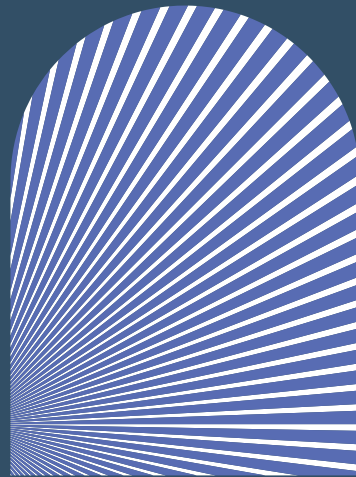
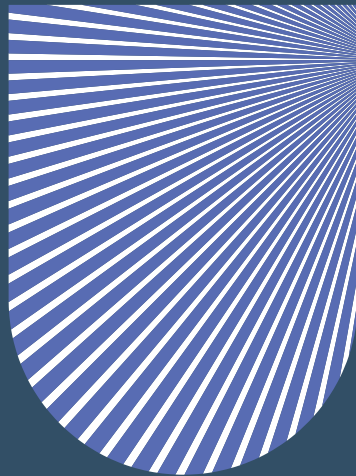


THAT
YOU



MAY
LIVE

Group Discussion Guide

WITH DARRELL JOHNSON

A NOTE FROM DARRELL

*That You May Live:
Small Group Discussion
Guide Introduction Video*



Why spend time studying the so-called Ten Commandments? There was a time, you may know, when such a study was part of the ministry of “making disciples.” Indeed, for most of the past two centuries, one was not considered a “functioning disciple” unless and until they could recite (along with the names of the books of the Bible, the Lord’s Prayer, the Apostle’s Creed) the whole of the Law from memory. That may explain, in part, why the Western world, though as sinful as the world is today, experienced a greater measure of freedom and order; and why the Western world now seems to be sliding into chaos and bondage.

Yet, we ask, why spend our time studying the Ten Commandments? Are they not, as the majority of our contemporaries argue, largely irrelevant, or, worse, potentiality weapons of oppression?

Why study the Ten Commandments?

Well, ask another question. Why did the One Who spoke the Commandments speak them? What did He hope His speaking would accomplish?

Step back for a moment and recall the historical context in which the Living God spoke the “Ten Words,” as they are literally called in Exodus.

Nearly three million people, who fifty days before had been freed from slavery and oppression, were making their way across the Sinai Desert on their way to the Promised Land. They had made camp at the foot of Mt. Sinai.

On that particular day, the mountain slowly became engulfed by smoke, which was pouring from what appeared to be fire on top of the mountain. Lightning flashed in the thick cloud. The sound of trumpets grew louder and louder. The whole mountain began to quake.

The people stood in rapt attention, for they knew that the Living God, the Mighty God, the Holy God had descended upon the mountain. The people trembled in awe. And they feared for their friend

and leader Moses. For, while the lightning flashed and the trumpets blasted and the ground shook, Moses was on the mountain! The Liberating God had called him up into that cloud of smoke.

Finally, Moses came down from the mountain. He emerged from that awesome, terrifying Presence unharmed. Indeed, he glowed! And he had a word from the God whose name is Yahweh. More exactly *he had ten words from Yahweh*. Still more exactly, *Yahweh’s ten words had Moses*.

Throughout the Bible, the Ten Commandments—The Ten Words (Exodus 34:28)—are celebrated as a gift of God’s grace, as a great gift of God’s great grace. As Old Testament scholar Gerhard von Rad put it, God, declaring the Ten Commandments, speaking the Ten Words, is celebrated as a saving act of the first order.

So much so that Israel, by God’s specific direction, gladly established an annual, weeklong feast to celebrate the giving of the Law. Israel observed three annual feasts: Passover, Tabernacles, and Pentecost. They were as big a deal centuries ago as Christmas, Easter, Mother’s Day and Thanksgiving are in our time. Passover celebrates the exodus—God’s liberation of Israel from four hundred years of slavery in Egypt. Tabernacles celebrates the forty years Israel spent wandering in the desert, when God graciously provided water and food, when God graciously guided the people with a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, and when the people lived in tents and God graciously dwelt among them in a tent called the tabernacle. Pentecost (the word simply means “the fiftieth,” referring to fifty days after Passover) celebrates God’s gift of the Law. And the dominant note of that feast is joy!

Imagine that! People celebrating with joy because Someone has interrupted their lives by speaking a new Law.

Why? Why would anyone want to celebrate the giving of the Law?

A NOTE FROM DARRELL

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The surprising answer is this: *The Living and Holy God speaks the Ten Commandments in order to protect and enhance the life of freedom.*

The Living and Holy God, who has a name, a personal name, the name “Yahweh” (which is usually translated and obscured by the title “Lord”), and who wants to be called by that name, speaks the Ten Commandments in order to protect and enhance the life of freedom. God had rescued the Hebrew slaves from, and had rescued the Hebrew slaves for: from bondage and oppression, for relationship with Yahweh and with each other. That is how it always is with God: God frees us from, to free us for. God freed them from slavery of all kinds, for relationship, for intimacy and wholeness and trust. From the top of the mountain ablaze with fire, shrouded in smoke, the Living and Holy God declares, “I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out of slavery.” And then, from the top of the mountain, speaks Ten Words in order to protect and enhance the new freedom.

As we read the rest of the Bible, one of the surprising discoveries we make is how closely connected the giving of the Law is with the promise of life. Again and again we hear the claim that in speaking the Law, Yahweh is speaking life:

Deuteronomy 4:1—God says, “And now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I am teaching you to perform, in order that you may live....”

Deuteronomy 5:29—God says, “Oh, that they had such a heart in them, that they would fear Me, and keep all My commandments always, that it may be well with them and their children forever!”

Deuteronomy 30:15-16—Moses says, “See, I have set before you today life and good, and death and evil; in that I command you today to love Yahweh your God, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments... that you may live.”

“Love Yahweh; keep His commandments so that you may live.” Love. Keep. Jesus also connects the two verbs: “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments (John 14:23).

We see this close connection between Law and life in Psalm 19. The Psalm is composed in two halves. The first half celebrates the goodness of God’s Creation; the second celebrates the goodness of God’s Law. *Life through Creation*: “The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of his Hands” (19:1). *Life through the Law*: “The law of Yahweh is perfect, restoring the soul; the precepts of Yahweh are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandments of Yahweh are pure, enlightening the eyes They are more desirable than gold, yes, then much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb” (19:7-10).

Really? God’s commandments are more desirable than gold? They are sweeter than honey?

Why?

Israel celebrates the giving of the Law of Yahweh *because Yahweh gives the Law in order to protect and enhance life, the life of freedom.*

And that is why we spend time studying the Ten Commandments! To be alive in the life for which our Creator has made us and our Redeemer has rescued us!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

What to Expect	4
A Note from Darrell	5
Introduction: Jealous for Our Freedom	7
Commandment 1: No Other Gods: You Were Made for Me Alone	8
Commandment 2: Don't Box Me In: Only I Can Tell You Who I Am	10
Commandment 3: Don't Let It Be In Vain	11
Commandment 4: 6 + 1: Rhythm of Wholeness	13
Commandment 5: Honoring Mom and Dad: The Way Society Gets Blessed	14
Commandment 6: Protest Against Inhumanity	16
Commandment 7: The Mystery of Human Sexuality	17
Commandment 8: Kleptomania: The Disease of Un-Faith	19
Commandment 9: The Truth Will Set You Free	20
Commandment 10: A Soul Running on Empty	22
Closing Word The Ten Commandments as the Ten Promises	23

WHAT TO EXPECT

The Goal

Over the next 11 sessions, we hope your group uncovers how the Ten Commandments speak to their relationship with God, others and themselves.

The format for each session will be scripture reading and discussion, typically book-ended by prayer exercises to open and close the time together.



SCRIPTURE READING
& PRAYER



DISCUSS



CLOSING PRAYER

If you are leading these sessions, we encourage you to consider the following:

- 1. Select your preferred discussion questions.** Choose a few or use them all – either way, we encourage you to consider which questions are most relevant to your group.
- 2. Plan to pray.** While discussion is important, prayer is the main way to get these Ten Words into your hearts.
- 3. Read ahead.** Preview upcoming sessions to best prepare your group for what is next.

Interested in reading together?

You can find copies online wherever books are sold, or for orders of 20+ books, we can provide discounted rates. Just reach out to us at darrelljohnson.ca using the contact form.

The Ten Commandments

EXODUS 20:1-17 (NASB)

Then God spoke all these words, saying,

² "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

1 ³ "You shall have no other gods before Me.

2 ⁴ "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. ⁵ You shall not worship them nor serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, inflicting the punishment of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, ⁶ but showing favor to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

3 ⁷ "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain.

4 ⁸ "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹ For six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the Lord your God; on it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male slave or your female slave, or your cattle, or your resident who stays with you. ¹¹ For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and everything that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day; for that reason the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

5 ¹² "Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be prolonged on the land which the Lord your God gives you.

6 ¹³ "You shall not murder.

7 ¹⁴ "You shall not commit adultery.

8 ¹⁵ "You shall not steal.

9 ¹⁶ "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

10 ¹⁷ "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male slave, or his female slave, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."



INTRODUCTION

Jealous for Our Freedom



SCRIPTURE READING & PRAYER

Have someone read the context for the giving of the Law | **Exodus 19:7-24.**

Then read together | **Exodus 20:1-17.**

First, have one person read the whole text.

Then someone else begin by reading the first commandment, someone else the second, and so on until the whole Law is read.

Pray for the Giver of the Law to help us understand what and why He has spoken.

“Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Jesus).



DISCUSS

Ten Words or Ten
Commandments?
See the last page
to learn more

1. Which of the Ten Commandments or “words” speaks to you the most right now. Why?
2. Which of the Ten Commandments (or “words”) do you think/feel is most in need of being heard and heeded in our time? Why?
3. Why does the Giver of the Law speak these commandments (or “words”)?
Hint: the implication of His declaration in Exodus 20:2.
4. What is God revealing about Himself in the Law that we would have never been able to figure out on our own?
5. What is God revealing about us in the Law that we would have never been able to figure out on our own?
6. How do the commandments (or “words”) enhance our relationship with:
Our Creator and Saviour? | Other human beings? | Our own self?
Pick one commandment for each and tell how.
7. What questions are brewing for you as a result of this first session?



CLOSING PRAYER:

Have someone read Psalm 19.

COMMANDMENT 1

No Other Gods: You Were Made for Me Alone



SCRIPTURE READING & PRAYER

Read the whole of the Law together twice | **Exodus 20:1-17.**

First time, one person reading the whole.

Second time, one reading the 'first word (commandment)', another the "second," etc. pausing briefly between readers.

Pray that the Giver of the Law helps us understand what and why He has spoken from the mountain top.



DISCUSS

1. Over the past week, where have you witnessed or experienced God's good Law being violated? How has this impacted you personally?
2. Over the past week, where have you witnessed or experienced God's good Law being obeyed? How has this impacted you personally?

Our focus is the first commandment | Exodus 20:3.
Someone read Exodus 20:1-3.

3. What is God getting at in this first of the good "words"? Why is this the first?
4. What does it look like for a human being to obey this first commandment? What does it look like to disobey it?
5. Can you share any way in which you have not lived this first? What have been the consequences?
6. What are the "other gods" that our culture(s) sets up between us and God? What are ones you are tempted to set up?
7. What is God supposed to do when we disobey? How does that make you feel?



CLOSING PRAYER:

Have someone read Psalm 62:1-2, 5-6; 63:1.



COMMANDMENT 2

Don't Box Me In: Only I Can Tell You Who I Am



SCRIPTURE READING & PRAYER

Once again, read together | **Exodus 20:1-17.**

One person read the whole text.

Then go around and others read the commandments one at a time.

Our focus in this session is the 2nd commandment, and how it relates to Jesus.

Someone read *Exodus 20:1-6.*

Someone read *Colossians 1:15-20; John 1:14-18; 2 Corinthians 4:6; Hebrews 1:1-3.*



DISCUSS

1. How do you respond to God's claim to be "a Jealous God"?
2. What is He revealing about **Himself** that we would never have figured out on our own?
3. What is He revealing about **us** that we would have never figured out on our own?
4. What is an "idol" or "likeness" (image)? And Why does God tell us not to do it, not to try to make an "idol" or "likeness" of Him?
5. What are the "idols" or "images" our culture(s) use for God? Suggest at least five.
6. What are the "idols" or "images" you are personally inclined to make and then substitute for the Living God?
7. Why is Jesus the perfect "likeness" of the invisible God? What about God do you find most compelling in the face of Jesus?



CLOSING PRAYER:

Go around the circle and speak out specific expressions of God's nature and character He reveals in His "idol" (Jesus).

COMMANDMENT 3

Don't Let It Be In Vain



SCRIPTURE READING & PRAYER

Let us read Exodus 20:1-17 together again.

First, read it **"forward"** – going around reading the commandments from the 1st to the 10th.

Then, read it **"backward"** – going around reading the commandments from the 10th to the 1st.



DISCUSS

1. How have you witnessed or experienced the "ten words" in your world this past week? Which of the "words" is grabbing you the most at this time?

Our focus in this session is commandment three.
Someone read Exodus 20:7

2. There are two ways the third commandment has been taken. One is as a prohibition against swearing. The other is as an exhortation to pray, to "use the name" and pray! Which way do you take it? Why?
3. "The name of Yahweh." What does this sacred name mean to you?
(See Exodus 33-34 for help, especially 34:6-7).
4. Why has God given us His name? Why would you give another person your name?
5. How do we who have been given His name "take it in vain"?



CLOSING PRAYER:

Yahweh exhorts us again and again, "call upon My name." So, let us do it right now! Share with one another a prayer request for yourself or others, then pray together boldly in Jesus' name.



COMMANDMENT 4

6 + 1: Rhythm of Wholeness



SCRIPTURE READING & PRAYER

Let us once again read **Exodus 20:1-17**.

And this time, also read **Deuteronomy 5:1-21**.

Pray for deeper insight into why the Living God has spoken these “words.”



DISCUSS

1. Did you notice any difference between the two readings of the Law? If so, what stood out?

2. Again, how did you witness or experience the goodness of the Law this past week? Our focus in this session is the 4th commandment.

Someone read **Exodus 20:8-11**.

Someone read **Deuteronomy 5:12-15**.

3. Did you see the different reasons given for why we are to honour the Sabbath? Why both?

4. Along the way in our study, we have been saying that in the Law the Living God tells us things about ourselves we would have never figured out on our own. What is He revealing in this 4th “word”?

5. Now that He has revealed it, do you see signs of it anywhere else in life?

6. What does “keep it holy” mean? What does it mean to you?

7. How have people distorted this good commandment since it was spoken? Have you ever experienced such distortion? How do you process this?

8. How did Jesus relate to the Sabbath? What are the implications for us His disciples?

9. How can we obey this commandment in our time? Where do you need help to do so?



CLOSING PRAYER:

Pray for one another to find a way to live into the 6+1 rhythm of wholeness; to be delivered from the “rat race” in order to truly live the “human race.”

COMMANDMENT 5

Honoring Mom and Dad: The Way Society Gets Blessed



SCRIPTURE READING & PRAYER

Choose a Bible translation that you haven't used in these sessions yet (ie. ESV, NIV, CSB, MSG) to read Exodus 20:1-17.



DISCUSS

1. Has your life been changing as we have been making our way through this study? Can you share in what way(s)?

Our focus in this session is the 5th commandment.
Someone read Exodus 20:12.

Note that this commandment is a kind of "swing" commandment between the two tablets. That is, in this commandment we "swing" from commandments protecting and enhancing our relationship with God to commandments protecting and enhancing our relationship with others. The phrase, "that your days may be prolonged in the land...." could go with both tablets!

2. "Honour" as "weigh" has at least three nuances: respect, obey, care for. What does each of these nuances look like in everyday life?
3. How has this commandment been abused regarding the second nuance, "obey"? How might realizing the fact that it is the 5th and not the 1st speak to such abuse? Consider what Jesus says about this relationship in **Luke 10:57-63; 14:25-26**.
4. What are the implications of this commandment for our aging society? (i.e. how does the Western world "weigh" the elderly?). How is the church as "the family of God" to live this out in our time?
5. How does Jesus Himself live out this commandment? Think when He is 12 years old and think when He is on the cross.



CLOSING PRAYER:

Share how others can pray for you about anything God is stirring in you through this "word".



COMMANDMENT 6

Protest Against Inhumanity



SCRIPTURE READING & PRAYER

As we read **Exodus 20:1-17** again, let's do it in the following way.

Someone read verses 1-7.

Someone else verses 8-11.

Someone else verses 12-17.

Pray that the Good God of the Good Law will open up more of His Good Will as we study together.

The focus of this session is the 6th commandment.

Someone read Exodus 20:13.



DISCUSS

1. The first tablet deals with our relationship with God, the second with our relationship with others. Why do you think "you shall not murder" is first?
2. What is God revealing about **Himself** and about **us** in this commandment?
3. How might people disagree on how to live out this command? How does this commandment speak to capital punishment, euthanasia, abortion, military or police service? Discuss with respect and listen well as others share; these are complex issues.
4. About what can we all agree as we seek to work this "word" out in the world?

Jesus works with this commandment in His Sermon on the Mount.
Read Matthew 5:21-26.

5. How is Jesus "drawing out the full implications of" the 6th commandment? Where do you see this "murder" taking place in our world at this time? What does Jesus say is at the root of it?
6. How does Jesus tell us to deal with the root problem? What does this look like in concrete terms?



CLOSING PRAYER:

Pray for any relationships you need forgiveness or reconciliation in.

COMMANDMENT 7

The Mystery of Human Sexuality



SCRIPTURE READING & PRAYER

See if anyone can re-cite the whole of the Ten Commandments from memory!

Once more, read the whole of **Exodus 20:1-17** together.

Pray for great wisdom and sensitivity as we grapple in this session.

Our focus is the 7th commandment.

Someone read **Exodus 20:14**



DISCUSS

1. How does the 7th commandment protect and enhance human freedom and flourishing?
2. How do people of our day hear this “word”? Good news, bad news, irrelevant news? Why?
3. How might we go about “making the case” for this commandment when disobedience of it is widely celebrated in our time. How can we speak it as “good news”?
4. What is God getting at in the commandment? What is He revealing about us that we would otherwise not figure out on our own?
5. What happens when we disobey this commandment?

**Jesus works with this commandment in His Sermon on the Mount.
Read Matthew 5:27-30.**

6. How has Jesus “drawn out the full implications” of the 7th “word”? How then are we to follow Him in His “word” on the “word”?

The Apostle Paul also works with this commandment in his letter to the Church in Corinth. Read 1 Corinthians 6:12-20.

7. How does Paul help us appreciate the 7th commandment? How might we speak this good news to our world?



CLOSING PRAYER:

Use John 8:1-11 as a framework for praying together. Then break off in pairs to pray.



COMMANDMENT 8

Kleptomania: The Disease of Un-Faith



SCRIPTURE READING & PRAYER

Want to try a risky exercise? Let us re-cite the Law from memory, only this time, one person begins with the 1st commandment, and then the next the 2nd, on through the 10th. Give grace for not being exact in wording!

*Someone read **Exodus 20:1-17**.*

Pray for the Good Lawgiver to do a deep work in our hearts.

The focus of this session is the 8th commandment.

*Someone read **Exodus 20:15**.*



DISCUSS

1. How have you experienced the violation of this commandment? How did (does) it feel?
2. What is the Living God revealing about Himself and ourselves we would have not otherwise deduced?
3. In what ways do we violate this commandment? Think widely and deeply.

Read Deuteronomy 8:11-17 and Proverbs 30:7-9.

4. How do these words help unpack the commandment?
5. What does “stealing” say about the state of our hearts?



CLOSING PRAYER:

Read and reflect on Philippians 4:6-19. Then pray in light of this text.

COMMANDMENT 9

The Truth Will Set You Free



SCRIPTURE READING & PRAYER

Someone read **Exodus 20:1-17.**

This time, go back and include the historical context for the giving of the Law.

Someone read **Exodus 19:4-25.**

Someone read **Exodus 20:1-7.**

Someone **Exodus 20:8-11.**

Someone **Exodus 20:12-17.**



DISCUSS

1. Have you been reading/watching news & current events differently as we have gone through this study? In what way(s)?
2. Why might this commandment be especially important for our time?
3. What is God revealing about Himself and ourselves in this good “word”?
4. Commentators say the breaking of this commandment destroys community as nothing else does. Why? How?

Read **1 John 1:7, Ephesians 4:29, and Psalm 141:3**

5. Thinking along and beyond these texts, how do we live this good commandment?



CLOSING PRAYER:

Share how others can be praying for you along these lines.



COMMANDMENT 10

A Soul Running on Empty



SCRIPTURE READING & PRAYER

Well, we are at the end! Be sure to read the Closing Word at the end of this session.

Let us read **Exodus 20:1-17** one more time.

Pray for the Living Word to speak these “words” into the core of our being.

Our focus in this session is the 10th commandment.

So, someone read **Exodus 20:17**.



DISCUSS

1. What is the God, Who loves us, revealing about us in this last of the Ten Commandments? How does this make you feel?
2. Commentators point out that once we break the 1st commandment we always and automatically break the 10th. Why?
3. What does “covet” mean to you? In what ways do you do it?
Jesus works with this last commandment in an interaction with a rich young man.
Read Mark 10:17-22.
4. Why does Jesus list the commandments and stop short of the 10th? What is He seeking for the young man to see?
5. How might the first commandment be the antidote to “coveting?”

Someone read Psalm 42:1-12.

How does this help?

Someone read Matthew 6:19-34.

How does this help?

Someone read Ephesians 1:3-14.

How does this help?



CLOSING PRAYER:

It is the 10th promise – one day we will be so satisfied in the Triune God of grace that we will not covet! Praise be to His name! Pray with thanksgiving and praise.

Praise be to His name! End your time in this study on the 10 Commandments together by praying the “Closing Word” found on the next page together. Have someone read it aloud, or mediate on it individually.

Closing Word

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS AS THE TEN PROMISES

In light of God's great promise in the Prophets – to write His Law on our hearts, to give us a new heart (Jeremiah 31:31-33; Ezekiel 36:25-28), and especially in light of all that God has done for us in Jesus Christ, on the cross dealing with the consequences of our disobedience, and in the sending of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:1-4), God's commandments turn out to be God's promises!

So, at the end of our study in Exodus 20:1-17, let us celebrate!

“I am Yahweh your God,
Who made you,
and Who became one of you,
and Who went to the cross to free you
from the consequences of your rebellious heart.

I am Yahweh your God,
Who having redeemed you, making you Mine,
comes to live with you and in you by My Spirit.

Therefore, because I am Who I am,
and have done for you what I have done for you,

One day you will no longer buck up against the really real.
One day you will have no other gods between Me and you.
You will have no distorted ideas or images of Who I am.
You will not use My name in vain.
You will live a holy, sabbatically-balanced life.
You will honour father and mother.
You will not murder.
You will not commit adultery.
You will not steal.
You will not bear false witness.
You will not covet!

And one day you will love Me
with all your heart and soul and mind and strength.

And you will love your neighbour as yourself.

And you will love one another as I have loved you.”

Even so, Lord, make it so!



Footnote: “Ten Words” or “Ten Commandments”?

This might actually be signaled in the word Moses uses for the Law; he says, “Then God spoke all these words” (Exodus 20:1). Moses does not call them “commandments.” They are, but they are not called such. Moses calls them “words.” The Hebrew Bible does not actually use the phrase “Ten Commandments.” English Bibles do – Exodus 34:28; Deuteronomy 4:13; 10:4. The Hebrew Bible consistently uses the word “words.” The texts use the Hebrew *dabar*, “word,” not *mitzvah*, “commandment.” Interestingly (and wonderfully) the Hebrew Bible regularly renders *dabar* as “promise” (see Psalm 119).

Furthermore, the idea of “promise” is built into the actual form of grammar used. “You shall not” is in the form of negative particle plus the second person of the imperfect of the verb. Indian OT scholar, Vara Prasad Deepati (in his PhD diss., Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Silang, Cavite, Philippines, 2009) points out that this form of the verb not only communicates an “emphatic form of prohibition” (quoting from E. Kautzsch, ed. *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, rev. A. E. Cowley [Oxford: Clarendon, 1910, 1990] 317) or “the strongest expectation of obedience” (quoting Kautzsch again), it also communicates a “definite expectation that something will not happen.” Phrases like, “You shall not die” (Judges 6:23) and “You shall not lack” (Deuteronomy 8:9) and “You shall not be afraid” (Deuteronomy 7:18; Psalm 91:5) – in the same grammatical form as the “commandments” – are clearly promises.

Other Books & Resources from Darrell Johnson:

- + Discipleship on the Edge: An Expository Journey through the Book of Revelation
- + Ephesians: The Wonder and Walk of Being Alive in Christ
- + Fifty-Seven Words That Change The World: A Journey Through The Lord’s Prayer
- + The Beatitudes: Living In Sync With The Reign of God
- + Experiencing the Trinity: Living in the Relationship at the Centre of the Universe
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