am ADONAI your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.* Here we see the name of the Great King as well as the decisive event by which He and the Vassal (the nation of Israel) have come into relationship.

The fact that these Ten Words became traditionally known as the Ten Commandments also figured into various enumerations of the Ten. Since generally the Christian Church considered the Ten to be commandments, it became common to find ten commandments, thus skipping past the opening titulature. The following table shows the traditional Jewish, Roman Catholic, and Protestant variations in how the Ten are numbered.

| <b>Jewish</b>                                 | <b>Roman Catholic</b>                                       | <b>Protestant</b>                             |
|---|---|---|
| 1. I am ADONAI...                             | 1. No other gods<br>Don't make idols                        | 1. No other gods                              |
| 2. No other gods<br>Don't make idols          | 2. Don't use God's<br>name in a false oath                  | 2. Don't make idols                           |
| 3. Don't use God's<br>name in a false<br>oath | 3. Keep the Sabbath   | 3. Don't use God's<br>name in a false<br>oath |
| 4. Keep the Sabbath                           | 4. Honor parents  | 4. Keep the Sabbath                           |
| 5. Honor parents                              | 5. Don't murder   | 5. Honor parents                              |
| 6. Don't murder                               | 6. Don't commit adul-<br>tery                               | 6. Don't murder                               |
| 7. Don't commit<br>adultery                   | 7. Don't steal  | 7. Don't commit<br>adultery                   |
| 8. Don't steal                                | 8. Don't give a false<br>witness                            | 8. Don't steal                                |
| 9. Don't give a false<br>witness              | 9. Don't covet your<br>neighbor's house                     | 9. Don't give a false<br>witness              |
| 10. Don't covet                               | 10. Don't covet your<br>neighbor's wife, ser-<br>vant, etc. | 10. Don't covet                               |

The differences are easy to spot: the Jewish list begins with “I am ADONAI ...” as the first Word, and then combines “no other gods” and “don’t make idols” together as the second Word. The Protestant list is the same as the Jewish, except that it does not begin with “I am ADONAI” and therefore separates “No other gods” and “Don’t make idols” to form Words one and two. The Roman Catholic list combines “No other gods” and “Don’t make idols” to form the first Word, but separates “Don’t covet your neighbor’s house” from “Don’t covet your neighbor’s wife, servant, etc.” in order to fill the ninth and tenth Words.

Regardless, the structure of the Ten Words is clear: the first half of the Ten relate to how one loves God while the second half relates to how one loves one’s neighbor. Thus, when Yeshua was asked about the greatest of the commandments, He answered by saying:

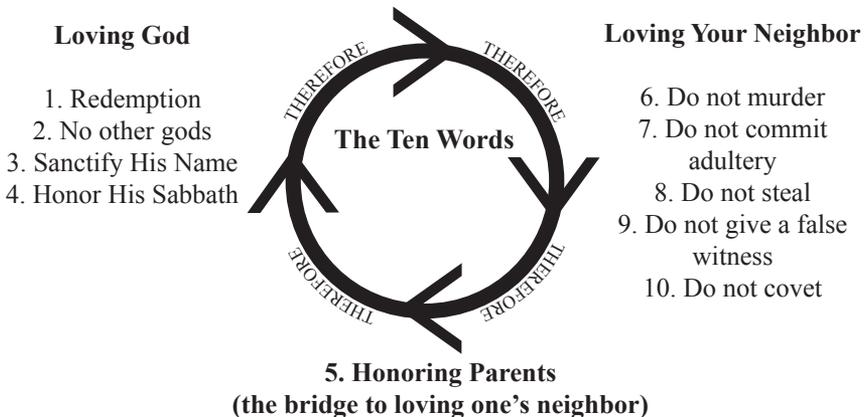
YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND. This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.” (Matt 22:37–40)

Thus, loving God and loving one's neighbor answers to the basic structure of the Ten Words.

Note that it is the fifth Word, the one which commands to honor one's parents, that is the "bridge" between the two halves. That is, as a child grows and is taught to honor his or her parents, they are in a much better position to understand what it means to willfully submit to God as their heavenly Father as well as to treat neighbors with the respect they deserve as bearing the image of God.

In fact, it seems clear by the structure of the Ten Words that one builds upon another. Thus, being redeemed from Egypt shows that Israel belongs to God Who redeemed His firstborn. This means Israel is to have allegiance to no other gods, for there are no other gods. The exodus event proved this conclusively. Since, therefore, the God of Israel is the one and only God, it becomes the duty of His redeemed people to sanctify His Name. Honoring God as the One and only Divine King leads to obeying His commandments, which begins by acknowledging the covenant He has made with us, the sign of which is the Sabbath. Then, once we have bowed in submission to God, we recognize that we must love our neighbors, for they bear the image of God Whom we serve.

The point is simple: as we work our way down the list of these Ten Words, we see how they are all bound together and how each one leads to the next. We might diagram this concept like this:



**1.** *“I am ADONAI your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”*

The opening word of the Ten makes it clear that there is a prior relationship between God and those to whom He is writing, for the Ten Words are inscribed upon the stones by the very finger of God (Ex 31:18). This relationship is one of redemption, of being delivered out of the “house of slavery.” This is a crucial point in understanding the Ten Words as a whole, as well as the entire Sinai covenant: we obey God, not to achieve or forge a relationship with Him, but because He has already chosen us and redeemed us for Himself. Thus, our desire to obey God is out of a heart of gratitude, not motivated by fear.

Moreover, this being the case, the covenant established through the Torah, and summarized in the Ten Words, is not a call to believe or confess that ADONAI is God, but a clear declaration of what we already know and confess to be true, that He is the One and only God and there is none other (Is 45:21–22). Thus, we bow before Him as our Savior, our King, and our Father, confessing from hearts of gratitude that what He commands, we will do.

**2.** *“You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, ADONAI your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.*

This common translation, “...no other gods before me” follows the Vulgate (*coram me*) and is incorrect. The Hebrew עַל פְּנֵי, *‘al panaiy*, can be literally taken as “beyond Me” (as the use of עַל, *‘al*, in Gen 48:22, “give you one portion more than your brothers...”), or עַל פְּנֵי, *‘al panaiy* can mean “in addition to Me” (as the use of עַל, *‘al*, in Gen 31:50, “... if you take wives besides my daughters....”). Regardless of the precise nuance of the prepositional phrase, the second word absolutely prohibits any form of polytheism or the worship of idols, whether in thought, word, or deed.

The negative likewise demands the positive, which is that God and God alone deserves the fear, love, and worship of all that He

has created. Thus, to fail to worship God in truth is likewise to transgress this commandment.

Further, the second Word does not in any manner suggest that other gods actually exist, even though fallen mankind has believed there are other gods and have given themselves to serve them. In reality, all other “gods” are demons (1Cor 10:19–20). As Isaiah affirms:

Declare and set forth your case; indeed, let them consult together. Who has announced this from of old? Who has long since declared it? Is it not I, ADONAI? And there is no other God besides Me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none except Me. Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other. (Is 45:21–22)

In summary, this second Word of the Ten also forbids the use of

- a. Objects as a focus of worship
- b. Rituals as an attempt to control Him, or which are done with the idea that the ritual itself obligates God to some action

From a positive standpoint, this means we must:

- a. Teach the truth about God’s character
- b. Guard against those things which inevitably lead to or are equal with idolatry
  - rebellion / insubordination, 1 Sam 15:23
  - greed, Col 3:5
- c. Commit ourselves to worship God as He has instructed us, and not by our own designs.

**3.** *You shall not take the name of ADONAI your God in vain, for ADONAI will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain.*

The Hebrew of this third Word is not easily conveyed in our English translations. The line is **לֹא תִשָּׂא אֶת־שֵׁם־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשׁוֹן**, literally, “You shall not lift up the name of ADONAI your God to waste/vanity.”

First, the verb **נָסָא**, *nasa’*, never means to “utter” or “speak” but always has the sense of “lift up,” “take up,” “raise,” and so forth. Thus, *nasa’* is used to “take up (or raise) a proverb” (Num 23:7; Job 27:1) or to “lift up a song” (Ps 81:3), or a prayer (Is 37:4). Note as

well Ps 24:4 which has the phrase “lift up his soul to vanity,” the very language of our text.

Second, the word translated “vanity,” *הַיָּשׁוּׁ*, *shav<sup>o</sup>h*, does not mean “to lie” but rather denotes that which is “worthless,” “a waste,” or “in disorder.”

Thus, to “lift up the Name of God” to that which is worthless or a waste is to evoke the Name of God in a false oath or in an attempt to make a falsehood appear as true. Likewise, evoking the Name of God in false worship is to profane the Name of God, i.e., to incorporate the Name into that which is worthless.

### In Summary:

How is this commandment broken?

- By claiming God agrees to something that is evil (e.g., taking an oath in God’s Name which you never intend to honor)
- By attempting to control God by chanting His Name (e.g., believing that speaking the Name has some magical power)
- By making the Name common as any other word (e.g., using God’s name as “filler” in prayer or speech, or using it as a thoughtless explicative.)
- By using the Name in a vulgar way (e.g., cursing, lewd or base speech)

How is this commandment honored?

- By using God’s name in a manner which proves that I fear and love Him. (e.g., in praise of His character, in honoring His ways and thoughts)
- By taking seriously the times I call upon God as a witness.

“[this commandment] does not condemn those who fail to believe; it condemns those who believe and do nothing about it.... What is dangerous is not intellectual atheism, which is unpopular, but mild religion, which is very popular indeed.... The real enemy is not irreligion but vague religiosity.” (E. Trueblood)

**4.** *“Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of ADONAI your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. For in six days ADONAI made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore ADONAI blessed the sabbath day and made it holy.*

The first imperative in this fourth Word is the command to “remember” (זָכוֹר, *zāchôr*). Too often people misunderstand the Hebraic concept of “remember,” taking it simply to mean to “think about” or “to recall to one’s mind.” But we should first consider that the text under investigation is a covenant text. When covenant texts from the Ancient Near East are studied, we find the word “remember” used in a technical sense, meaning “to act in loyalty to the covenant.” Conversely, “to forget” is used in covenant contexts to denote “disloyalty to or rebellion against the covenant.”

In this light, note for instance Ex 2:24: “So God heard their groaning; and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” This does not mean that God had forgotten the covenant for a time and then suddenly recalled it when He heard the groaning of the Israelites! Rather, the meaning is that God acted in faithfulness to the covenant He had made with the patriarchs, the result being that He acted on behalf of His people and delivered them from the slavery of Egypt.

Let us consider, then, the use of the word “remember” as the opening command in this, the fourth Word. To “remember” the Sabbath means to guard and keep it as the sign of the covenant God has made with Israel and thus with all who join themselves to the covenant people through faith in God and His Messiah, Yeshua.

Moreover, the Shabbat is not a day given to mark Jewish identity but the day that functions as the sign of the covenant God enacted with His people at Sinai.

So the sons of Israel shall observe the sabbath, to celebrate the sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between Me and the sons of Israel forever; for in six days ADONAI made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day He ceased from labor, and was refreshed. (Ex 31:16–17)

As we know, a mixed multitude stood at Sinai to receive the covenant

(Ex 12:38), so the Sinai covenant as a whole, revealed in its fulness in the Torah, was not given to establish Jewish identity either. In fact, the Sinai covenant is partner with the earlier Abrahamic covenant as the vehicle by which the promise made to Abraham would be realized: “in you all the families of the earth will be blessed” (Gen 12:3, cf. 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14). This promise, referred to as “the Gospel” by Paul (Gal 3:8), was central in David’s mind when, having been given the eternal covenant of kingship he exclaimed, “and this is the Torah for mankind” (2Sam 7:19, Hebrew). David understood that it was through the covenant promise of his unending dynasty that the Torah would come to all of the families of the earth, for Yeshua is the final and ultimate King in David’s royal dynasty (Acts 2:30–31), and He proclaimed that He came to establish the Torah, not to abolish it (Matt 5:17–21). This is why Yeshua stated regarding the Shabbat, the sign of the covenant, that “the Shabbat was made for mankind” (Mk 2:27). He does not say the Shabbat was made for the Jews.

Therefore, the idea that this fourth Word pertains only to Jewish people finds no basis in the Scriptures themselves. On the contrary, the Shabbat remains a sign of the covenant in which all the believing remnant are members, whether Jewish or non-Jewish. What is more, as Isaiah writes, God promises blessings upon those who honor God by keeping the Sabbath.

For thus says ADONAI, “To the eunuchs who keep My sabbaths, And choose what pleases Me, and hold fast My covenant, to them I will give in My house and within My walls a memorial, and a name better than that of sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name which will not be cut off. Also the foreigners who join themselves to ADONAI, to minister to Him, and to love the name of ADONAI, to be His servants, every one who keeps from profaning the sabbath and holds fast My covenant; even those I will bring to My holy mountain and make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be acceptable on My altar; for My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples.” (Is 56:4–7)

In Summary:

How is this command broken?

- by treating the Shabbat (seventh day of the week) as the same as the other six days of work, i.e., by continuing one’s normal work on the Shabbat.

- by deliberately causing others to work for me on the Shabbat so that I gain monetarily by their labors.
- by failing to use the Shabbat as a time of rest in which I am afforded time to gather with other believers, worship God in the context of community, and openly honor God for all of His kindness and mercy to me in Yeshua. The Sabbath is called a “*mikra kodesh*,” a “holy gathering” in Lev 23:2-3. As disciples of Yeshua, we should follow His example of gathering with others on the Shabbat: “And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read.” (Lk 4:16)
- by engaging in commercial enterprise on the Shabbat (buying and selling, cf. Jer 17:19–27; Neh 13:19–22).
- by failing to work during the other six days of the week so that I can cease my labors on the Shabbat.

How is this command honored?

- by stopping my normal daily work and using the Shabbat as a day to gather with other believers in order to:
  - share the Scriptures and pray together
  - to worship God for all of His blessings in Yeshua and the work of His Ruach HaKodesh
  - to encourage and lift up each other by bearing each other’s burdens and thus fulfilling the Torah of Messiah (Gal 6:2)
- by living according to God’s calendar, and thus preparing for the Shabbat so that I am able to keep it. This means preparing for and observing all of the Shabbats (both the weekly as well as the festival Shabbats).
- by refusing to be lazy and instead, regularly working six days each week to provide for my own needs and for the needs of others (my family; the poor; etc., cf. 1Tim 5:8; Eph 4:28).
- by recognizing that the primary lesson of Shabbat is to teach me about the eternal rest which I have in Messiah, and my need to rest in His finished work.

A Final Thought:

Yeshua gave us a very important lesson about Shabbat, which is recorded in Matt 12:11–12.

And He said to them, "What man is there among you who has a sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable then is a man than a sheep! So then, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." (Matt 12:11–12)

We should remember that throughout the centuries, rabbinic Judaism has added a myriad of laws to the observance of Shabbat, laws which greatly expanded the simple, straightforward commandments given in the fourth Word. These man-made laws are not one-and-the-same with God's Torah, and should therefore not be forced upon the conscience of anyone. While some may choose to follow such rabbinic traditions, and may find value in them, they are not to be given equal authority with the Torah itself. Thus, there may be times on Shabbat where, following the teaching of Yeshua, we would engage in an activity on Shabbat which rabbinic Judaism would forbid.

Likewise, as followers of Yeshua, we should take seriously His statement that "it is lawful to do good on the Shabbat." We must use wisdom in this, but there may be times when aiding a fellow believer in his or her need, and doing so on the Shabbat, may take precedence over our normal Shabbat activities. Further, this may apply particularly to those whose occupation involves the saving of life (fire fighters, police officers, doctors, nurses, EMTs, etc.). For Yeshua, using a *qal v'chomer* (a fortiori) argument, reasons that if it is lawful to care for the life of one's animal on Shabbat, then most certainly it is lawful to care for the life of another person. For mankind, not the animals, are bearers of God's image and therefore people have even greater value than animals. Thus, for those whose work involves saving human life, doing so on the Shabbat would clearly be lawful and necessary.

**5.** *"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which ADONAI your God gives you."*

The commandment contained in this fifth Word is "to honor" (כָּבֵד, *kaveid*), which has the sense of "putting one's praise or honor upon someone," to "weigh them down with praise." (The basic sense of the verb *kaveid* is "to be heavy.")

Perhaps the first question we must ask when considering how to obey this fifth Word is: "Who are my parents?" As the family

unit in our society continues to break down, an increasing number of children maintain relationships with not only birth parents, but also with step-parents, foster parents, or live-in partners. How does this commandment apply in these cases?

Even in those situations which are far less than the norm as God has ordained for the family, we must foster a spirit of submission and respect. We must learn to confront what is wrong with an attitude that maintains a respect for what is right. How sorrowful it is that many children in our society grow up in an environment which is patently immoral. The sin of our society may make it nearly impossible for some children to ever honor their “parents,” for all they have every seen are parents who seem to be entirely without honor.

The terms used in the 5th Word, אב (‘*av*) “father” and אם (‘*im*) “mother,” are broader in scope than the English words imply. “Father” in the Hebrew may refer to one’s actual father, or to any male blood relative. The same word may refer to one in authority, as a king (1 Sa 24:11) or a teacher (cf. 2Ki 2:12). “Mother” may stand likewise for any female in authority (Judges 5:7). This being the case, “father and mother” in our text should be understood to refer to those who have primary authority over us as children. Thus, honoring father and mother extends to step-parents or foster parents, or to others who complete the role of a parent.

For orphans and those who have been adopted, this commandment is fulfilled by honoring those who function in a parental role. If, at some stage, it is deemed wise to initiate a relationship with birth parents who were previously unknown, such a relationship ought also to be characterized as giving honor as much as possible. The overarching principle in this fifth Word is that we honor parents and those who fulfill a parental role in our lives because they are, by God’s good providence, those He has placed over us.

A second, and more difficult question, is how children are to honor parents who, in general, have lived lives of dishonor. The first thing to establish is that it is by God’s hand of providence that we were born to our parents. Thus, honoring our parents is first and foremost a conscious desire to honor God.

Second, we may honor our parents even if they appear to be dishonorable, by not engaging in gossip against them. The natural tendency is to tell others of our parents’ faults and to diminish them in the eyes of our friends and acquaintances. But this is *lashon hara’* (evil speech) and is something God hates (Prov 6:16–

17). Honoring our parents mean keeping ourselves from speaking evil against them to others. Further, we honor parents whose lives are less than honorable by respecting the fact that God has placed them in authority over us. If they ask of us that which is contrary to God's ways, then we should first appeal to them for a different outcome, and if such is not forthcoming, then we should decline but do so in a respectful manner. Whatever the case, we should seek as much as possible to submit to their authority in all matters which do not violate the clear teaching of God's word. In doing so, we would hope to show them the ways of God and in so doing, to open their eyes and hearts to the Gospel.

A third consideration on the fifth Word is that, by logical extension, it also applies to parents. That is, we are to help others obey God, not put barriers in their way from walking as God has instructed. Thus, for parents to make it difficult for their children to honor them is contrary to the Ten Words. Paul hints at this when he writes: "Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart. " (Col 3:21). Therefore, this fifth Word of the Ten is directed toward parents as well as children. Parents must seek to live in an honorable fashion so as to make it easy for their children to obey this commandment.

In Summary:

How is this fifth Word broken?

- By failing to give your parents the honor they deserve as God's appointed source of life and authority. (i.e., if parents are viewed as God's servants, to despise the servant is to equally despise the one who sends the servant.)
- By acting as a tyrant toward your children and failing to live in a manner which fosters their respect. (To the extent that parents fail to honor God they make it equally difficult for their children to obey this commandment.)
- By giving into the natural tendencies to rebel. (i.e., a submissive spirit is an essential element in honoring those whom God has placed as authorities over us.)

How is this fifth Word honored?

- By first submitting to God, and as a result, honoring the authorities He appoints over us. (We must view our responsibility to honor parents as a means of honoring God.)

- By establishing godly integrity and compassion in our lives so as to gain the respect of our children. (As our children see us honoring those in authority over us, and living out integrity with compassion, honoring us as their parents will be a far easier duty.)

## 6. “You shall not murder.”

Since the King James Version (KJV) became the authorized English translation within the Protestant Church for nearly 450 years, it is understandable why its translation has greatly affected Christian theology. And this influence is seen in the manner in which the sixth Word has been interpreted by some denominations within the wider Christian Church.

The KJV translates the sixth Word as: “Thou shalt not kill.” Given this translation, one understands why some took this Word of the Ten to require a complete passivism—no taking of human life whatsoever, regardless of the situation.

But the KJV, in this instance, is a very poor translation. The Hebrew word used in the sixth Word is not the word usually translated “to kill” (הָרַג, *harag*). The word used here is רָצַח, *ratzach*, “to wrongly take a person’s life.” Some have taught that this particular word describes premeditated murder, but this conclusion cannot be sustained. Numbers 35, which deals with the “cities of refuge,” employs the word in connection with the “man-slayer,” someone who accidentally kills another person (defined as “manslaughter” in our times). In this context, the killing of an individual is clearly accidental and therefore the one who committed manslaughter is given refuge in one of the designated cities. The fact that our word *ratzach* is used in this context shows that it cannot be narrowed to mean “premeditated murder.” Yet the word itself is much narrower in its scope than the broader and more inclusive term *harag* (“to kill”). This narrower meaning emphasizes the unwarranted taking of a person’s life. Thus, the death penalty, clearly prescribed in Gen 9:6, is not controverted by the sixth Word, nor does the taking of life in self-defense run counter to its meaning.

As in all of the Ten Words, even those which are cast in a “you shall not” form, there is both a positive and negative aspect to each, and the same is true for the sixth Word. Thus, helping to prevent

murder is likewise enjoined upon us by this commandment. This means that to stand by idly and do nothing when we see someone's life in danger is to disregard and break the sixth Word. This obviously applies to murder by abortion and all other situations in which defenseless children are at risk of losing their lives. In obedience to this Word, we must do all in our power to preserve life and rescue those who are in danger of being murdered.

Finally, we guard ourselves against breaking this commandment by keeping our hearts from bitterness and anger which leads to hatred. Yeshua taught us that hating one's neighbor is like murder (Matt 5:21–22), for hatred may in fact lead to murder, even as Cain became angry against his brother Abel and sought to kill him (Gen 4:5–8).

In Summary:

How is the sixth Word broken?

- By taking a person's life unjustly (murder is an attribute of Satan [Jn 8:44] and characteristic of fallen mankind's disposition [Cain murdered Abel]).
- By taking one's own life (Suicide is as much or more a disregard for the value of God's image than is homicide.)
- By failing to carefully protect life (if failing to protect the unborn child is wrong, how much more the brutal taking of his or her life! Cf. Ex 21:22ff)
- By allowing the sin of hatred in our lives. (Hatred is displayed by slander, gossip, character defamation, or abuse, and often is the first step in the course of murder.)

How can the sixth Word be honored?

- By growing in our ability to love others
- By doing all in our power to protect life
- By loving and promoting justice

## 7. *"You shall not commit adultery."*

Once again, we must define our terms, and so the first question to be answered is "What is the biblical definition of adultery?"

Two words in the Tanach generally represent the idea of "immorality." One is זָנָה, *zanah*, usually translated "to commit fornication" or "to be a harlot." The Greek word which usually translates Hebrew *zanah* is πορνεία, *porneia*, from which we derive the English word "pornography."

The second word is the one in our text, נָאֹף, *na'af*, usually translated “to commit adultery.” The Greek word which usually translates this Hebrew term is μοιχεία, *moicheia*.

*Zanah/porneia* is the broader term, encompassing all illicit sexual activity. *Na'af /moicheia* is a subset of *zanah/porneia*, narrowing the definition to the meaning “marital infidelity.” The Biblical text, however, does not necessarily keep such a fine distinction. *Zanah* and *na'af* are often used together to describe sexual sin in general, and when they are so used, they form a literary unit, shading their individual distinctions. They are likewise used metaphorically of spiritual infidelity, especially in the prophets’ judgment of the nation of Israel (Cf. Is 57:3; Jer 3:1-3; 13:27; Hos 2:2).

While a case can be made that *na'af* in the Ten Words refers specifically to marital infidelity, many scholars have seen in the word a broader prohibition of all illicit sexual activity.

Walking in the truth of the seventh Word means both to abstain from sexual sin as well as to guard oneself from that which would lead to such transgressions. This means that we must guard our eyes, ears, and thoughts so as not to be inundated with the immorality of our era and culture. This also means that we must fill our heart or minds with that which is righteous, and particularly with the word of God, so that we will be strong to withstand the *zeitgeist* (spirit of the time).

For those who are married, we honor this seventh Word by carefully and continually strengthening our love and care for our spouse. This means practicing the biblical doctrine of forgiving and not allowing disagreements and offenses to become deeply rooted within our marriage. For single adults, honoring this Word means guarding one’s heart in all relationships with the opposite sex and not allowing emotions or fleshly desires to override what we know is God’s will.

Finally, Yeshua makes it clear that divorcing one’s spouse may cause them to commit adultery by marrying another person. The only exception to this is when the divorce results from one of the spouses committing fornication or when an unbelieving spouse abandons a believing spouse. Thus, divorce may often lead to breaking this seventh Word.

## In Summary:

How is the seventh Word broken?

- By engaging in sexual relations with someone other than your spouse. (Such a sin begins inwardly as a sin of the mind and heart.)
- By causing someone else to commit adultery (Divorce may have this consequence, cf. Matt 5:32.)
- By allowing immorality to become an accepted thing in home and society. (Note Yeshua's warning against lust, Matt 5:27-28)

How is the seventh Word honored?

- By agreeing with God that marriage is honorable (of high importance in God's community are wedding ceremonies, celebration of wedding anniversaries, and vibrant marriages)
- By actively guarding against the flood of immorality which flows in our society (pornography, sexually explicit lyrics, sexually oriented media, immodest fashions, homosexuality, etc. must be opposed by God's people)
- By engaging in godly discipline of mind and heart (We inevitably become like that at which we most often gaze.)

## 8. *"You shall not steal."*

The eighth Word is predicated upon a general Torah axiom, which is that private ownership of real and tangible property is a God-given right. As far as the individual is concerned, he or she must treat all possessions as still belonging to God, and given to the individual for their use, but since God has given all things, it becomes the responsibility of the one to whom He has given, to be a faithful guardian and steward of the property. Moreover, that which is owned is to be used for the glory of God, and the owner is responsible to make this a reality.

Indeed, all civilized societies are based upon this foundational principle, that individuals within the society have the right to exclusive ownership of private property. Any individual or collective, including a government, which seeks to uproot this basic right, is in violation of the eighth Word.

Moreover, theft is wrong because of the fact that God owns everything.

The earth is ADONAI'S, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it. (Ps 24:1)

The heavens are Yours, the earth also is Yours; the world and all it contains, You have founded them. (Ps 89:11)

Therefore, to take something that He has not given is, as it were, to steal from Him. In the same manner, to acquire property of any sort in an illegal fashion is theft. Thus, to purchase something that one knows is stolen is in violation of the eighth Word. Likewise, failing or refusing to attempt to find the owner of lost property and instead, taking it unto oneself, is theft and violates this Word.

In a positive vein, then, to uphold this eighth Word requires that we seek to find the rightful owner of any item we may find or happen upon. Further, we should make every effort to make certain that items we buy are being sold by their rightful owner. And we should do all in our power to prevent theft. If we see a theft in progress, we should alert the proper authorities in hopes of apprehending the thief.

A guard against breaking this commandment contained in the eighth Word is to guard our hearts against covetousness. Covetousness, the inappropriate desire for property of whatever sort, can lead to theft. And the antidote against covetousness is learning to be content and thankful for what God has provided. In this regard, note Prov 30:8–9,

Keep deception and lies far from me, give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is my portion, that I not be full and deny You and say, "Who is ADONAI?" Or that I not be in want and steal, and profane the name of my God. (Prov 30:8–9)

To this we may also highlight the exhortation of Paul:

He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need. (Eph 4:28)

We may derive from Paul's words that stealing is a double crime, for it not only transgresses the eighth Word specifically, but also negates the entire second half of the Ten Words which are summed up in "love your neighbor as yourself."

Finally, theft may also occur in a non-physical realm. For

instance, to withhold honor from someone to whom honor is due is to rob them of what is rightfully theirs. Likewise, to withdraw our support for someone we have promised to support is also a type of theft.

In Summary:

How is the eighth Word broken?

- By claiming ownership of something which rightfully belongs to someone else. (The value of the object is of no matter. When something is found, it still has a rightful owner, and this command is broken when no attempt is made to find the owner.)
- By failing to give to someone what they rightfully deserve. (Stealing may apply to the non-physical realm as well as the physical. We may rob others of honor, support, sustenance, etc.)
- By failing to protect what rightfully belongs to my neighbor (Failing to warn one's neighbor of possible theft, or refusing to help identify a thief, or neglecting to do all in one's power to prevent theft—any of these may be classed as theft and break the eighth Word.)

How is the eighth Word honored?

- By carefully guarding the ownership rights of each other. (Doing all in our power to help guard our neighbor from being robbed and doing all we can to return found items to their rightful owner.)
- By learning to be content with what God has given us (stealing begins with a spirit of discontentment, that is, not being satisfied with the portions God has allotted to us.)

## 9. *"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor."*

The Hebrew that lies behind this English translation is: לֹא-תִעֲנֶה לְאִתְּנֶךָ, literally "You shall not answer against your neighbor a lying testimony." The meaning is obvious: when called upon to be a witness of an event, one is prohibited by the ninth Word to construct a lie and present it as what is true. Leviticus 19:11 may have the same situation in mind: "You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor

lie to one another.”

It is interesting that the term “neighbor” (רֵי, *rei-a’*) is used here rather than “brother” (אָח, *’ach*). If “brother” had been used, then this commandment would have possibly been narrowed to one’s clan or family. Indeed, there are instances where “brother” and “neighbor” are clearly delineated in respect to various laws (cf. Deut 15:2, 3). But the use of the word *rei-a’* suggests that this commandment was intended to encompass one’s relationship with any person, regardless of whether or not that person was a part of one’s family or clan. “Neighbor,” then, could be understood as “fellow-man”—as anyone who, created in God’s image, bears the marks of his or her Creator. Thus, to “love one’s neighbor as oneself” is to treat all human beings with the respect that their image-bearing deserves. To demean another person on the grounds that he or she is not part of a certain clan or race is thus to fly in the face of God Who has given us this Word to obey.

While this Word seems to primarily to envision the situation where a person has been summoned to give witness before judges, it also encompasses giving a false witness in general. Thus, it prohibits gossip or *lashon hara’* in which a person’s reputation is damaged by spreading lies or unfounded accusations.

In the same vein, we can fail to uphold this commandment by remaining silent when we hear a falsehood being spread, or a false witness being given. If we have the ability to correct a false report or witness, we are obligated to do so. Once again, this comes under the broad heading of loving one’s neighbor as oneself (Lev 19:18).

In Summary:

How is the ninth Word broken?

- By lying or failing to tell the truth in a court of law. (A society unable to uphold justice is doomed to failure.)
- By damaging another person’s reputation through unconfirmed reports and evil gossip. (We should engage in conversations about the failings of others only when we are sure the information is true and we are actively involved in helping bring a godly solution to the problem).
- By remaining silent when we know a falsehood is being spread. (Failing to correct a false witness when we are able to do so is equal to giving a false witness.)

How is the ninth Word honored?

- By a firm commitment to speak the truth. (This involves both expressing what we know to be true, and shunning false pretenses.)
- By actively guarding the reputation of others. (The damage done by false accusations is often irreparable.)

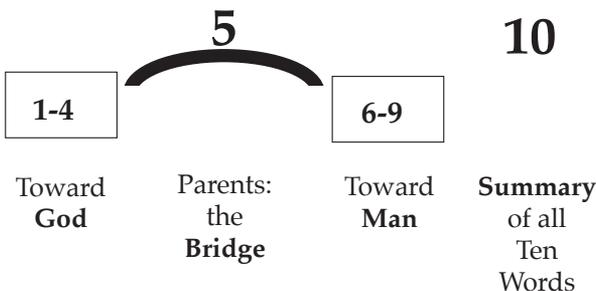
**10.** “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”

What is the definition of the word “covet”? The Hebrew verb for “covet” is **חָמַד**, *chamad*, and has a basic meaning of “desire,” or “take pleasure in.” It is used in a good sense, as in the desirability of the Torah being more than fine gold (Ps 19:11; cp. Is 53:3; Ps 39:12). It is, however, often used of an evil desire, of an inordinate and ungoverned, selfish desire. The word is also found in connection with idolatry (cf. Is 1:29; 44:9; Prov 1:22) in the sense of people delighting to worship false gods.

The Greek word underlying the concept of “covet” is *ἐπιθυμέω*, *epi-thumeō*, which follows the same basic pattern of the Hebrew term, meaning “to desire, long for, lust after, covet”

Coveting, then, begins with the desire of the heart but comes to fruition when this desire remains unchecked. Such undisciplined desire inevitably leads to an evil longing for things or position without a humble submission to the will of God in one’s life. In a very real way, the sin of coveting is at the root of all other sin.

In this light, we may now see the overall structure of the Ten Words in this way:



How is the tenth Word broken?

- By allowing uncontrolled desires for things, position, or pleasure to dwell in our hearts. (There is nothing wrong in seeking the best. This commandment is broken when desire controls rather than being controlled. We must strive to desire God's will, and only when this is a reality will we find lasting satisfaction in life.)
- By failing to be satisfied with God's provision. (Are those things which please God my greatest desire and joy?)

How is this commandment honored?

- By fostering genuine thankfulness. (The antidote to covetousness is contentment. And, being truly thankful is the path to contentment.)
- By learning the spiritual discipline of controlling one's thoughts and intentions.

Contentment is wanting what you already have!" The primary issue may be in honestly assessing the value of what you already have!

"Woe to those who scheme iniquity, who work out evil on their beds! When morning comes, they do it. For it is in the power of their hands. They covet fields and then seize them, and houses, and take them away. They rob a man and his house, a man and his inheritance." Mic 2:1,2

"But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust (ἐπιθυμία, the same root word used for "covetousness"). Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death." James 1:14-15

"Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life." Prov 4:23

"For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart." Heb 4:12

## The Ten Words & the New Covenant

Behold, days are coming, declares ADONAI, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them, declares ADONAI.

But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares ADONAI, I will put My torah within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. And they shall not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know ADONAI,' for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, declares ADONAI, for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.

Jeremiah 31:31-34

The characteristic of those who are part of the New Covenant is that they keep the Torah, for it has been written on their hearts.

- 1** I am ADONAI your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.
- 2** You shall have no other gods before Me  
You shall not make for yourself an idol . . .
- 3** You shall not take the name of ADONAI your God in vain . . .
- 4** Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. . .
- 5** Honor your father and your mother . . .
- 6** You shall not murder.
- 7** You shall not commit adultery.
- 8** You shall not steal.
- 9** You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
- 10** You shall not covet . . .