



As the story continues, in chapter 33 Moses prays for God's presence and then chapter 34 records how God gives Moses a second pair of tablets. Chapter 34:1 states, "the LORD said to Moses, 'Cut two tablets of stone like the first ones, and I will write on these tablets the words that were on the first tablets which you broke.'" In verse 2, God continues and says, "So be ready in the morning, and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai." As verses 4-5 records, once again Moses ascends the mount just like before and God descends to the mount to meet with Moses. Verses 6-26 record a discussion between God and Moses that covers topics including God's mercy, driving out the Canaanites and destroying their altars, prohibiting the making of molded images (which is the first of the 10 commandments), how to keep the feast of Passover, how to keep the Feast of Pentecost, how to keep the Feast of Tabernacles, and prohibiting eating blood. This discussion runs up to verse 26. And then verse 27 states, "Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Write these words, for according to the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.'" Finally, verse 28 concludes by saying, "So he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he neither ate bread nor drank water. And He wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments." There are several items worth noting here.

First, apart from this summary reference at the end in chapter 34:28, there is no actual discussion of the 10 Commandments during the description of the second 40 days of discourse except for the prohibition against idolatry in verses 13-17. Second, according to verse 28 "the words of the covenant" are written on the tablets, yet according to God in verse 27 the entire conversation in verses 6-26 constitutes the words according to which God made the covenant with Israel. In other words, verse 27 provides a contextual definition for the phrase "words of the covenant" and defines them as the entirety of the 40-day conversation. This would imply that it was not just the 10 commandments that were written on the tablets but the entire discourse recorded in verses 6-26.

What is most likely happening is that chapter 34 is an abridged parallel to the conversation that occurred during the previous 40 days as recorded in chapters 25-31. An interesting question is why it would take another 40 days if all that God wrote was the 10 Commandments? Clearly, God is repeating the entire event and discourse. What is most likely occurring here is two separate recordings of the highlights of a dialogue that took 40 days, a dialogue that occurred twice because Moses broke the first set of tablets. Different portions of the covenant and dialog are recorded from both occasions but between the two of them we have the entire conversation recorded. And the entire conversation describes the commandments of the covenant including the sacrifices, the priesthood, and the festivals. In other words, the entire 40-days of dialogue are the "words of the covenant," the words that lay out the covenant. And all of these words are recorded on the tablets, not just the 10 Commandments. And this is why the tablets are written on both sides. The repetition of the 40 days of dialogue before each set of tablets again suggests that it was the entire covenant revealed by God during the 40 days on the mount that was on the tablets, not just the 10 Commandments.

It is also necessary to discuss in further detail the assertion in chapter 32:15 that the tablets were covered in writing on both sides. This statement is meant to indicate that there is a great deal of writing on the tablets, not just 10 brief statements. Revelation similarly reflects this way of expressing that there is a large amount of writing when Revelation 5:1 records “a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals.” The purpose of such phrases is not to convey the idea that the text was written large so that it could be seen from a distance. Instead, such phrases are intended to convey that there is a very large amount of writing, so much writing that every available surface is used. In fact, Exodus 32:15 repeats this twice for emphasis, saying, “The tablets were written on both sides; on the one side and on the other they were written.” Clearly, the author wanted to get across to his audience that there was a lot written on these stone tablets and he did not want them to miss that point and think that only a little or moderate amount of text on them.

Moreover, to further substantiate this point, it is important to recall that the primary purpose for the golden ark of the covenant was to carry these stone tablets. Below is an excerpt from *Smith's Bible Dictionary* on this topic.

“Ark of the Covenant – Ex. 25. I. Description.--It appears to have been an oblong chest of shittim (acaceai) wood, 2 1/2 cubits long by 1 1/2 broad and deep...II. Its purpose was to contain inviolate the divine autograph of the two tables, that "covenant" from which it derived its title.” – *Smith's Bible Dictionary*, p. 53

In a separate article on page 740, *Smith's* delineates that one cubit is equivalent to roughly 19 inches. Consequently, being 2.5 cubits long but 1.5 cubits broad and 1.5 cubits high, the ark would be about 4 feet long, about 2.5 feet wide, and about 2.5 feet wide. 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles also attest that the primary purpose of the ark was to contain the stone tablets, and both passages also highlight that only the tablets were in the ark, nothing else. Other items were placed in the ark at least for a time. Exodus 16:33-34 states that an “omer” of manna was at one time placed in the ark. But that is only about 2 liters according to the Online Bible Hebrew Lexicon. This is roughly equivalent to placing a bottle of soda into a 25 square foot volume, leaving the majority of the space vacant. Hebrews 9:4 also indicates that Aaron's staff was placed into the ark as well, but again this is not an item that would have occupied a great deal of space.

This means that the volume of the ark was devoted to housing the tablets with little space needed for other items. Conversely, this would mean that the tablets themselves would be roughly 4 feet by 2.5 feet, in which case there would be 10 square feet of surface on each side of the tablets. With 2 sides per tablet and 2 tablets, that would be a total of nearly 40 square feet of surface area. The implication from Exodus 32:15 is that God filled nearly 40 square feet of writing area with the words of his covenant with the Israelites. That is a lot of writing and certainly the text intends to convey that much more than merely the 10 Commandments were written on the stone tablets. Consequently, the dimensions of the ark also corroborate the large amount of writing on the tablets and that the entire covenant was written on them, not merely the 10 Commandments.

Moreover, both 1 Kings 8 and 2 Chronicles 5 contain the phrase “the two tables of stone, which Moses put there at Horeb, when the LORD made a covenant with the children of Israel.” This phrasing also suggests that the entire covenant described by God to Moses over the 40 days of discourse on the mount were written on the stone tablets. Just as God said in Exodus 34:27-29, the words of the 40 days of dialog were the words of the covenant and it was the words of the covenant that were written on the tablets.

However, the counterargument could arise that in chapter 34:27, God tells Moses, to “Write these words.” By “these words” God is referring to the words that God had been speaking to Moses for the 40 days as recorded in verses 6-26 of that same chapter. Consequently, the objection is that it is Moses who writes these words, while God himself writes the 10 Commandments. However, verse 28 states, “So he was there with the LORD for forty days and forty nights; he neither ate bread nor drank water. And He wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.” The first thing to notice here is that according to verse 28, it is the same person who writes “the words of the covenant” and the “Ten Commandments,” which would make it impossible to suggest that God wrote the Ten Commandments and Moses wrote the rest of the words. There is also the question of who is doing the writing in verse 28. While the New King James version capitalizes the pronoun “He” in the latter part of the verse, the King James Version does not. Of course, the grammar of the Hebrew does not indicate which is correct, a capital “He” referring to God or a lowercase “he” referring to Moses. However, looking back to the first verse of the chapter, it is clear that verse 28 is referring to God writing on the tablets because in verse 1 God promises to again write on the tablets all the things that were on the first set of tablets.

While verse 27 seems to indicate that God also told Moses to write the words of the discussion, it seems clear that God himself wrote all the words of the discussion on the two tablets just as he had done the first time. The simple solution here is that we have two copies being made, one by God and one by Moses. And this makes sense. After all, everyone agrees that God himself wrote at least the 10 Commandments on the stone tablets, yet Moses himself recorded the 10 Commandments in Exodus 20. So likewise, it would seem that Moses recorded the entire content of his dialogues with God over those 80 days and we have those recordings from Moses in our current Pentateuch (the first five books) while God himself made his own recording of the same discussions and put it in his own handwriting on the stone tablets. In these 80 days of dialogue, God defined the covenant. So the dialogues were the “words of the covenant” and both Moses and God wrote their own, separate record of all the words spoken in those 80 days defining the covenant. So, while Moses did write a copy of those words, Moses was not the one writing on the stone tablets. God was the one writing on the stone tablets as clearly stated in Exodus 31:18, 34:1, Deuteronomy 9:10, and 10:3-4. While the text of chapter 34:28 is quick to highlight for us that the 10 Commandments are included among all the “words of the covenant” covered over those 40 days, they were not the only commandments recorded.

There are several other reasons reassuring us of this conclusion. First, the second tablets were an exact copy of the first, as God himself plainly states in chapter 34:1. This fact is confirmed in Deuteronomy 10:3-4. Yet in chapter 24:12, when God first announces that he will give Moses tablets of stone, God lists both “the law and commandments” as being on those tablets. There are 2 items mentioned here. Since all parties agree that at least one of these items was written on the tablets and since both items are part of the same statement, we must conclude that whatever applies to one item in chapter 24:12 applies to the other. If one item (the 10 Commandments) were on the tablets, then chapter 24:12 is indicating that the other item, the rest of the Law (defined over those 40 days) was also written on the tablets. Again, this is most likely why the text denotes that the tablets were covered on both sides with writing.

In addition, the question might be asked why chapter 34:27 singles out the 10 Commandments when it states, “He wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.” The reason for this is simple. Verse 26 states that all the words God spoke over the 40 days were “the words of the covenant,” and consequently, when the original reader got to verse 27, it would have been clear the “words of the covenant” on the tablets included all the words God had spoken in verses 6-26. But as we mentioned before, verses 6-26 are most likely only highlights and the 10 Commandments are not covered in the highlights, except for a reference in verses 13-17 to the first commandment. Consequently, since the 10 Commandments were not recorded in the dialogue, it was necessary for the author to specifically include them here in the summary so that the audience would know they, too, were included on the tablets containing all the “words of the covenant.”

Of course, Exodus 34:27 is not the only occasion where the 10 Commandments are highlighted when the text mentions “words of the covenant” that were written on the tablets of stone. Deuteronomy 4:13 states, “And he declared unto you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, ten commandments; and he wrote them upon two tables of stone.” Likewise, Deuteronomy 10:4 states, “And he wrote on the tables, according to the first writing, the ten commandments.” Why are the 10 Commandments specifically highlighted in such passages? Doesn’t this prove that only the 10 Commandments were on the tablets? The answer is “no” for a very simple reason that is obvious from the unfolding historical narrative of these books.

While the 10 Commandments are stated in chapter 20:1-17, it is not until four chapters later in Exodus 24:12 that God first mentions to Moses that he will give Moses 2 stone tablets, written by God himself. More importantly, God’s statement concerning the stone tablets is presented in the text as part of a separate visit between God and Moses on the mount. We might call this separate visit, which follows after chapter 24:12, “God’s stone tablet discourse.” Exodus 25-31 records dialogue from this “stone tablet discourse” between God and Moses on the mount, concluding in chapter 31:18 with the statement that “he gave unto Moses, when he had made an end of communing with him upon mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God.” Most importantly, in

the record of the “stone tablet discourse,” (this separate visit between God and Moses on the mount), the 10 Commandments do not appear, but instead we find only a brief reference to the Sabbath commandment in chapter 31:12-18. Likewise, during the second 40 days of discourse preceding the replacement pair of stone tablets, the 10 Commandments do not appear in the discussion, but instead we find only a brief reference to the first commandment in chapter 34:13-17. The presence of the first commandment here might simply be due to the fact that the first set of tablets were destroyed because the people were committing idolatry, in which case, the presence of this command would not indicate a summary reference to the rest of the 10 Commandments. Rather, it might be highlighted here for emphasis in light of recent events. Likewise, the specific mention of the Sabbath during the first 40 day discourse might be due simply to the fact that the people had previously had trouble with the Sabbath in Exodus 16, in which case the presence of this command during the first 40 days would also not indicate a summary reference to the rest of the 10 Commandments but a highlight for emphasis.

Consequently, if we set aside familiar misperceptions, the way that the text presents the stone tablets written by God is that they are part of a separate dialogue, a separate set of declarations by God. And this is the way the story originally unfolded for the Israelites. Consequently, stubborn individuals among the Israelites could have argued that since the 10 Commandments were not part of the episode in which God gave the stone tablets, therefore these particular 10 rules were not binding or part of the covenant. In conclusion, the most natural reason why the 10 Commandments are repeatedly reinforced as being on the stone tablets is not because they were the only thing on the tablets but because they were given on a separate occasion, not during “God’s stone tablet discourse.” And, as such, it might have been concluded that they were not on the tablets at all. In other words, the reason for highlighting that the 10 Commandments were on the tablets was to reinforce their inclusion alongside the rest of God’s declarations on the tablets, not to exclude the rest of God’s declarations from the tablets.

In addition, there is also another reason why the 10 Commandments are highlighted so often whenever the stone tablets are mentioned. In God’s first mention of the stone tablets, God promises to give these tablets as a record of his 40 days of dialog with Moses. In Exodus 24:12 God says to Moses, “Come up to me into the mount, and be there: and I will give thee tables of stone, and a law, and commandments which I have written.” Consequently, when passages such as chapter 34:27 say things like, “He wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments” they may simply be repeating God’s delineation of the two items He said would be written on the tablets in chapter 24:12, the law and commandments. As such, the phrase “the covenant” would refer to chapter 24’s phrase “the law” and likewise the phrase “ten commandments” would simply correspond to chapter 24’s phrase “commandments.”

While this alternate interpretation would perhaps allow for the 10 Commandments to be listed separately than (and perhaps conceptually distinguished from) the rest of the law, two facts would remain clear. First, this alternate interpretation would

still reinforce that the entire Law, not merely the 10 Commandments, were written on the stone tablets. And second, rather than providing a basis for dividing the 10 Commandments from the Law, the fact that the 10 Commandments are written by God right next to the rest of the law on the stone tablets actually reinforces the eternal and indivisible link between the 10 Commandments and the Law. Finally, this correlation between “the law” and “the covenant” resonates with God’s assertion at the end of the second 40-day discourse in chapter 34:27-29 that the words of the preceding dialog were the words of the covenant and that all these words of the covenant were written on the tablets of stone. This discourse included such concepts as God’s mercy, driving out the Canaanites and destroying their altars, prohibiting the making of molded images, how to keep the feast of Passover, how to keep the Feast of Pentecost, how to keep the Feast of Tabernacles, and prohibiting eating blood, which indicates that all of these items were written on the tablets.

Ultimately, there are two options for why the Ten Commandments are often specifically identified when the tablets are mentioned. The purpose may have been to highlight the inclusion of the 10 Commandments as part of the Law since they were originally given separately from the “stone tablet discourse.” Or, the purpose may have been to reflect God’s description in Exodus 24:12 that the tablets would contain both a covenant law and commandments. In fact, these two explanations probably go hand and hand so that the basis for the conceptual distinction between the “law” and “the commandments” stemmed from the original chronological separation between the initial pronouncement of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20 and stone tablet discourse between God and Moses on a different occasion later in Exodus. In either case, we can see that explicit references to the 10 Commandments when the stone tablets are mentioned do not in any way necessitate that the 10 Commandments were the only items on the tablets.

There is one other objection that could be offered to this theory that the entire covenant was written on the two tablets of stone, not only the 10 Commandments. The objection comes out of Deuteronomy 5:1-22, which re-records what occurred in Exodus 20 when God descended upon Mount Sinai before the assembly of the Israelites. Verses 6-21 of Deuteronomy recount the 10 Commandments. Then verse 22 concludes with an interesting statement: “These words the LORD spake unto all your assembly in the mount out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of the thick darkness, with a great voice: and he added no more. And he wrote them in two tables of stone, and delivered them unto me.” At first glance this may seem to indicate that the only thing God spoke and the only thing God recorded on the tablets was the 10 Commandments, particularly the phrase “and he added no more.”

However, a closer examination of Exodus 20 reveals this is not the case. In Exodus 20:1-17, God descends to the mount for the first time and speaks the 10 Commandments. But in verse 18 a critical event happens. Having heard God’s words up to this point, the people ask Moses in verse 19 to go up to God so that they won’t have to hear God anymore for themselves. Although God says a great

deal more (the sum of which is recorded in verses 22-26 of chapter 20 and on through chapter 21-23), the only portion that the people heard for themselves was the 10 Commandments. Consequently, Deuteronomy 5:22 is not saying that all God spoke was the 10 Commandments. We know that wasn't the case because Exodus 20-23 records a great deal more that God spoke one on one with Moses from the mount after the people asked God to stop speaking to them directly. When verse 22 states, "These words the LORD spake unto all your assembly...and he added no more," this is simply a reference to God "adding no more" to what the people heard. It's a reference to the people's plea for God to stop talking to them directly because they were terrified, a request which God granted. It is not an assertion that God added nothing more than the Ten Commandments to his law or covenant with Israel.

Likewise, when verse 22 goes on to state that God wrote these 10 Commandments on tablets of stone, it is not indicating that this was all God wrote on the tablets and that he "added no more" to the stone tablets beside the 10 Commandments. Instead, Moses is simply indicating to the people that the 10 Commandments, which were all that the people heard for themselves before God stopped talking at their request, were included on the tablets of stone. But just as we know that God did "add more" to what "he said" that same day beyond the 10 Commandments, we also can conclude that what "God wrote" on the tablets of stone likewise included more than just the 10 Commandments. In short, the phrase "he added no more" does not limit what God said or wrote that day or in later chapters during the 2 separate 40-day conversations with Moses on the mount. It merely refers to the limited portion that the people heard from God for themselves when they asked God to say no more to them directly.

In fact, the remaining verses of Deuteronomy 22 starting in verse 23 recounts the people's request not to hear God's words for themselves. Furthermore, Deuteronomy 5:30-31, God himself draws the distinction that while the people only heard a part before they asked God to stop speaking, when Moses came up as the people had requested, God would tell him the "whole" or "all" of the rest of the Law. So, clearly God said more and wrote more on the tablets than just the 10 Commandments, which is simply the only part the people could bear to hear before they asked God to say no more. In addition, this interpretation is clearly born out by the New Jewish Publication Society's translation of the TANAKH (although the verse numbers are slightly different than the KJV and NKJV) in which this verse reads, "as for thee, stand though here by Me, and I will speak unto thee all the commandment, and the statutes, and the ordinances, which though shalt teach them."

Lastly, we should say that the New Testament confirms that the entire Law of Moses was written on the stone tablets. In Jeremiah 31:31-34, Ezekiel 11:17-20, and Ezekiel 36:24-27, God describes a new covenant written on the people's hearts in place of the old covenant that was written on "hearts of stone." These passages are quoted by Paul in 2 Corinthians 3:3-14 (especially verse 3, 7, 11, 13-14) and Hebrews 8:6-13 (especially verses 7-11, 13). The phrasing "written on hearts of stone" is explicit in Ezekiel and implied by contrast to the phrase "write



on hearts” in Jeremiah. These prophetic phrases are clearly a reference back to the stone tablets on Mount Sinai, particularly since both passages discuss the covenant God made with the fathers of Israel. And not only is it clear that Ezekiel and Jeremiah have the stone tablets in mind, but certainly Paul’s reference in 2 Corinthians 3:3 is explicit that Ezekiel and Jeremiah had the stone tablets in view. Consequently, here Paul’s argument that the Law of Moses has been removed is based upon these Old Testament statements declaring the removal of the “stone tablets.” After all, how would the removal of stone tablets signify the removal of a covenant that was not written on them? Quite simply, such arguments from Paul are only possible if Paul himself believed that the Law of Moses (and not just the 10 Commandments) was written on the stone tablets and, therefore, the removal of the stone tablets necessarily demonstrated the abolishing of the entire covenant of the Law of Moses written upon them.

At this point, it is important to address one additional justification that could be offered for treating the 10 Commandments separately from the rest of the Sinai Covenant. Specifically, can the 10 Commandments be distinguished on the grounds that they are the “Moral Law” or “Moral” aspect of the Law of Moses? Furthermore, does the fact that they deal with moral laws provide a basis for asserting that the 10 Commandments are necessarily eternal and unchanging? There are 3 facts that prevent dividing the 10 Commandments from the rest of the Law of Moses on these grounds.

First, the 10 Commandments themselves clearly contain a command that establishes a holy day (the Sabbath) and what must be done on that day (rest instead of work). Consequently, if commands that establish holy days (as well as what can and cannot be done on such days) fall under the category of “moral” laws, then the entire portion of the Sinai Covenant instituting new moon and annual feast days (as well as all the ceremonial activities required for each day) also must be deemed “moral laws.” Consequently, nearly the entire ceremonial and sacrificial law would also fall under the category of the “moral law.” And as such, it is impossible to divide the 10 Commandments from the rest of the Sinai Covenant simply on the basis that the 10 Commandments deal with “moral” issues.

Second, there are other precepts in the Law of Moses that govern morality issues beside the 10 Commandments. For instance, the Law of Moses contains the legal commands concerning rape, homosexuality, incest, and even divorce and remarriage, as well as other non-sexual issues. Surely, everyone will no doubt quickly agree that rape and homosexuality always have and always will be eternally wrong. But this is not the point. The point is that these commands are clearly not part of the 10 Commandments, yet they clearly deal with moral issues. And consequently, it is not possible to divide the 10 Commandments from the rest of the Sinai Covenant simply on the basis that the 10 Commandments deal with “moral” issues.

And third, in contrast to rape and homosexuality, the Mosaic ruling on the moral issues of incest and remarriage are not eternal. The rule concerning incest in the

Law of Moses differs from the rule concerning incest prior to the Law of Moses. After all, Abraham as well as the entire first generation of Adam's sons all married sisters. Likewise, while Moses' law allows for divorce and marriage to a new spouse, Jesus' commands forbid this practice. In addition, who could argue that seeking atonement and repentance are not "moral" issues? Not only are the requirements for repentance and atonement absent from the 10 Commandments, but also the requirements for repentance and atonement under the Law of Moses are clearly different from those under the New Covenant.

Consequently, just because a command deals with a "moral" issue, the "moral" nature of the command does not mean that the command goes back to the time of Genesis 2 or that it will not change in future covenants. And since having a "moral" nature does not mean a particular command is eternal, once again the "moral" nature of the 10 Commandments simply does not provide any basis for distinguishing the 10 Commandments as a separate, eternal portion of the Law of Moses.

Ultimately, there remains no basis for dividing the 10 Commandments from the rest of the Law of Moses. The 10 Commandments are simply a part of the whole and inseparable covenant given to the Israelites through Moses on Mount Sinai.

(For more information on differences in the laws and covenants of different periods please see our "Liberty in Christ" study as well as our study entitled "Sin and the Covenants" in our Redemption section.)