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THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

In the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) the Decalogue is uniformly referred to as “the ten words” (Ex. 34:28; Deut. 4:13; 10:4), or simply as “the words” spoken by Jehovah (Ex. 20:1; 34:27; Deut. 5:22; 10:2), or as “the words of the covenant” (Ex. 34:28). In the New Testament they are called “commandments” (Matt. 19:17; Eph. 6:2), as in most Christian lands.

The “ten words” were spoken by Jehovah to the people whom He had recently delivered from Egypt bondage, and they led out into the wilderness, that He might teach them His laws. It was to Israel that the Decalogue was primarily addressed, and not to all mankind. Thus the reason assigned for keeping the 5th commandment applies to the people who were on their way to the land that had been given to Abraham and his descendants (Ex. 20:12); to the servitude in Egypt (Deut. 5:15). It is possible, then, that even in the Ten Commandments there are elements peculiar to the Mosaic system and which our Lord and His apostles may not make a part of faith and duty for Christians.

Of the “ten words,” seven were perhaps binding on the consciences of enlightened men prior to the days of Moses: murder, adultery, theft and false witness were already treated as crimes among the Babylonians and the Egyptians; and intelligent men knew that it was wrong to dishonor God by improper use of His name, or to show lack of respect to parents, or to covet the property of another. No doubt the sharp, ringing words in which these evils are forbidden in the Ten Commandments gave to Israel a clearer apprehension of the sins referred to than they had ever had before; and the manner in which they were grouped by the Divine speaker brought into bold relief the chief elements of the moral law. But the first two prohibitions were novelties in the religious life of the world; for men worshipped many gods, and bowed down to images of every conceivable kind. The 2nd commandment was too high even for Israel to grasp at that early day; a few weeks later the people were dancing about the golden calf at the foot of Sinai. The observance of the Sabbath was probably unknown to other nations, though it may have been already known in the family of Abraham.

The “ten words” were spoken by Jehovah Himself from the top of the mount under the most awe-inspiring circumstances. In the early morning there was thunder and lightning and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of an exceedingly loud trumpet. It is no wonder that the people trembled as they faced the smoking and quaking mount, and listened to the high demands of a holy God. Their request that all future revelations should be made through Moses as the prophet mediator was natural. The promulgation of the Ten Commandments stands out as the most notable event in all the wilderness sojourn of Israel. There was no greater day in history before the coming of the Son of God into the world.

After a sojourn of 40 days in the mount, Moses came down with “the two tables of the testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God.” At the foot of the mount, when Moses saw the golden calf and the dancing throng, he cast the tables out of his hands and broke them in pieces (Ex. 31:18; 32:15-20). Through the intercession of Moses, the wrath of Jehovah was averted from Israel; and Jehovah invited Moses to ascend the mount with two new tablets, on which He would write the words that were on the first tablets, which were broken. Moses was commanded to write the special precepts given by God during this interview; but the Ten Commandments were written on the stone tablets by Jehovah Himself (Ex. 34:1 - 4:27-29; Deut. 10:1-5). These precious tablets were later deposited in the Ark of the Covenant (Ex. 40:20). Thus in every way possible the Ten Commandments are exalted as the most precious and directly Divine of all the precepts of the Mosaic revelation (I.S.B.E.).

Spelling G-d with a hyphen

Many orthodox Jewish believers in the Messiah Yeshua adhere to the custom of traditional Judaism which forbids speaking or completely writing the proper name of G-d (sometimes translated as Jehovah in English) in order to ensure that it is not desecrated. We greatly respect those who honor Jehovah in this way, and, even though we do not follow this practice, it is certainly not our purpose or intention to offend by using the Father’s Holy Name without the hyphen.



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