

WRITTEN BY THE FINGER OF THE LORD

The Lord wrote with his own finger some of the Law he gave through Moses. What were the words that the Lord wrote?

This story starts at Exodus 19, three months after the Hebrews had escaped from the Egyptians and were encamped at the foot of Mount Sinai.

In the third month after the Israelites left Egypt—on the very day—they came to the Desert of Sinai ... and Israel camped there in the desert in front of the mountain. (Ex. 19:1-2)

The Lord called to Moses from the mountain:

“If you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession.” (Ex. 19:5)

Moses told the elders what the Lord had spoken to him, and the people said they would obey whatever the Lord said (verses 7-8). When Moses reported this to the Lord, he said that he would appear in a cloud so that the people could hear his voice as he spoke to Moses, so that the people would trust him.

The LORD said to Moses, “I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, so that **the people will hear me speaking with you** and will always put their trust in you.” Then Moses told the LORD what the people had said. (Ex. 19:9)

So far, all these communications were spoken, not written.

On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled.

Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the LORD descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, the whole mountain trembled violently, and the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder. Then Moses spoke and **the voice of God** answered him. (Ex. 19:16-19)

After Moses returned with Aaron (verse 24), the Lord **spoke** to them. The Lord did not write these words.

And God spoke all these words:

- (1) **“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.**
- (2) **“You shall have no other gods before me.**
- (3) **“You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.**
- (4) **“You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.**
- (5) **“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or**

maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

- (6) "Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.
- (7) "You shall not murder.
- (8) "You shall not commit adultery.
- (9) "You shall not steal.
- (10) "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.
- (11) "You shall not covet your neighbor's house.
- (12) You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor." (Ex. 20:1-17)

Although God spoke to Moses, the people were in fear and asked that God not speak directly with them.

When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance and said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die." ...

The people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was. Then the LORD said to Moses, "Tell the Israelites this: 'You have seen for yourselves that I have spoken to you from heaven'" (Ex. 20:18-19, 21-22)

Then, from the start of Exodus 21 to the end of Chapter 23, God spoke the laws they were to observe.

These are the laws you are to set before them: (Ex. 21:1)

Throughout these three Chapters (21-23), every instruction was spoken by God, none was written. After Moses spoke to the people and told them the Lord's words and laws, the people said they would obey. After this, Moses wrote what the Lord had said to him.

When Moses went and told the people all the LORD'S words and laws, they responded with one voice, "Everything the LORD has said we will do."

Moses then wrote down everything the LORD had said. (Ex. 24:3-4)

When Moses completed the record, the people offered sacrifices, Moses read the scroll(s) of the Covenant to the people and they dedicated themselves in obedience to the words.

Then [Moses] sent young Israelite men, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as fellowship offerings to the LORD. Moses took half of the blood and put it in bowls, and the other half he sprinkled on the altar.

Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, "We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey." (Ex. 24:5-7)

Seventy-four of them went up the mountain and saw God and they ate and drank.

Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel went up and saw the God of Israel. Under his feet was something like a pavement made of sapphire, clear as the sky itself.

But God did not raise his hand against these leaders of the Israelites; they saw God, and they ate and drank. (Ex. 24:9-11)

The Lord then told Moses to come up the mountain where he would provide the law and commands he had written. This was the first time the Lord provided anything he himself had written.

The LORD said to Moses, “Come up to me on the mountain and stay here, and I will give you the tablets of stone, with the law and commands I have written for their instruction.” ...

When Moses went up on the mountain, the cloud covered it, and the glory of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai. ... On the seventh day the LORD called to Moses from within the cloud. ... Moses entered the cloud as he went on up the mountain. And he stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights. (Ex. 24:12, 15-16, 18)

There was no point for the Lord to write what he had said before, since Moses had already written those words. The Lord then told Moses that he required the people to provide a sanctuary for him, so he could live on earth in their midst. He then told Moses that he would provide the exact pattern.

The LORD said to Moses ... “Have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you.” (Ex. 25:1, 8-9)

After describing the Ark (25:10-22); Table (25:23-30); and Lampstand (25:31-39), the Lord reminded Moses that these instructions concerning the tabernacle had to be followed.

See that you make them according to the pattern shown [to] you on the mountain”. (Ex. 25:40)

This is followed by detailed instructions for the Tabernacle (Ex. 26:1-31:11). Following instructions concerning the Sabbath, the Lord handed Moses the tablets he had inscribed “with the law and commands”, called “the two tablets of the Testimony”.

When the LORD finished speaking to Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave him the two tablets of the Testimony, the tablets of stone inscribed by the finger of God. (Ex. 31:18)

The narrative is interrupted with a description of the people worshipping a Golden Calf. As the people descended into idolatry, Moses descended from the Mount, carrying the two tablets of the Testimony engraved by God. In his extreme anger, Moses threw down the tablets, smashing them to pieces.

Moses turned and went down the mountain with the two tablets of the Testimony in his hands. They were inscribed on both sides, front and back. The tablets were the work of God; the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets. ...

When Moses approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, his anger burned and he threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain. (Ex. 32:15-16, 19)

As a result of their idolatry, 3000 were killed and the Lord struck them with a plague.

Then he said to them, “This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘Each man strap a sword to his side. Go back and forth through the camp from one end to the other, each killing his brother and friend and neighbor.’ ” The Levites did as Moses commanded, and that day about three thousand of the people died. ... And the LORD struck the people with a plague because of what they did with the calf Aaron had made. (Ex. 32:27-28, 35)

The presentation on the laws resumes at Chapter 34, where the Lord told Moses to bring him two tablets of stone so he could write the words that were on the tablets Moses had broken.

The LORD said to Moses, “Chisel out two stone tablets like the first ones, and I will write on them the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke. ... So Moses chiseled out two stone tablets like the first ones and went up Mount Sinai early in the morning, as the LORD had commanded him; and he carried the two stone tablets in his hands. (Ex. 34:1, 4)

The Lord then spoke to Moses.

Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the LORD. And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming. (Ex. 34:5, 6)

The Lord thus said that the following words he spoke to Moses were the same words he had engraved with his finger on the tablets that Moses broke.

- (1) Do not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.
- (2) “Be careful not to make a treaty with those who live in the land; for when they prostitute themselves to their gods and sacrifice to them, they will invite you and you will eat their sacrifices. And when you choose some of their daughters as wives for your sons and those daughters prostitute themselves to their gods, they will lead your sons to do the same.
- (3) “Do not make cast idols.
- (4) “Celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread. For seven days eat bread made without yeast, as I commanded you. Do this at the appointed time in the month of Abib, for in that month you came out of Egypt.
- (5) “The first offspring of every womb belongs to me, including all the firstborn males of your livestock, whether from herd or flock. Redeem the firstborn donkey with a lamb, but if you do not redeem it, break its neck. Redeem all your firstborn sons.
- (6) “No one is to appear before me empty-handed.
- (7) “Six days you shall labor, but on the seventh day you shall rest; even during the plowing season and harvest you must rest.
- (8) “Celebrate the Feast of Weeks with the firstfruits of the wheat harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering at the turn of the year.
- (9) Three times a year all your men are to appear before the Sovereign LORD, the God of Israel. I will drive out nations before you and enlarge your territory, and no one will covet your land when you go up three times each year to appear before the LORD your God.
- (10) “Do not offer the blood of a sacrifice to me along with anything containing yeast, and do not let any of the sacrifice from the Passover Feast remain until morning.
- (11) “Bring the best of the firstfruits of your soil to the house of the LORD your God.
- (12) “Do not cook a young goat in its mother’s milk.” (Ex. (34:14-26)

After the Lord spoke these words, Moses engraved them on the tablets. The original tablets were named the “tablets of the Testimony”; the replacement tablets, engraved by Moses, were called “the words of the covenant – the Ten Commandments”.

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.” ... And [Moses] wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant—the Ten Commandments (Ex. 34: 27-28)

Summary

The only words written by the Lord were on the tablets at Exodus 31:18 - 32:16. They were repeated when God uttered them to Moses at Exodus 34:14-26. The tablets engraved by God were known as the “two tablets of the Testimony”; when Moses engraved the replica tablets, they were known as the “words of the covenant – the Ten Commandments”.

Everything else concerning these verses and chapters of Exodus was **spoken** by the Lord, including the passage at Exodus 20.

It could be hypothesised that the way in which the words engraved by the Lord could be known would be to use a story such as that employed. This created a situation whereby the Lord was caused to utter the words; otherwise they could not be known.

This analysis shows that the passage at Exodus 34 was known as the Ten Commandments, not any other. It is possible that the listing at Exodus 20 formed a theocratic constitution.

My reading of each list at Exodus 20 and 34 suggests that the words following “And God spoke all these words”, and “passed in front of Moses, proclaiming” could be given as twelve items. If so, this would invoke the spiritual significance of the number twelve.