BIBLE

The Ten Commandments

The division and structure has been open to interpretation throughout history.

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The division of the commandments themselves is not at all certain. There are 13 sentences in the accepted Jewish version of the Ten Commandments (17 in the Christian), but it is difficult to ascertain with certainty from the text itself what comprises the first commandment, the second, and so forth. For while there are 13 *mitzvot* [commandments] to be found in the text, their allocation to the Ten Commandments can be done in a variety of ways. Thus there are different traditions.

The Commandments (in Jewish Tradition)

First Commandment (Exodus 20:2)

I am the Lord Your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

Second Commandment (Exodus 20:3-6)

You shall have no other gods beside Me. You shall not make for yourself any graven image, nor any manner of likeness, of any thing that is heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them, nor serve them, for I, the Lord Your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation.

Third Commandment (Exodus 20:7)

You shall not take the name of the Lord Your God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that takes His name in vain.

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Fourth Commandment (Exodus 20:8-11)

Remember the Sabbath, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work; but the seventh day is a Sabbath unto the Lord Your God, in it you shall not do any manner of work, you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your man-servant, nor your maid-servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger that is within your gates; for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested on the seventh day. Wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and made it holy.

Fifth Commandment (Exodus 20:12)

Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord God gives you.

Sixth Commandment (Exodus 20:13)

You shall not murder.

Seventh Commandment (Exodus 20:13)

You shall not commit adultery.

Eighth Commandment (Exodus 20:13)

You shall not steal.

Ninth Commandment (Exodus 20:13)

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

Tenth Commandment (Exodus 20:14)

You shall not covet your neighbor's house, nor his wife, his man-servant, his maid-servant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is your neighbor's.

Non-Jewish Ordering of the Commandments

The above are the Jewish division of the Ten Commandments. However, such writers as [the ancient philosopher] Philo, as well as the Jewish Publication Society's translation of the Bible, the Greek Church Fathers, and most Protestant churches (except the Lutherans), consider the first of the Ten Commandments to be, "I am the Lord Your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me" (verses 2 and 3). That is to say, God's very existence and God's relation to Israel in addition to the prohibition of worshiping other gods are seen as belonging together, while the prohibition of idolatry forms the second commandment.

Yet another division is used in the Roman Catholic and Lutheran churches. This follows the written text of Torah scrolls and combines verses 2 through 6 into one commandment; that is, it includes the prohibitions of idolatry in the first commandment. And further, it divides the last phrase (verse 14 in Jewish, verse 17 in Christian versions) into two parts:

Ninth Commandment: "You shall not covet your neighbor's house..."

Tenth Commandment: "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife..."

The Structure of the Ten Commandments

A dual structure can be seen in the Ten Commandments. Commandments one through four deal with human relationships to God. Commandments six through 10 deal with humanity's relation to humanity. The fifth commandment, that of honoring one's parents, forms a sort of bridge between the two.

While the Bible itself provides no indication of how the "words" of the commandments were distributed on the actual stone tablets, it is generally assumed that they stood five on one tablet and five on the other. Some commentators *(Mekhilta, Yitro* 8) have seen a correlation between the five commandments opposite each other on each of the two tablets. So, for example, murder is an injury to God whose image man is, apostasy is equivalent to marital infidelity, stealing will lead to a false oath, the Sabbath violator attests falsely that God did not create the world in six days and rest on the seventh, and the person who covets his fellow person's wife will end by fathering a child who rejects his true parent and honors another.

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Some commentators speculate that the commandments range in a descending order from Divine matters to human matters, and within each group from higher to lower values. In this scenario, duties to God come first, the obligation to worship God alone precedes that of treating His name with reverence, and both precede the symbolic piety of Sabbath rest. Respect for parental authority naturally follows respect for God. The purely ethical commandments are arranged in a hierarchal form: life, the family, right of possession, reliability of public statements. The last commandment, the ban in desires arising from jealousy, deals with what is most ethically sensitive, and protects against the infringing of the other ethical commandments.

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The philosopher Abraham ben Chiyya, after placing the first commandment apart as comprising all the others, divided the other nine according to the commandments of thought, speech, and action, and according to relations between human and God, human and his family, and human and human, reaching the following classification:

Relations between:	Man & God	Human & Family	Human & Human
Thought	Second Command: "Thou shalt have no other God"– fear of God.	Fifth Command: "Honor thy father and thy mother."	Tenth Command: "Thou shalt not covet."
Speech	Third Command: "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord in vain."	Sixth Command: "Thou shalt not murder," especially one's family.	Ninth Command: "Thou shalt not bear false witness."
Action	Fourth Command: "Remember the Sabbath Day."	Seventh Command: "Thou shalt not commit adultery."	Eighth Command: "Thou shalt not steal."

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