

[10 Commandments E1 Transcript]

Jon: “Thou shalt not . . .” What do you think of when you hear those words? Well, probably the 10 Commandments. Even if you know very little about the Bible, you’ve likely heard, “Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not steal. Honor your mother and father.” The 10 Commandments are everywhere. They’re in our movies, our literature, they’re even engraved on public monuments. The 10 Commandments are central to our life now, but more importantly, they were central to the story of ancient Israel. But surprisingly, in the Bible, they’re not introduced as the 10 Commandments. Instead, they’re called—

Tim: ‘*Aseret haddevarim*, which means “the 10 words.”

Jon: So this new podcast series is on the 10 Words.

Tim: They’re not 10 divine commands dropped out of heaven for all people of all time. They were spoken at a moment in time in the context of a relationship. These words appeared out of a moment in a story with God and a particular people at a time and place in history.

Jon: After God gives the 10 Words, he gives hundreds of laws to ancient Israel, 613 to be exact. And these laws are about all sorts of things, from what animals to eat to: How do we treat widows and orphans? But the 10 Words come first, and they’re treated as foundational.

Tim: These 10 are also the only ones that are said to be written on the two tablets, etched on stone by the finger of God. The story is inviting us to see these 10 as a uniquely pure expression of the will of God for his people.

Jon: The 10 Words are so central to Israel’s identity that they become this ongoing litmus test for how well they are relating to God and others.

Tim: The prophets take the 10 Commandments as this essential base of the covenant partnership.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: How do you know if Israel’s doing well or not? “How are you doing with the 10? Let’s not even talk about the hundreds.”

[Laughter]

Tim: "Let's just talk about the 10."

Jon: In many of the teachings of Jesus, including the Sermon on the Mount, he references and builds on the 10 Commandments. And when the rich young ruler asks Jesus how to inherit eternal life, guess where he points him?

Tim: Jesus says, "Don't murder. Don't commit adultery. Don't steal. Don't bear false witness."

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: "Honor your father and mother." The 10 function as this foundational statement of immense, expansive wisdom. In Jesus' mind, these 10 show you the way to the life of God's new creation.

Jon: Today, Tim Mackie and I begin a new series on the 10 Commandments, or as we'll call them, the 10 Words. Thanks for joining us. Here we go.

[Musical Break (2:39—2:44)]

Jon: Hello, Tim.

Tim: Mmm, Jon Collins, hello to you.

Jon: Today, we begin a new journey.

Tim: We do. It's an exciting day.

Jon: Yes.

Tim: I mean, these are always exciting days when we start a new series. So we are doing a series that has been long requested, both externally by the people in our audience, but also internally—a number—

Jon: By our team.

Tim: Of people on our team have been encouraging us to move towards this topic-theme in the Bible.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: We're starting it today.

Jon: Mhm. This is the 10 Commandments—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Which isn't a theme. The 10 Commandments is just—they're 10 laws—

[Laughter]

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: In the Torah.

Tim: That's right. Yep.

Jon: But you're also going to show us how the idea of the command of God is a theme.

Tim: That's right.

Jon: So we'll look at that.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: And then at—we're just going to go through the 10. And I kind of imagine—here's what I kind of expect. I expect all 10 of the commandments to themselves become little mini theme journeys.

Tim: Mhm. Yeah. Yep, ways of thinking about the story of the whole Bible.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yeah. Probably, the 10 Commandments rank up there among the most well-known things associated with the Bible.

Jon: Sure.

Tim: Even for people who haven't grown up around the Bible, they don't read the Bible, it's not a part of their family history, personal—whatever—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Journey. They probably know.

Jon: They know about the 10 Commandments.

Tim: There's this thing called the 10 Commandments—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And that it's in the Bible. Probably. And in terms of Christian culture, it ranks up there with, like, the Adam and Eve story, Jesus, the Sermon on the Mount, and the 10 Commandments. It, like—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Just kind of the basics.

Jon: But surprisingly, it's hard to remember all 10.

Tim: Oh, right. It's hard to remember 10 of anything.

[Laughter]

Jon: It kind of is, isn't it?

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Seven is a little easier, like, a phone num—phone numbers. But—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: But 10—right? There's some brain science principle at work—

Jon: Oh—

Tim: There, I think.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: But anyway, 10. It's hard to remember all 10. Do you want to do a pop quiz right now?

Jon: Oh—oh, boy.

Tim: Well, I just—you brought up this point.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Maybe you could help illustrate—

Jon: Whew—

Tim: It for us.

Jon: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

[Laughter]

Jon: I'll be a live illustration of how—

[Laughter]

Tim: Jon Collins, what—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Do you remember what the 10 Commandments are?

Jon: Mmm. Okay. Should I do it with “Thou shalt” or—

[Laughter]

Jon: “Do not”?

Tim: It's your choice.

Jon: “Thou shalt not—”

Tim: “Thou shalt not.”

Jon: See, I don't even know what the first one is.

[Transition]

Jon: Okay, spoiler alert: I didn't get all 10. I—I failed miserably. So we're not going to listen to me fumble through it. However, we thought, how would other people in the office do with a pop quiz of: What are the 10 Commandments?

[Transition]

Jon: So we're walking around the BibleProject office. Here is Dani, my mother, who takes care of our patrons.

Dani: Hi, Jon.

Jon: How many of the 10 Commandments do you think you know?

Dani: I hope I could say them all. "Do not lie. Do not steal. Do not covet. Do not commit adultery." Is that in there?

Jon: Yeah.

Dani: Uhm—man, I haven't read that for a while.

[Transition]

Jon: This is the sound stage, and Luke should be in here. Okay, man, how confident do you feel about listing the 10 Commandments?

Luke: Oh, shoot. No other gods before me. Sabbath day. Obey your parents. Shall not murder. Shall not steal. Is that? Oh, oh, oh, the Lord's name is vain, right? Isn't that one?

Jon: Mmm, yeah.

Luke: What am I missing?

Jon: Bearing false witness.

Luke: Oh, everyone's got to forget that one. Bearing false witness—who even knows what that—

Unknown: Yeah

Luke: Is?

[Laughter]

Jon: Nobody knows what it is.

[Transition]

Jon: This is Rose.

Rose: Hey, Jon.

Jon: So I'm going to set you up to fail. I'm sorry.

Rose: Oh, no.

[Laughter]

Jon: Oh, no. We're going to try to list as many of the 10 Commandments as you think you might know.

Rose: There's definitely "Thou shalt not kill." "Honor your parents." No idols. No bearing false witness. Did I say lying? Is that—

Jon: No. Lying—

Rose: There's no lying.

[Transition]

Jon: Sam. 10 Commandments.

Sam: Yeah.

Jon: Can you list them?

Sam: Uh—all 10?

Jon: You seem like a guy who knows them.

Sam: Really? I am a PK after all.

Jon: Yeah.

Sam: Uh—the G—Love your God—

Jon: God only.

Sam: Yeah. No idols.

Jon: Yeah.

Sam: Which, those two kind of seem like the same to me, but who know—

Jon: Ooh, bonus points.

Sam: Oh, really?

Jon: Some people think that's one command.

Sam: Oh, man, get me on this podcast more often.

[Laughter]

[Transition]

Jon: Alex, can I bug you for a sec? How many of the 10 Commandments do you think you know?

Alex: I think I can confidently do, like, four. I'm going to start with the easy one: "Do not murder." Don't want to kill anybody. "Do not covet. Honor your mother and father." No other gods before me.

Jon: Okay, there's the four confident ones.

Alex: "Don't commit adultery."

Jon: Yeah.

Alex: And blank from there.

Jon: Good job.

Alex: 50 percent. That is an F.

[Laughter]

[Transition]

Jon: Christopher.

Christopher: Hey, Jon.

Jon: Okay. 10 Commandments. How many do you think you know?

Christopher: I think I can get a passing grade on them.

Jon: Okay. Let's go.

Christopher: No other god before me.

Jon: Okay.

Christopher: No graven images. No name in vain. "Keep the Sabbath. Honor your father and mother."

Jon: Oh my goodness.

Christopher: "Do not murder. Do not commit adultery."

Jon: Okay.

Christopher: "Do not steal. Do not bear false witness."

Jon: Oh.

[Laughter]

Jon: Last one.

Christopher: Do not covet your neighbor's house.

[Unknown]: Ding ding ding.

Jon: Boom. Wow.

[Applause]

Christopher: Do I win anything?

Jon: Uh—yes. What is his prize?

Christopher: I want Levi's desk.

[Laughter]

Levi: You can have my desk.

Jon: He's unplugging his computer.

[Transition]

Tim: Okay. So here's the quick list again in order: No other gods before me—number one. Number two: "Don't make idols." Number three: "Don't carry the name of the Lord in vain." Number four: "Keep the Sabbath." Number five: "Honor your father and mother." Number six: "Don't murder." Number seven: "Don't commit adultery." Number eight: "Don't steal." Number nine: "Don't offer false testimony." And number 10: "Don't covet"—that is, "Don't desire what belongs to your neighbor."

Jon: Okay.

Tim: 10 Commandments.

Jon: Yeah. The big 10.

Tim: The big 10. Here's an interesting factoid. For the majority of the history of these commands being in the Bible of both Jewish and Christian traditions—for the majority of their history, they ar—were not called the 10 Commandments.

Jon: Oh.

Tim: That's a modern innovation—

Jon: Okay.

Tim: In the history of referring to them. The majority of their Christian history, as long as it's been in Greek, which is still how many followers of Jesus refer to them today—that's called the Decalogue, which comes from a compound Greek word, *deka*, which is "10," and then *logos*, which is "words," the 10 words.

Jon: 10 words.

Tim: Yeah. Decalogue.

Jon: That's cool.

Tim: Yep. The 10 words. And that is actually a Greek translation of the Hebrew way of referring to this, which in Hebrew is the '*aseret haddevarim*, which means the 10 words. And the reason why that title has lived on in both Jewish and Christian traditions is because it's how they're referred to in the Bible. That's actually what these—

Jon: The Bible calls them "the words"?

Tim: Yep. Yeah.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Totally. So just real quick—Exodus 34, verse 27: "The Lord said to Moses, 'Write down these words—'"and he's referring to the words that were spoken, like, the 10 words—"write down these words—*haddevarim*—for in accordance with these words, I've made a covenant with you and with Israel.' So Moses was with the Lord 40 days and 40 nights, didn't eat bread or drink water, and he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the 10 Words."

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: But it gets translated as—

Jon: The 10 Commandments.

Tim: In English, as "commandments." And so this is repeated—

Jon: But it's not technically 10 words. There's many words.

Tim: Oh, that's right. Okay. So in Hebrew, *davar* is the singular, *devarim*—"matters."

Jon: "Matters."

Tim: Yeah. It can refer to the spoken word, but can also refer—it's a meta word.

[Laughter]

Tim: It's referring to an abstract category of "thing."

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: It's kind of like our word "thing."

Jon: Okay. That's Interesting.

Tim: So the same word for “word” and “thing” is one word in Hebrew, just *davar*, a matter. There’s a separate word for command—

Jon: Okay.

Tim: *Mitsvah*. And so that’s why—it’s a bit of a misnomer to call them the 10 Commandments. And—

Jon: But they are commandments.

Tim: But they are commandments, so it’s not, like, wrong.

[Laughter]

Jon: Okay.

Tim: But I think we miss something.

Jon: Okay. I don’t see what we’re missing.

Tim: Okay. Well, le—let’s talk about that a little bit.

Jon: All right.

Tim: So first of all, let’s just note, in—remember, in the history of English Bible translation, the pioneer is John Wycliffe in the, like, 14th century.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So we’re like in the mid to late 1300s.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: It was the Wycliffe Bible that made that move—

Jon: Okay.

Tim: To translate it as “commandment.” So the difference is important though, because every *mitsvah* in Hebrew, command, is a word—is—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Spoken word.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: But not every word—

[Laughter]

Tim: Is a command, right?

Jon: Su—not everything that God says is a command—or not everything—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Someone says is a command?

Tim: Both.

Jon: Right.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: We speak a lot of words, not all of them are commands. So I think just—it's interesting that these 10 words are referred to—when—the first time they're referred to as a bundle—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: As a thing—

Jon: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Tim: They're referred to as *davar*, which means that they're words spoken in the context of a covenant partnership. And as we're going to see, the 10 Commandments don't come out of nowhere. They occur at a moment in God's relationship with a group of people that he invites into a covenant partnership. But the point is is that the—the word used to describe these 10 things isn't "command," it's "words." Words spoken from one person to another in the context of making a partnership. Now, those words are going to be about the terms of how we relate. Like, when a couple's getting married, and they say their vows—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: To each other, those are words, and they're binding on each other's behavior, right? When I said my vows to my wife, like in our wedding, those are words that I was putting on myself.

Jon: We don't call them the marriage commands.

Tim: No, we call them vows.

Jon: We call them vows.

Tim: Things that I—I'm going to do. Now, actually, it's a little different, because in my wedding, I said what I was going to do.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And then she said what she was going to do.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: She didn't tell me what to do—

[Laughter]

Tim: And I didn't tell her what to do.

Jon: Right.

Tim: And that is what the 10 Words are, is God—

Jon: Is God telling Israel—

Tim: Telling Israel what to do.

Jon: What to do.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: And God doesn't say in that moment what God's going to do, though he does in the many words around the 10. So I'm not saying "commands" is wrong. I—I just want to introduce this little point. They're not referred to as the 10 commands in the Bible.

Jon: You're saying there's something significant that the Bible itself doesn't call them commands. It calls them words.

Tim: It doesn't call them commands in the first context of them being named.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: And we're going to flesh out why "command" is one way you can refer to these words.

Jon: But they're introduced as words.

Tim: Yep.

Jon: And that language gives you, it sounds like, a little bit of freedom to step back and then ask yourself: What's the context for these words?

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: What's the story we're in?

Tim: Totally. The 10 words were spoken at a time and a place in a context. And a constant interplay we're going to be seeing is that these 10 words were seen and intended to have a broad universal invitation to all people of all places to think about the will and purpose of God for a human life.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: But at the same time, these words appeared out of a moment in a story with God and a particular people at a time and place in history. And that's also a crucial part of what they mean.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So they're not 10 divine commands dropped out of heaven for all people of all time. They were spoken at a moment in time in the context of a relationship.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: But what God said in that moment with that one people actually has immense wisdom to offer all people of all times. So maybe what I'm after here is that these 10 words occur within a specific context. And to really get their full significance, I think means honoring that story—

Jon: Okay.

Tim: And seeing what they mean there first—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: I guess.

Jon: Yeah. I think I'm also hearing that by using this new language, it's an opportunity to think about them in a fresh way. When you talk about them as commands, it's easy to think about them as just a checklist. But when you talk about them with this new language of the 10 words, now you're open to thinking about them in a new way, perhaps a way—a way of being, a way of relating to each other and to the God of the universe. It's just an invitation to something a little grander.

Tim: Yeah. So it might feel new. My point is that this is actually the oldest way—is to call them the 10 Words.

Jon: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Tim: Like, that's actually what God calls them.

Jon: Yeah.

[Laughter]

Tim: And it's what the—the narrator of the Torah calls them. But for us, it's new. And I guess maybe it's also the dynamic of translation that we've talked about—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: How to translate ancient biblical texts in other languages into modern languages. And that's a dynamic process.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And sometimes what have become familiar ways of referring or talking about things in the Bible—things can become unfamiliar.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Or as some coworkers—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Of ours say, familiarity kills wonder, and that unknowing is the way back.

[Laughter]

Jon: Unknowing is the way back.

Tim: Yeah. And unknowing sometimes means finding other words to translate old biblical concepts so we hear them in a new way.

Jon: And you want us to unknow these 10 commandments in a way.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: These are very familiar.

Tim: And I don't want to overstate this, because they are—one way to think about them is God commanding a group of people and telling them what to do.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: That is one way to think about it.

Jon: “Hey, everyone, stop killing each other.”

Tim: Yeah. So how about this? Let's just let that point be.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And let's see if it—

Jon: Bears any fruit later?

Tim: Bears any fruit throughout the conversation.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: But the first title for these 10 things within the Bible itself—

Jon: Before it got rebranded.

Tim: Before it got rebranded—

[Laughter]

Tim: By John Wycliffe in the English translation tradition as 10 Commandments, is the 10 Words.

[Musical Break (17:26—17:29)]

[Transition]

Jon: Did you know that the Bible doesn't call them the 10 Commandments?

Dani: I didn't know that.

Jon: Yeah, it's a mistranslation.

Dani: Oh my goodness. So what's the real thing?

Jon: It's the 10 Words.

Dani: 10 words. Wow, I got a word for you.

[Transition]

Jon: Did you know that they're not introduced as the 10 Commandments in the Bible?

Sam: I didn't know that.

Jon: Do you know what they were introduced as?

Sam: Uhm—

Jon: Take a guess.

Sam: God's greatest hits.

Jon: 10—

Sam: Uh—

Jon: The 10 greatest hits?

Sam: Yeah. The 10 life lessons.

Jon: The 10—it's the—

Sam: No—

Jon: It's the—

Sam: I have no idea.

Jon: It's the 10 words. They're called the 10 words.

Sam: Whoa, wow.

Jon: Yeah.

Sam: Okay.

[Transition]

Jon: Did you know that the Bible doesn't introduce them as the 10 Commandments? What do you think it is?

Luke: The 10 Articles of Confederation.

[Laughter]

Luke: Uhm—

[Transition]

Tim: One unique thing about this list of 10 words is that they are repeated two times in the Torah, in the first five books of the Hebrew Bible. The list of 10 is found in Exodus chapter 20, verses one to 17. And then it's also found in Deuteronomy chapter five. So remember, Deuteronomy is Moses' speech to the second generation that came out of Egypt. And he's actually reminding them the significance of the moment that their parents experienced, but they were kids.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So you know—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: He's kind of like reminding them of this thing that—that happened. Do you find—we're both in the child-raising years. Our kids are in—into the teenage—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Era.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Do you find yourself reminding them of things—

[Laughter]

Tim: From their early childhood that they have already forgotten?

Jon: Oh, yeah. I was just talking to my oldest about his kindergarten experience. And I realized, like, he had largely forgotten a lot of it.

Tim: Yeah, isn't that interesting? I—

Jon: And—

Tim: It's only been—

Jon: I mean, I've forgotten about my kindergarten—

[Laughter]

Jon: Experience.

Tim: Yeah, to—totally.

Jon: But I didn't realize how early that begins to fade from—

Tim: Yes.

Jon: Your memory.

Tim: I think that's what I'm drawing attention to.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: I've noticed that too. Certainly, I don't remember vast amounts of my childhood, but I was really struck by how early that process begins—

Jon: Right.

Tim: Like you just said.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So anyway, Moses is reminding the children of the Exodus generation what they experienced when they were all at Mount Sinai—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Th—three months later. So he repeats the 10 Commandments—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Almost verbatim, but not identical.

Jon: Oh.

Tim: So we'll—we'll talk about that—

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Along the way. What's interesting is they're—remember, they're referred to within the Bible by God and the narrator as the 10. But the narrator or God, when God says them in Exodus 20, doesn't go through—doesn't say number one, the first command, the second command—kind of like the seven days of Genesis that each end with—

Jon: Oh, yeah.

Tim: Day one, day two, day three.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: The numbering isn't given—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Explicitly.

Jon: You got to do it yourself.

Tim: You got to do it yourself. And incidentally, it's kind of hard.

[Laughter]

Jon: Yeah, we've—and we talked about this too.

Tim: Yes. So some traditions, Jewish and Christian, have taken the “Don't have any other gods” and “Don't make idols” as a twin expression of a single command.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: But if you do that, you have to go find nine more. And there is something very interesting. The last command, “Do not covet,” the verb “do not covet” is repeated twice in the—

Jon: In that command?

Tim: Yeah. Yep. That's right.

Jon: And—

Tim: And it's either don't covet your neighbor's wife—

Jon: Uh-huh.

Tim: And do not covet your neighbor's house or donkey or—

Jon: Ah—

Tim: Ox or—

Jon: So you—

Tim: Like, the verb's fr—

Jon: Can split those into two?

Tim: Right.

Jon: All right.

Tim: So if you take no other gods and no idols as one, you can actually find nine more things in the list.

Jon: You can split covet into two.

Tim: Nine more—yep.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: That's right. Or you can take no other gods and no idols as separate, as one and two, and then you just bundle together the two repetitions of "Do not covet" as a single command. All that to say is there's actually 11 verbs—

Jon: Oh.

Tim: 11 sentences.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: But they're called the 10. Okay, so that's interesting. Here's another thing that sets them apart, actually, within the story itself. There's, as we know, hundreds of commands that God speaks to Israel at Mount Sinai. These 10 are the first. These 10 are also the only ones that are said to be written on the two tablets.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: The famous stone tablets.

Jon: Okay. I've wondered about that. Like, are the rest of the commands written on other tablets?

Tim: Right.

Jon: We don't know.

Tim: No, what we're told is that they were written on a scroll.

Jon: Oh—

Tim: Yep.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Like, separate.

Jon: Ah.

Tim: So there's something about these 10 that are—

Jon: Put on stone.

Tim: Set apart. Mhm, they're etched on stone. And interestingly, they are etched on stone by the finger of God.

Jon: Oh, yeah.

Tim: It's very interesting. So back to Exodus 34, where Moses was up on the mountain 40 days and 40 nights, and what we get was: "And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the 10 Words." So what we heard was: Moses was there with Yahweh 40 days and 40 nights, and he wrote on the tablets.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: What is so interesting then is when you get to another moment in the story, and it's when Moses goes down from the mountain when the people have made the golden calf.

Jon: Breaking the first two—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Commandments.

Tim: Yeah. That's right. Exodus 32.15: "Moses went down the mountain. The two tablets were in his hand—"

Jon: Okay.

Tim: "Tablets written on their two sides, on the front and on the back."

Jon: Double-sided.

Tim: Very interesting. So that little detail has ha—spawned a whole history of discussion of: How are the 10 distributed on the tablets?

[Laughter]

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Isn't that interesting.

Jon: Oh, there's no easy way to do that.

[Laughter]

Jon: If you just have two tablets single-sided—

Tim: Right.

Jon: Five and five.

Tim: Five and five.

Jon: Easy. Done.

Tim: Right. But we're explicitly told—

[Laughter]

Tim: It wasn't five and five on each—

Jon: Yeah, interesting.

Tim: Because they're on front and back.

Jon: Okay

Tim: And so you're like, "Is it two on the front? Is it three on the back?" And the—so it could be that it's all 10 on each.

Jon: Oh, oh. You got a copy.

Tim: Yes.

Jon: You got one tablet—

Tim: Yep.

Jon: With all 10, one tablet with all 10.

Tim: Yep. So it could be that.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: And there's—it's a rabbit hole—there's precedent for thinking that.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: And it—it makes sense there's, like—

Jon: It's the old copy-and-paste—

Tim: Yeah, there's, like, Israel's copy—

Jon: Ancient version.

Tim: And there's God's copy.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: What we're next told, however—actually, this is 32:16: "Those tablets were the work of God. And the writing was the writing of God engraved on the tablets." So that's actually saying, somehow these tablets were uniquely inscribed. And this links back to the end of Exodus 31 when Yahweh finished speaking with Moses on Mount Sinai. "He gave Moses the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone written by the finger of God." Now, what does that mean?

Jon: Written by the finger of God.

Tim: This—this is a great mystery.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: But the story is inviting us to see these 10 as, like, a uniquely pure expression of the will of God for his people—so much so that it's unmediated. I mean, Moses is the one carrying it down, right?

Jon: Yeah. Right. That Moses didn't carve it in—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: The finger of God—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Carved it in.

Tim: Divine agency was uniquely intensified in the writing of these 10. Isn't that interesting.

Jon: Uh-huh.

Tim: I mean, th—this is probably the thing that sets the 10 apart the most.

Jon: Okay. All right.

Tim: You're really hearing a pristine, pure statement of the will of God in these 10 in a way that's different from all the other hundreds. Remember, we've had discussions—like when we're talking about Deuteronomy, and there'll—there'll be these laws, and it's like, "Well, if a guy—"

Jon: Uh-huh.

Tim: "Is fighting with another guy and they stumble and fall, and then they end up, like, hitting a pregnant woman who's—"

Jon: Uh-huh.

Tim: "Sitting by, here's what you do."

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So like, all of that assumes: People are screwed up, they're going to do terrible things to each other, and what does God's will look like as a form of damage control in an already bad situation? But the 10 commands are—kind of work upstream of all that. And they're just—they're working at almost the source of human reflection about right and wrong and good and bad.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And this finger of God description is, I think, trying to draw our attention to that.

Jon: Yeah. I see that. There's something pretty grand about them that sets them apart. It's a shorter list that feels like it gives a pretty complete picture—

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: Of—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: What it means—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: To live in right relationship with God and other people.

Tim: Mhm. That's right.

Jon: Now, that doesn't mean Israel's not going to need any other laws to kind of dig in deeper.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: But there's something about the 10.

Tim: Something about the 10. And so think about what they cover. They cover the human relationship to God—Don't have any other gods.

Jon: Yeah. "Carry his name."

Tim: Uhm—yep. "Carry his name. Don't worship idols. Keep the Sabbath because the Sabbath belongs to God."

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Wh—we'll—we'll get there—

Jon: All right.

Tim: Later—later on in these conversations. But the Sabbath is something that belongs to God, and you're doing right by God—

Jon: When you keep it.

Tim: When you keep it. So the first four are all explicitly in relationship to God. Five is this interesting hinge. "Honor your father and mother." So you're doing—you're relating to humans.

Jon: Your father and mother.

Tim: Yeah. But then it says, "so that life will go well for you in the land." And as you read on to the Torah, it's God who will give goodness and life to the people—

Jon: Oh—

Tim: Of Israel and—

Jon: I see.

Tim: The land.

Jon: So that could have read: “Honor God—”

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: “So that life will go well for you in the land.”

Tim: Exactly. It’s this interesting hinge where the way that you honor God is by honoring father and mother. That’s an—it’s an interesting hinge. You—

Jon: Okay. First five.

Tim: So the first four are how you relate to God and then the fifth is this hinge where how you relate to God is bound up with how you relate to humans—

Jon: Oh—

Tim: Specifically the two humans who birthed you into the world.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And then it pivots. The last set of five are about how you relate to your neighbor, other humans.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So: “Don’t murder. Don’t commit adultery. Don’t steal. Don’t offer false witness.” And, “Don’t desire what belongs to your neighbor.” So what’s not covered in the 10?

[Laughter]

Tim: Like, really, what area of human relationships isn’t covered?

Jon: You’re saying, if we came up with any sort of scenario of, like, something going awry—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: In human relationship—

Tim: You could bring it back to one—

Jon: Or in relationship with God—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: You can say, “Oh, well, that’s because of one of these 10.”

Tim: Yeah. Essentially.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Maybe I'll just throw that out there—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: To say, that would be a cool thing to meditate on as you go for a run or a walk or hang out with some friends.

Jon: What about road rage?

[Laughter]

Tim: Ah, okay. That's fantastic. Ah, I think if we have learned how to meditate on the commands from Jesus, he would say that falls under the wisdom contained in "Do not murder."

Jon: When you are raging at someone on the road and your hatred for them is spilling up out of you—

Tim: Yeah, yeah. Verbal abuse.

Jon: Yeah. Which could turn into the fist—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: The finger—

Tim: Yeah, totally.

Jon: The shouting—

Tim: Yeah. Yeah.

Jon: That's—

Tim: That's right.

Jon: That's a type of contempt.

Tim: Yeah, okay—

Jon: That's a type of contempt.

Tim: S—yeah, in fact, here—I was going to save this for later, but I'll bring it up now—

Jon: Okay.

Tim: I was really helped by an excellent book by Hebrew Bible scholar Patrick Miller that's called *The Ten Commandments*. It was written near the end of a long, very productive career as a—

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Hebrew Bible scholar. And he saved his book on the 10 Commandments for last.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: It's rad. It's a rad little book. In his introduction, he names kind of the persistent challenging issues that Jewish and Christian communities have had in interpreting the 10 commands and con—making them relevant throughout history. And one of those is noticing that the commands have both an explicit meaning, but then each of them also contains an implicit meaning. So some commands are negative. They're prohibitions. "Don't do X. Don't make idols."

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: "Don't have any other gods. Don't murder. Don't commit adultery." But some of them are positive. So: "Do honor your parents." Some of them have both. "Do remember the Sabbath. Don't do any work on the Sabbath."

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So what that invites you to begin thinking is that any negative command also implies a positive. And then every positive command implies a negative, as it were. So "Not worshiping other gods—"the inverse of that is "Do give your total allegiance—"right—"to God." So "Don't worship other gods" seems very clear and focused—

Jon: Uh-huh.

Tim: But once you flip it, it's like a wide-open world—

Jon: Oh.

Tim: Where—

Jon: What does it mean to give your allegiance to God?

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: That's a bigger—

[Laughter]

Tim: Way bigger.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Yes. So “Do not murder.” “Do make it one of your main concerns to protect the well-being of your neighbor—protect the life and well-being.” Which is way more open-ended. Isn’t that interesting?

Jon: That’s if you—that’s if you invert it.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So when you go from negative to positive, the positive just, like—shwoo—really opens it wide up. When you go from positive to negative, it usually goes from general to specific.

Jon: Makes it feel very simple.

Tim: Yeah. So it’s just saying that the commands have an implicit and explicit meaning. And you were—we’re pondering this question—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: What area of human life is not covered—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: By them? And in a way, once you flip—

Jon: I see.

Tim: From explicit to implicit—

Jon: When you allow yourself to flip—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: “Do not murder” into: “How do I respect—”

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: “And love the image of God in others, which is the opposite of destroying them?”

Tim: Their life. Yeah.

[Laughter]

Tim: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Jon: Now you're in a—you're in a much grander territory.

Tim: Mhm. Yeah. "Do not commit adultery—"that is, taking advantage of and ruining someone else's covenant partnership of marriage. So we sh—you flip it. "Do proactively support, encourage, create a culture where marriage covenant partnerships can thrive and be healthy." Isn't that interesting to flip that one?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Once you do that, all of a sudden the 10 cover almost—

[Laughter]

Jon: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Tim: Everything.

[Musical Break (32:38—32:42)]

[Transition]

Jon: What do you think the difference between a commandment and a word is?

Dani: A word sounds much more like it's sage. It's wisdom. It's intentional to live by. It has a deeper reason than commandments. "Do this. Don't do that." You know, kind of pointing your finger at you.

[Transition]

Sam: It makes it a lot more simple and less like right or wrong structure attached to it. I don't know. Less of that authority word that we kind of put when we say "laws," "commandments." That's kind of a scary, intense word.

Jon: Command is a scarier word than a word.

Sam: Yeah. Oh, yeah. For sure.

Jon: Word's an inviting word.

Sam: Yeah, that's a good way of saying it.

[Transition]

Jon: When you think of them as the 10 words, what do you think about?

Unknown: I think about 10 authoritative sayings that are meant to guide and impact, maybe what Israel is going through.

[Transition]

**Unknown**: Around that part of the Bible, it often feels very lawful. Like, "Here are the laws you have to follow." To change that mindset of: it's not necessarily a law, but words to follow.

Jon: Yeah.

**Unknown**: It's like a shift.

[Transition]

**Unknown**: It feels just as important, but less like I'm following a set of rules, but more of a guideline for how I live my life.

[Transition]

Tim: Within the Hebrew Bible, these 10 are brought up regularly. So Hosea, for example—the prophet Hosea chapter four—it reads, “Children of Israel, hear the word of Yahweh. Yahweh has an indictment against the inhabitants of the land. There’s no faithfulness. There’s no loyalty. There’s no knowing God in this land.” So the covenant has been violated. “There’s swearing and lying. There’s murdering. There’s stealing. There’s adultery. It’s all breaking out, and bloodshed follows bloodshed.” So that’s a little short list right there.

Jon: He lists what, four or five of them?

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: It’s—yep. Yep. Swearing and lying are bound up in “Don’t offer false testimony.”

Jon: Oh, okay.

Tim: It’s the same ideas. Same words for murder, steal, adultery.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: In fact, those three are next to each other in the—in the 10. Jeremiah, a couple—century and a half later after Hosea, is in the Jerusalem temple haranguing—

Jon: Haranguing?

Tim: Yeah. Yeah, I—I picked up that word recently.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: It’s like—

Jon: What does that word mean?

Tim: Uh—it’s kind of like you’re critiquing someone—

Jon: Uh-huh.

Tim: In a kind of louder way to get other people’s attention in on the criticism. Haranguing.

Jon: Haranguing.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Okay.

[Laughter]

Jon: You're criticizing loudly to get people to participate.

Tim: Yeah. You want to create some peer pressure—

[Laughter]

Tim: Around the situation.

Jon: That's a good word.

Tim: Yeah, haranguing.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So he's haranguing specifically the leaders of Israel that are in and around the temple. And he says, "You are relying on deceitful words without benefit. 'Will you go on stealing? Will you murder? Will you commit adultery? Will you swear falsely? Will you make offerings to the Baal? Will you go after other gods whom you haven't known and then come stand before me at this temple, which is called by my name and say, 'Yeah, we're good to go'? We're safe doing all this stuff. Yahweh is good with us.'" So you can see the logic of how he's—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Operating here.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: The point is is that the prophets take the 10 Commandments as kind of this essential base—

Jon: It's like base camp.

Tim: Of the covenant partnership.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: How do you know if Israel's doing well or not—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: In maintaining faithfulness to the covenant partnership?

Jon: Right. “How are you doing with the 10?”

Tim: “How are you doing with the 10?”

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Like, “Let’s not even talk about the hundreds.”

[Laughter]

Tim: “Let’s just talk about the 10.”

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yeah. Jesus himself referenced the 10 in arguably the most important condensed form of moral reflection Jesus has on, like, what is good and what is bad in the Sermon on the Mount. And we actually spent many months—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Working through these sayings. So “You’ve heard it said, ‘Don’t commit murder.’” And Jesus says, “That’s right.” And then he says, “And I say to you, whoever has road rage—”

[Laughter]

Tim: “At his neighbor is guilty—”right—“Of breaking one of the 10.” He quotes adultery in the same way. There’s that interesting story when a wealthy guy comes to Jesus and says, “Wh—hey, Jesus, what do I—”

Jon: Oh, yeah.

Tim: “Need to do to inherit life of the age to come?” And Jesus says, “Wh—what di— why are you asking me this question?”

[Laughter]

Tim: “Why are you asking me about what is good? Listen, there is one who is good, the source of all goodness—”implied, my father—“But if you really need me to tell you something, I’ll tell you, keep the commandments.” Now he doesn’t even say the 10. He just says, “Keep the commands.”

Jon: Which could be all of them.

Tim: Yeah. That’s why the guy says, “Well, which ones?”

[Laughter]

Tim: And Jesus says, “Don’t murder. Don’t commit adultery. Don’t steal. Don’t bear false witness.”

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: “Honor your father and mother.”

Jon: “Why don’t we start with those, the big—the big 10.”

Tim: Yeah. So he—he quotes six of the 10. No, excuse me, five. That’s five.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: He quotes five.

Jon: And he focuses on the human-human relationship ones.

Tim: Yes. Yeah, he quotes on the hinge with “Honor your father and mother,” and then on the—the second set. Yeah. So clearly, for Jesus, this is also base camp.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Like, all reflection about what is good and not good for Israel—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Needs to go back to the 10. And just in case we’re tempted to think this is just an Israel thing—

Jon: Uh-huh.

Tim: The Apostles, you know, that Jesus commissioned also regularly referred to the 10. Paul the Apostle does this, like in Romans—in Romans chapter 13. He’ll say, “Listen, these commands—don’t commit adultery, don’t murder, don’t steal, don’t covet—those all are valid.” And then he says, “If there is any other commandment, it is summed up in

this statement, “You will love your neighbor as yourself.” So he wants to go from the hundreds to the 10—

Jon: Yeah, to the one.

Tim: To the one.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yeah. Which is a—

Jon: Which is what Jesus did to them.

Tim: A move that Jesus pulled.

Jon: Yeah, okay.

Tim: Yeah, that’s right. Yeah. So Paul quotes “Honor your father and mother” when he’s writing to children in the house churches of Ephesus. That’s interesting. The letter to the Ephesians. My point is just this: The 10 have a vital foundational status—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Both within the Hebrew Bible and in the teaching of Jesus and in the teaching of the Apostles. So for what it means for followers of Jesus today to be looking at all of scripture as a unified story that leads to Jesus, the 10 are important. They’re an important home base for ethical, moral reflection. And they’ve played a key role in church history in teaching people, like, what is good.

Jon: So when you think of them as just commands, it’s really focusing on: I just want to check these off the list. You know: I want to make sure I’m doing them. It’s kind of like the rich young ruler just being like, “I want to make sure I got the checklist done.”

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: And when—when you think of them as words, this thing that you started showing us about: You can invert them—

Tim: Yeah, flip them over.

Jon: Flip them over and you can mine them, and you can find this kind of deep wisdom in them—like, calling it a word kind of gives it more space for that—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Kind of move.

Tim: You have to have a wider—yeah. Yep. Wider significance. Uhm—

Jon: And then you can see what Jesus is doing then.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: “You’ve heard it said, ‘Do not commit murder.’” If you think of that as a command, then that seems pretty cut and dry. “Let’s think of it as something bigger.”

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: “Let’s think of it as a word.”

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: “And let’s flip it over. When you call someone a fool, when you hate someone—”

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: “Aren’t you breaking that command as well?” And suddenly—yeah—these become base camp.

Tim: Yep. Yeah. That’s right. The 10 function as this kind of, like, foundational statement of immense expansive wisdom about what is the good. In Jesus’ mind, these 10 show you the way to the life of God’s new creation. When the guy says—

Jon: Oh, yeah.

Tim: “What must I do—”

Jon: “To inherit eternal life?”

Tim: “To inherit—”yeah—“life of—”

Jon: “Of the age.”

Tim: “Of God’s new age of infinite life and abundance?” “What’s the kind of life patterns and habits that lead to that outcome that’ll allow me to participate in that?”

Jon: It’s so funny because you could think of the 10 as, like, simplifying life. But the way Jesus thinks about it is it’s—

Tim: Oh, yeah.

Jon: Just so full.

Tim: Right. Okay, so we didn’t finish that story, but in Jesus’ mind, meditating on the 10 should have—

Jon: It should just—

Tim: Led this guy to realize he was—

Jon: He's—

Tim: Trusting in his stuff too much. And you're like, "Whoa, how'd you get there from the 10?"

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And then as he goes on in the Sermon on the Mount, we find out that how you relate to your stuff, which he calls *mammon*, the thing in which you trust, is in competition to your loyalty to God. And so all of a sudden the first command, "Don't have any other gods," in Jesus' mind, should have led this guy—

Jon: To realize, "I need to get rid of some of my stuff."

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: "In fact, I need to get rid of all my stuff."

Tim: "All my stuff." And in our minds, we might go, "Whoa, how'd you get there—"

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: "From the first command?" But I think that's what it means to see the 10 as—as the core. It's the diamond with—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So many facets. It's the jewel that every time you flip it, turn it from negative to positive, positive to negative, you look at these 10 facets—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Of the diamond, and you will see the whole of a human life unfold out of these 10. That seems to be how Jesus viewed these commands, and he's not alone in that.

Jon: We've also used the metaphor of base camp a few times—

Tim: Oh, yeah.

Jon: And it's a cool metaphor.

Tim: Oh, okay. Generations of climbers have tried all the approaches—

Jon: Ah.

Tim: To summit this thing, but this base camp, it reflects the wisdom of the generations.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: The best way to the top—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: “You really want to get to the top?”

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: “You need to start from here.”

Jon: “You want to inherit eternal life?”

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: “Start here.”

Tim: “Start from here. Not over there, not on the other side.”

Jon: But—but you don’t end up here. You don’t end up with just, like, checking off the 10. You end up in a pretty cosmic place at the end.

Tim: Yeah. True. Yeah.

Jon: You’re giving away all your stuff.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah.

Jon: Or you’re—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: You’re doing something pretty radical likely.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So again, j—maybe just we could conclude by flipping each of these. When the guy says, “What must I do to obtain eternal life—” what he’s asking is, “What are the kinds of human behaviors—”

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: “That participate in or that anticipate what kind of world God has in store in a fully restored creation?” What’s the kind of life? Like, what kind of lives will we lead? So—well, we won’t kill each other. Okay. But flip it over and you’re like, “What would a creation look like where the life of every creature, one of the central focuses of every life, was to protect and value and support every other life?” Yeah, the 10 Commandments are a way of thinking about the life that we will lead in the new creation.

Jon: Yeah. The 10 Words.

Tim: The 10 Words.

[Transition]

Jon: Thanks for listening to this episode of BibleProject podcast. Next week, we'll continue in the study of the 10 Commandments. Now, before we go directly to the 10 Commandments and read them one by one, we're going to do a short study on the theme of the commands of God. What does it mean to listen to God's voice? What does it mean for God to tell humans what to do? And it just so happens that the first time God instructs humans about anything is on page one of the Bible, but it's not called a command.

Tim: "Be fruitful. Do multiply. Do fill the land. Subdue it and rule it." But they are called blessings, words of blessing. So the first directives God gives to the humans are essentially: Imitate the divine life. So the first time God tells anybody what to do, it's a blessing.

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