

The Ten *Commandments*?

Introduction

From traditional Christianity, to Judaism, to “Sacred-namers,” to other Messianic believers, all can typically agree on one thing – we are to obey what are commonly called the “Ten Commandments.” It is not within the scope of this study to show how traditional Christians do not, in most cases, obey the fourth “commandment” regarding the Sabbath. The intent of this study is to evaluate the common understanding of the “Ten Commandments” and determine whether it is correct. If the foundation upon which this understanding about the “Ten Commandments” is incorrect then the entire building built upon that foundation is compromised. Does the current understanding stand up against the truth of the scriptures?

Commandments or Words?

As in all studies of the scriptures it is vitally important for us to carefully evaluate the words in question. A question needs to be asked, “Does the phrase ‘Ten Commandments’ actually appear in the scriptures? Most would quote the following passage.

Exodus 34:28 (NASB) – “So he was there with יהוה forty days and forty nights; he did not eat bread or drink water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.”

There it is! The “Ten Commandments” are indeed in the scriptures! Or are they? Let’s take a closer look. In Hebrew the phrase “the Ten Commandments” is עֲשֻׁרוֹת הַדְּבָרִים *aseret hadevarim*. עֲשֻׁרֶת *aseret* is the Hebrew word for the cardinal number ten (10). So, there are definitely no issues with that word. However, דְּבָרִים *devarim* is not the Hebrew word for “commandments.” The word דְּבָרִים is the plural of דָּבָר *davar*, which means “word(s), speech, discourse.”¹ So, literally rendered the phrase עֲשֻׁרוֹת הַדְּבָרִים should be translated as “the Ten Words” not “the Ten Commandments.”

¹ Gesenius, Wilhelm. “Entry for דָּבָר.” *Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures*. London, UK: Samuel Bagster & Sons, Limited, exact publication date unknown.

There is a word in Hebrew that does mean “command, or precept.”² That Hebrew word is **מִצְוָה** *mitswah* (plural **מִצְוֹת** *mitswot*). So if Moses had intended to write something that would accurately translate to “the Ten Commandments” he would have written **עֲשֶׂרֶת הַמִּצְוֹת** *aseret hamitswot*. But that is not what he was inspired to write.

Significance

So, the big questions on everyone’s lips are, “So what? Who cares if it is really ‘words’ instead of ‘commandments’?” The significance lies in the interpretation and understanding of several passages in the New Testament that apply to the word “commandment(s).” Here are some of those scriptures.

Matthew 5:17-19 (LITV) – “Do not think that I came to annul the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to annul, but to fulfill. {18} Truly I say to you, Until the heaven and the earth pass away, in no way shall one iota or one point pass away from the Law until all comes to pass. {19} Therefore, whoever relaxes one of these commandments, the least, and shall teach men so, he shall be called least in the kingdom of Heaven. But whoever does and teaches *them*, this one shall be called great in the kingdom of Heaven.”

Matthew 19:17 (LITV) – “And he said to him, ‘Why do you call me good? No one *is* good except One, Elohim! But if you desire to enter into life, keep the commandments.’”

1 John 3:22-24 (LITV) – “And whatever we ask, we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments, and we do the things pleasing before Him. {23} And this is His commandment, that we should believe the name of His Son, Yeshua Messiah, and love one another, even as He gave command to us. {24} And the *one* keeping His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit which He gave to us.”

1 John 5:2-3 (LITV) – “By this we know that we love the children of Elohim: when we love Elohim and keep His commandments. {3} For this is the love of Elohim, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not heavy.”

All of the verses above speak of the importance of obeying the “commandments.” Most followers of Messiah, traditional Christians or otherwise believe that these “commandments” speak only of the “Ten Commandments,” but this is a misguided belief. As we just established above the phrase “the Ten Commandments” occurs nowhere in the scriptures. Everywhere the

² Gesenius, Wilhelm. “Entry for **מִצְוָה**.” Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures. London, UK: Samuel Bagster & Sons, Limited, exact publication date unknown.

translators chose to use the phrase “the Ten Commandments” the Hebrew actually reads “the Ten Words.”

What this tells us is that the word “commandment(s)” as it is used in the New Testament passages above is much more expansive and inclusive than just the Ten Words that Moses received on the mountain. So the next thing that needs to be established is exactly what is meant by the word “commandment(s)” scripturally. The underlined words in the verses below are those that are translated from the Hebrew מִצְוָה *mitswah*.

Genesis 26:5 – “Because Avraham obeyed My voice and guarded My charge, My commandments, My laws, and My teachings.”

Abraham obeyed the commandments of יהוה before they were even given on Mount Sinai. How is this possible if the word “commandments” only refers to the Ten Words?

Leviticus 27:34 – “These *are* the commandments which commanded Mosheh unto the sons of Yisrael at Mount Sinai.”

This passage, whether it is referring to the entire book of Leviticus being the last verse in the book, or only the verses in that chapter, clearly expand the meaning of the word “commandments.”³

Deuteronomy 27:10 – “You will obey the voice of יהוה your Elohim and do His commandments and His laws, which I *am* commanding you this day.”

Just like the Leviticus 27:34 passage above this passage is either an all-encompassing one including every command that Moses gave the children of Israel that day, or one simply limited to the context. Whichever one is being spoken of it is clear that “commandments” includes much more than just the Ten Words.

Psalms 119:151 – “You *are* near, יהוה, and all Your commandments *are* truth.”

If, as is shown in the scriptures above, the word “commandments” is all-encompassing when speaking of the commands of יהוה to His children that means that every single one of them is truth. We as His children should diligently seek and obey the truth.

This correct understanding of the word “commandments” shows us that Yeshua and the apostle John, amongst others, were exhorting us to obey all of יהוה’s commands, not just the Ten Words. These commands would then include the food laws in Leviticus 11, the weekly

³ See the context of Leviticus 27:34, which refers to commands pertaining to redemption, Jubilee, and tithing, commands that are outside the scope of the Ten Words.

seventh-day Sabbath and annual feasts in [Leviticus 23](#), the prohibitions against cross-breeding and tattoos in [Leviticus 19](#), and more. To show our love for יהוה we should strive to obey all of His commandments, not just those that misguided translators have incorrectly limited us to. The מִצְוֹת *mitswot* of יהוה include all of His awesome instructions in the Torah, not just those written on stone on Mount Sinai.

Conclusion

Once the truth of the scriptures is revealed to us we are left with no excuse for continual disobedience to His commandments. Misguided translators have mistranslated the phrase עֲשֵׂת הַדְּבָרִים *aseret hadevarim* for years to the detriment of followers of Yeshua worldwide. One could easily see this as a clever tactic of the adversary designed to lead people away from our ever-important loving obedience to our Creator's commands. יהוה doesn't command us to do something that is too difficult for us.

Deuteronomy 30:11 – “For this commandment which I *am* commanding you this day, it *is* not too difficult and it *is* not far from you.”

1 John 5:2-3 (LITV) – “By this we know that we love the children of Elohim: when we love Elohim and keep His commandments. {3} For this is the love of Elohim, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not heavy.”

The scriptural truth is consistent throughout. We are to obey יהוה's commandments through and through. Similar to how a parent instructs their child, Yahweh guides and instructs us through His commandments. Let us be diligent to search out and obey all of יהוה's commandments.

HalleluYah!