

How Does God Write?

Taking a Second Look at Torah

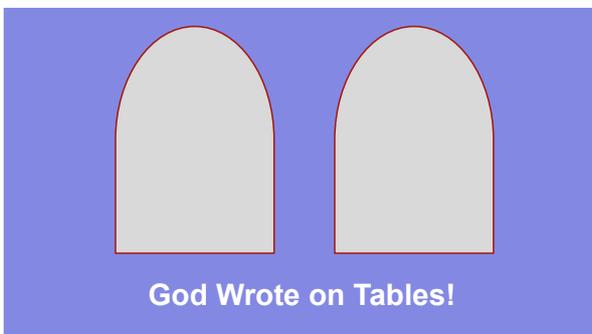
Based on the insights of Moshe Kline

How does God write? It is probably not a question you have ever been asked before! But if you *were* asked this question, how would you answer? If God *was* to write, how *would* he write?

Well, we actually know the answer to that question, or at least, one answer. God did actually write, at least once, in space and time. We all know the story—on Mt Sinai, when God met with Moses in the fire and thick cloud, with thunder and lightning, earthquake and trumpet sound (Exod 19:18–19; 20:18). How did God write then?

Torah on Tables

He wrote on two tablets of stone, “tablets of stone inscribed with the finger of God” (Exod 31:18). We have known this from childhood, but have we ever stopped to consider the significance? God wrote on tables! Two tablets of stone side by side. (By the way, the stones were probably rectangular. The curved top edge emerged in medieval art).



But why *two* tablets of stone? Why not one tablet? It certainly *would* have been possible to write the ten commandments in Hebrew on *one* stone, and Hebrew is also shorter than the English! (And another aside, the term “ten commandments” is actually “the ten words” in the Hebrew (Ex 34:28; Deut 4:13; 10:4; עֲשֵׂרֶת הַדְּבָרִים). They are also given the name “Decalogue,” from the Latin for “ten sayings”).

And another question: how many *sides* did God write on? Look at what the NIV says in Exod 32:15–16 (and the JPS 1985 version says similarly)—it suggests that God wrote on *both sides* of the *two* tablets, so on four sides! Have we ever considered that?

The Talmud (Shabbat 104a) recognises this and says a miracle occurred—God’s writing went through the

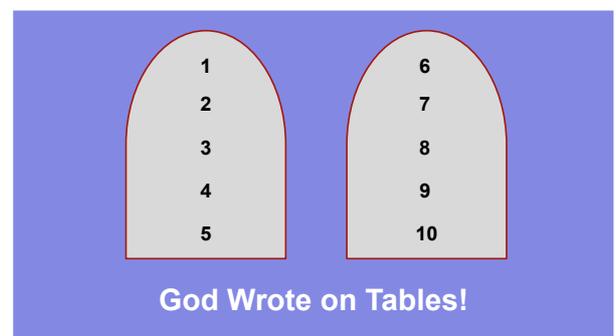
stone onto the other side, and yet it was possible to read it correctly on both sides. And not only that, but the two letters which are like complete circles, the samekh (ס) and final mēm (ם), the stone which was left separated in the centre of the letter, miraculously stayed in place!

The Ten Words (Decalogue)

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

NIV: Exod 32:15–16

And a final question is: how did God actually lay out the commandments on the two tablets? In what order or arrangement? Well we all know the answer to that, as we have watched Cecil B. DeMille’s film, *The Ten Commandments*! They were set out one to five and then six to ten.



But it is not just presented in films like this. Every Children’s Bible, and on the curtain or *parokhet* in front of the Ark with the Torah scroll, in many synagogues around the world, shows it similarly, laid out in numerical order on the two tablets. (There is a slight

variance in the Jewish listing, in that the first commandment in Rabbinic Judaism is considered as just the initial affirmative statement: “I am the LORD your God,” and then the next two (Protestant list) commands are counted as one, about God.

Mekhilta of R. Ishmael (ch 20.14) supports this. It asks:

“How were the Ten Commandments given?” And answers: “Five on one tablet and five on the other.” It also says that number one was written over against six, with an assumed relationship between them. However, the same passage says: “The sages say: (They were given) ten on one tablet and ten on the other,” so meaning the two tablets were a copy of each other, maybe like ANE treaties. What is right?



First we should take notice of the literal translation of Exod 32:15–16.

**The Ten Words (Decalogue)
On one Tablet, then the Other**

Moses turned and went down the mountain, with the two tablets in his hand tablets of testimony written from their two sides from this & from this they were written & the tablets work in God they & the writing writing in God it engraved on the tablets.

Exodus:32.15–16

The Hebrew uses a preposition “from” that suggests movement, “from their two sides, from this and from this *they* were written.” Also, the phrase “from this and from this” is used when talking of two things opposite each other, over against each other, such as the arms of a chair (on this arm and on this arm, 1Kings 10:19–20) and of the two sides of a valley or river (on this side and on this side, 1 Sam 14.4; Ezek 47:7, 12). So it seems most likely that the two tablets of stone were being considered over against each other, and that God’s



finger wrote the first commandment on the first tablet (the right one, as it’s Hebrew!) and then the second

commandment on the second tablet, and then moving back and forth alternately, “on this and on this.”

But, before we look at the implications of this, we must first face the challenge of the actual numbering of the ten! If we are going to divide the commands alternately, we need to know we have the correct listing. The list of

commands given in Exodus and Deuteronomy are not given with numbering, so readers are left to work it out for themselves. We have seen already that the Jewish numbering is slightly different from the Protestant numbering. And you may be surprised to know that Augustine, and so the Roman Catholic Church, also numbers the list differently! This time, the affirmation “I am the LORD your God” is seen as a preface, but they count the first two commands as a single “word” (similar to the Judaism list). The number ten is then achieved by considering the last two imperatives, “You shall not covet,” to be commandments nine and ten, and not as a single command, as Judaism and Protestantism does! The comparisons are shown here.

The List of Ten Words?

Commandment	Jewish Talmud	Augustine R. Catholic Lutheran	Orthodox, Protestant Christian
I am the Lord your God	1		preface
You shall have no other gods before me	2	1	1
You shall not make for yourself an idol			2
Do not take the name of the Lord in vain	3	2	3
Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy	4	3	4
Honour your father and mother	5	4	5
You shall not kill/murder	6	5	6
You shall not commit adultery	7	6	7
You shall not steal	8	7	8
You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour	9	8	9
You shall not covet your neighbour’s wife		9	
You shall not covet anything that belongs to your neighbour	10	10	10

Now, there is an interesting postscript to this story—the paragraph spacings shown in the Torah scroll, since before the time of the Dead Sea Scrolls (ca. 2nd century BCE), show paragraph spacing at the end of the commands, and in line with the Augustinian listing (Appendix 1). It may well be that this is how Augustine worked out his numbering, based on the spaces between the commandments. There are, in fact, two types of paragraph spacing, the large type (marked with a פ) and the small (marked with a ד). There is a large paragraph mark at the end of the second commandment (Protestant third commandment) and at the end of the tenth one (as expected).

The List of Ten Words?

Commandment	Jewish Talmud	Augustine R. Catholic Lutheran	Orthodox, Protestant Christian	Torah Scroll Paragraphs
I am the LORD your God	1		preface	
You shall have no other gods before me	2	1	1	1 [פ]
You shall not make for yourself an idol			2	
Do not take the name of the LORD in vain	3	2	3	2 [פ]
Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy	4	3	4	3 [פ]
Honour your father and mother	5	4	5	4 [פ]
You shall not kill/murder	6	5	6	5 [פ]
You shall not commit adultery	7	6	7	6 [פ]
You shall not steal	8	7	8	7 [פ]
You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour	9	8	9	8 [פ]
You shall not covet your neighbour’s wife		9		9 [פ]
You shall not covet anything that belongs to your neighbour	10	10	10	10 [פ]

So, although the paragraph indications were probably not part of the original text, they certainly indicate the most ancient tradition, and most importantly, they indicate that the first commandment includes both “Have no other gods” and “Make no idols,” and that the last two parallel commands use the repetition “You shall not covet You shall not covet” Why the rabbis did not later stay with these paragraph indications is not clear.

We can now put all our answers together, that God wrote on tables, and that he wrote “the ten words” alternately, in pairs, as shown below (a larger version is in Appendix 2).

<p style="text-align: center;">1A</p> <p>I the LORD am your God who brought you out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods beside Me. You shall not make for yourself a sculptured image, or any likeness, of what is in the heavens above, or on the earth below, or in the waters under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them. For I the LORD your God am an impassioned God, visiting the guilt of the fathers upon the children, upon the third and fourth generations of those who reject Me, but showing kindness to the thousandth generation of those who love Me and keep My commandments.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">1B</p> <p>You shall not swear falsely by the name of the LORD your God; for the LORD will not clear one who swears falsely by His name.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">2A</p> <p>Remember the sabbath day and keep it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God: you shall not do any work—you, your son, or daughter, your male or female slave, or your cattle, or the stranger who is within your settlements. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth and sea, and all that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">2B</p> <p>Honour your father and thy mother, that you may long endure on the land which the LORD your God is giving you.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">3A</p> <p>You shall not murder.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">3B</p> <p>You shall not commit adultery.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">4A</p> <p>You shall not steal.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">4B</p> <p>You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">5A</p> <p>You shall not covet your neighbour's house;</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">5B</p> <p>You shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or his male or female slave, or his ox, or his ass, or anything that is your neighbour's</p>

Now, you ask, what is the significance of this? The commandments have not been changed in any way, and the reader reads them in the same sequence, whether written in the linear form or in this tabulated form, so surely there is no difference? But there is a conceptual difference. God's finger inscribed the stone of the first tablet with commandment 1, and then the stone of the second tablet with commandment 2, and the reader now follows the finger of God, and reads them and experiences them *as a pair*. They are placed visually on the tablets in parallel with each other, and the implication is that they are *conceptually related*! God's truth is not uni-dimensional but two-dimensional, not monocular but binocular, as if heard in stereo.

This is indicated to the listener or reader by literary indicators in the reading. The most obvious is the one we have failed to see! It is hidden in plain sight! Our Western/Greek paradigm for reading has prevented us from reading and interpreting the repetitions correctly. We have read the repeating “You shall not covet” as one command, said in two different ways. But in Biblical Hebrew, repetition is used to indicate to the hearer or reader that these two things are meant to be considered *in parallel*. They are not repetition for repetition's sake, but indicating *parallel truths* or concepts. Look at them carefully. The first (5A) says “you shall not covet your neighbour's house” and the second (5B) says, “You shall not covet your neighbour's wife, male or female slave, his ox, his ass, or anything that is your neighbour's.” Now, because we have a modern viewpoint, we read “our neighbour's

house” in the same way as we read “our neighbour's things.” But if we read this in a near-eastern context, we recognise that the neighbour's *house* does not mean a building, a “thing,” but the neighbour's house-hold, his family line, his dynasty. Like when we speak of “the house of David,” we don't mean his palace, but his dynastic line! Can you see how conceptually different these two commands are? You shall not covet your neighbour's *house* (his family line, his ancestry) is set over against your neighbour's *things* (his property and possessions). Very different indeed, though complementary, of course. Two sides of the coin in regard to coveting—my inner passions in regard to my neighbour!

Take another example, at the other end of the spectrum, the first pair of commands (1A and 1B). There is so much to consider in the first one (1A), but just notice the subject—“I am the LORD your God . . . for I the LORD your God am an impassioned God” It all about Yahweh and his nature. And the second one (1B): “You shall not swear falsely by the name of the LORD your God; for the LORD will not clear one who swears falsely by His name.” Note the repetition of “Yahweh,” and of “his name.”

So, the first pair of commands, in parallel with each other, are about God's *Nature* and his *Name*. Notice next, the relationship of the first pair and the last pair: the first pair are about the passionate deity, Yahweh, and the last pair are about passionate humanity, coveting! This suggests some kind of spectrum, from top to bottom, from the above to the below.

Now look at the second pair of commands (2A and 2B). Notice again the repetitions here. This is the only other pair of commands that contains the phrase “The LORD your God.” So the top *two* pairs address relationships with God, firstly, regarding his nature and name, and now secondly, his call on his people to act in appropriate relationship with him. But there is also another repetition, not here of identical words, but of *syntax*, grammatical form. Notice, these two commands are the only pair which commence with a positive imperative. All other commands start with the Hebrew negative “lō” (לֹ), “not shall you have other gods . . . not shall you kill . . .” and so on. But these two commands (2A and B), dealing with our relations with the divine, start with “Remember” and “Honour.” This repeating literary syntax indicates again to the hearer or reader that they are to be considered together, in parallel. There is so much of importance in these two commands, but sufficient for our purpose for us to be convinced that they are meant to be considered as a pair.

Now, how about the parallel pair in the sequence, pair four (4A and 4B), parallel to pair two. Here there is no overt repetition but clearly both start with “lō”, not, and both are about relationship with our neighbour. The first one, “you shall not steal” is about taking physical possessions from my neighbour, but the second one, though about my neighbour, is more opaque to our

modern mind. We need to know that in ancient near eastern culture, justice was administered in front of the town elders, in the town gate (as in Ruth 4), and testimony was required from two or three witnesses, before any claim or dispute could be resolved. For justice to be served, the witnesses would need to believe in the absolute importance of true testimony (There was no DNA testing, or Lie Detection Equipment back then!). If any witness (for malicious reason or because of bribery) decided to give false testimony to the judges, the innocent party would be damaged in society forever, and may even lose their life! Minimally, they would lose their reputation, and once a person's reputation was damaged, the words could never be taken back, as they would spread out through society indiscriminately. So now we can see more clearly the relationships being considered in this pair of commands. They are basically about *stealing*, stealing the possessions (4A) and stealing the reputation (4B) of my neighbours. As we have seen, the second pair (2A and B) is about our relationship with the divine, but this fourth pair is about our relationship with the human or mundane.

So what about the remaining central pair (3A and 3B). This is another key concept in Biblical Hebrew—that the *literary* middle of an inverted parallel relationship (eg. A-B-C-B-A) is the also the *conceptual* middle of the composition. The middle pair of commands is: “you shall not kill!” and “you shall not commit adultery.” Basically, this pair is about life and death matters. Clearly, the first, about killing, is obvious. God is deeply concerned that we respect human life. But the other side of the coin to the *taking* of life is the *giving* of life, which was/is a fundamental purpose of marriage. In the coming together of two as one, a divine, God-like relationship is formed that amazingly can create life itself! Again, there is so much more in this pair of commands, but we have given sufficient detail for our purpose on how God writes.

We can now reflect on the whole, how God has written the Ten Words as a five-pair table or weave, and on some of the relationships in them and between them.

Pair	Subject of Pair	Progression
1	Actions based on God's Nature	Transcendent/Divine
2	Actions based on divine will	Actions a function of Transcendent
3	Life and Death Actions	Transcendent & Immanent meeting
4	Actions based on human will	Actions a function of the Immanent
5	Actions based on Human Nature	Immanent/Mundane

So, we have asked the question: How does God write? The answer that the Torah gives us—he writes on tables! He writes in parallel, presenting truth in complementary concepts, because truth is not linear or one-sided, but two-dimensional and holistic.

Two Speakings

Another indication of the two-dimensional view in the Torah is found in the frequent repetition of the clause, “The LORD *spoke* to Moses, *speak* to the people of

Israel ...” This occurs frequently in the three central books of the Torah, Exodus to Numbers, and 37 times in Leviticus alone. It occurs so many times that readers tend to take it to mean simply “And.” And the Lord said this, *and* he said this. But look at it again:



There are *two* speakings in the sentence: Firstly, Yahweh speaking to Moses, and secondly, Moses speaking to the people of Israel. Yahweh is said to speak to Moses on Sinai, in some kind of celestial revelation, where Moses saw a revelation of God and of the heavenly sanctuary as a pattern for the earthly. This first speaking was some kind of vision—Moses seeing and hearing God like a prophet did. But the second speaking was when Moses came down the mountain and spoke God's words to all the nation—Moses like a teacher, giving them the words of God in oral instructions (the meaning of *torah*).

Clearly, the Decalogue was meant to be like a paradigm, a “concrete” picture, for us to have a visual image in our minds of how God presents truth to us, and how we should “hear” it and “see” it. It is not a logical list, 1-goes-to-2-goes-to-3 kind of thing, but a 1A idea *in parallel* with a 1B idea.

Torah in Creation

Now, if this is true for the “concrete” example of the Decalogue, could it be true elsewhere in the Torah? A likely place to consider is the creation story in the first unit of the Bible. One of the advantages in analysing this creation story, compared with the Decalogue, is that the days are clearly labelled, one to six, and each day is clearly marked out with literary indicators. Each day *opens* with, “And God said...” and each day *closes* with, “and it was sunset and it was dawning, the *n*th day.” So we have no difficulty knowing the six parts.

But one of the strange things people (and critics) have noticed about the six days of creation is the way the luminaries in the heavens are created on day four, when light had already been created on day one! That does sound odd. But we should notice carefully the Hebrew of days one and four. Day one starts, “And God said, Let-be light ...” (יְהִי אוֹר) and day four starts in exactly the same way: “And God said, Let-be lights ...” (יְהִי מְאֹרוֹת). As we have seen, this kind of repetition is a surefire way of knowing that these two days are meant to be conceived *in parallel*, side by side.

Of course, if you put day four alongside day one, then you have a symmetrical pairing, days one to three paired with days four to six. Other things then become obvious also.

The Creation Torah			
Above	1 Light	4 Lights <small>(Sun, Moon, Stars)</small>	
Between	2 Expanse <small>between waters below & above</small>	5 Living Beings <small>in waters below, heaven above</small>	
Below	3 Land Plants	6 Land Life Humans	

Day one is about Light and day four is about Lights. Day two is about the expanse between the waters below and the waters above, and day five is about two kinds of living things, the fish that live in the waters below, and the winged birds that fly in the expanse above. And even more striking, day three is made up of *two* creations, the formation of land and plants, and likewise, day six is made up of two creations, the creation of the animals that live on the land, and human beings, who feed on the plants.

It is quite clear that the six days of creation are meant to be heard, read and considered as three pairs of days. This is confirmed by many commentators, from medieval to current times.

When creation is looked at like this, as a 3 x 2 matrix, one can see that the top row is about the heavens (labelled “the above”), and the bottom row is about the earth (“the below”), and the middle row is about the expanse (“the between”). I have coloured the rows to indicate the sky above and the earth below, to make the “picture” obvious.

Now, interestingly, Midrash Rabbah (Sefer Beresheit 1:1) says that: “Hashem (the LORD) gazed into the Torah and created the world.” This is interesting, suggesting the rabbis believed that the “Torah” was there “in the beginning” and that the Lord consulted the Torah in order to create the world in the way that he did. The opening of John’s Gospel also says, “In the beginning was the Word.” And if you accept the two-dimensional, parallel view of creation in Genesis 1, as outlined above, then it is true that the Torah “paints” creation as everyone sees it! Everyone, whether a primeval human or an advanced scientist, looking out at the world, sees the heavens above (with the sun, moon and stars), the earth below (with the plants, animals and themselves on terra ferma), and “the between,” separating the below from the above. The Torah shows this creation image, not when read in its linear order, but when read as if written on tablets, in parallel.

Interestingly, the *pattern* is the same as it was with the Decalogue, with the above and the below and the between. And the key issue is in “the between.” As

people stand up and look out at their world, they recognise that they are very definitely part of the mundane world here *below*, and they sense the light of the divine in the heavens *above*, but they feel the issue is raised in their minds by the *separation* of the above from the below, by the *between*. How does our below connect with the above? Does Torah’s picture of creation contain the answer to this primordial question?

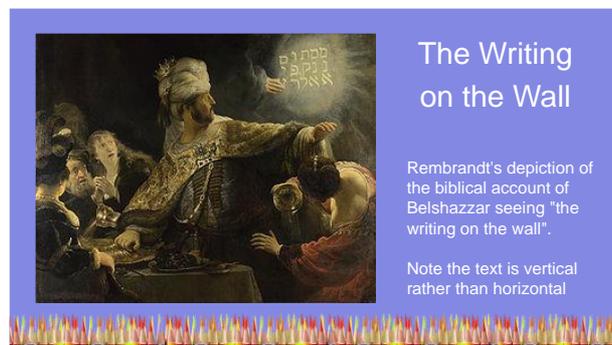
The first thing to notice is the divine statement made on each day regarding the goodness of the day’s creation. After every creation, the Torah says, “And God saw the X, that it was good” (as shown by the ticks). That is, except for day two. So, once on days one, four, and five and twice each on days three and six, making seven in all. But not on day two! Is this just an author-oversight, or is it torah inspiration? The Torah seems to be saying that there was something not right about day two. It does not say it was bad, of course, because God had made it, but it does not say God saw that it was good either. What’s different about day two? Well, on day two, there was a separation of the below and above, and an expanse was formed between the below and the above. It seems the Torah is raising a question in the mind of the hearer/reader, about the *separation* of the above from the below.

But where are we to find the answer to the question, raised by day two, in the picture of creation, as presented in the Torah? Well, of course, in the *parallel* day, day five. This day sets out, as also for the other days in the second triad, the things that populate the spheres that were made in the first triad. Day five tells of the creation for the first time of “living beings.” The Hebrew actually uses two words for life here, *nephesh* and *chaia* (חַיָּה נֶפֶשׁ), like saying “living living things,” or “the essence of life.” And the thing pointed out in the description is that there are *two kinds* of living things being made—the *teeming* living things that teem in the waters below (the fish), and the “winged flying things” that fly (literally): “above the earth, across the face of the expanse of the heavens” (1:20). So, day five is the first day to mention life and living things, and makes clear there are two kinds of living things, those that teem down here in the waters below, and those that fly above the earth, up there in the expanse of the heavens. There seems to be “torah” in this picture of creation. As we look at our world, we see, on the one hand, that there is an expanse, a gap, between our immanent below and the transcendent above, but we also see, on the other hand, set out for us in contrast, the two kinds of living things—the ones that thrive below and the ones that are created to fly above. It is interesting to remember that, in the Bible, there are only two kinds of beings with wings, the “winged birds,” as mentioned here on day five (1:21), and the heavenly angels! It seems that the Torah is revealing to us, in its picture of creation, the potential resolution of the separation that is obvious in the universe. It makes it clear that there are two kinds of living things in this world—the ones that love it below, and the ones that love it above! And it seems to ask the

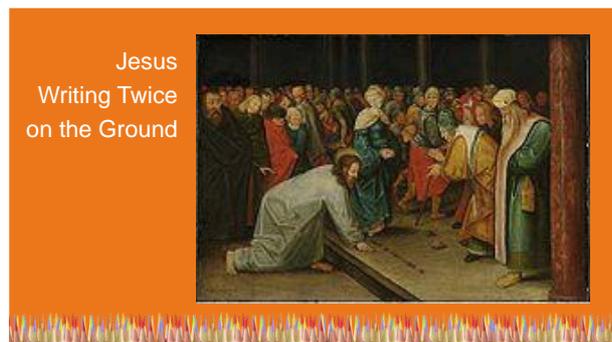
reader the question, Which kind do we want to be? The kind that thrives down here, or the kind that flies “above the earth” in relationship with heaven. And, as if to confirm this, the same thread runs right through the book of Genesis—again and again, presenting us in parallel, *two kinds* of living beings: Cain and Abel, Abraham and Lot, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and Pharaoh? This is the question of the whole Bible—what kind of living thing do you want to be?

God Writing Elsewhere

In concluding, we may think of other times when God actually wrote in time and space. One is the time in the book of Daniel when God wrote a cryptic message to King Belshazzar in the plaster on the wall: Mene, Mene, Teqel, Upharsin. Having heard how God writes, do you think this was written “in parallel”? Check out Bejon’s scholarly article on this (Bejon, 2020).



And another less obvious occasion, when the religious leaders brought to Jesus in the Temple a woman they had caught in the act of adultery. Leaving aside the questions about how they caught her, and where the man was, notice how many times Jesus stooped down and wrote with his finger in the dust of earth. Twice.



What do you think he wrote? Given the resonance with when God wrote on earth with his finger the first time on Sinai, was Jesus writing something from the Decalogue? And if so, what? Given the accusation and the punishment they wanted to inflict, I wonder whether Jesus actually “put his finger” on the *central* pair of the Decalogue, “You shall not commit adultery” and “You shall not murder.”

1A The Lord is your God. You shall have no other gods beside Me. Not make for yourself a sculptured image.	1B You shall not wear falsely by the name of the Lord your God.
2A Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.	2B Honour your father and your mother.
3A You shall not murder.	3B You shall not commit adultery.
4A You shall not steal.	4B You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.
5A You shall not covet your neighbour's house;	5B You shall not covet your neighbour's wife, ... or anything of your neighbour's.

Conclusion: Writing on the Tablets of your Heart

So, how does God write? Does it make sense to you that God would write on tablets, truth in tandem, principles in parallel? What difference would this reading make compared with a linear reading? Spend time meditating (“from this side to this side”) on the parallel texts of the Decalogue and the Creation, and see if it makes a difference for you. And whenever you are studying a part of the Torah, download the relevant “literary Unit” from Kline’s *The Structured Torah*, and use that to study the text “in stereo”! And look up my paper online on the “Festival Unit” in Leviticus 23, as an example (Hocking, 2020).

Bibliography

Download Moshe Kline’s papers online:

1. The Structured Torah [here](http://www.chaver.com/Torah-New/English/Text/The%20Structured%20Torah%20(JP%201917).pdf)
2. The Exoteric Decalogue [here](http://www.chaver.com/Torah-New/English/Articles/The%20Decalogue.html)
3. The Creation Weave [here](http://www.chaver.com/Torah-New/English/Articles/The%20Creation%20Weave.htm)

Also:

- Bejon, James. (2020). Mene, Mene, Tekel, Parsin: The Neatness of God’s Handiwork. *academia.edu*. https://www.academia.edu/44021917/Mene_Mene_Tekel_Parsin_The_Neatness_of_God_s_Handiwork
- Hocking, P.J. (2020). Repetition Indicating Form and Function: A Rhetorical-Critical Case Study in Leviticus 23. *Hiphil Novum*, 6(1), 2–19.

Exodus 20:1–17 MT

The text is laid out below, as in the Masoretic Text in BHS.

The large or “open” paragraph is called a petucha (פתוחא) and is indicated by a letter פ at the end of the paragraph, and the starting of a new line for the next paragraph (in the hand-written Torah, but not the printed BHS).

The small or “closed” paragraph is called a setuma and is indicated by a letter at the end of the sentence and a short gap before starting the next paragraph.

¹ וַיְדַבֵּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה לְאֹמֶר: ס
² אָנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבְּיַת עַבְדְּךָ יָם:
³ לֹא יִהְיֶה־לְךָ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים עַל־פְּנֵי־לֵא תַעֲשֶׂה־לְךָ פֶסֶל⁴ |
 וְכָל־תְּמוּנָה אֲשֶׁר בַּשָּׁמַיִם | מִמַּעַל וְאֲשֶׁר בָּאָרֶץ מִתַּחַת וְאֲשֶׁר בַּיָּם |
 מִתַּחַת לָאָרֶץ לֹא־תִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לָהֶם וְלֹא תַעֲבֹדֵם כִּי אָנֹכִי יְהוָה⁵
 אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֵל קַנָּא פֹקֵד עֵוֹן אָבֹת עַל־בְּנֵים עַל־שְׂלֵשִׁים וְעַל־רְבַעִים
 לְשִׁנָּא י: ⁶ וְעֲשֵׂה תִסֹּד לְאֵלֹפִים לְאַהֲבִי וּלְשִׁמְרֵי מִצְוֹתַי: ס ⁷ לֹא
 תַעֲשֶׂה אֶת־שֵׁם־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשֹׂא כִּי לֹא יִנְקֶה יְהוָה אֶת אֲשֶׁר־יַעֲשֶׂה
 אֶת־שְׁמוֹ לְשֹׂא: פ ⁸ זְכוֹר אֶת־יּוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ שֵׁשַׁת־⁹
 יָמִים תַּעֲבֹד וְעָשָׂה ית כָּל־מְלֶאכֶתְךָ וַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שָׁבַת | לַיהוָה¹⁰
 אֱלֹהֶיךָ לֹא־תַעֲשֶׂה כָל־מְלָאכָה אֲתָה | וּבְנֵי־וְבָתְּךָ עַבְדְּךָ וְאִמְתְּךָ
 וּבְהֵמָתְךָ וּגְרֻךְ אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעֲרֶיךָ כִּי שֵׁשַׁת־יָמִים עָשָׂה יְהוָה אֶת־¹¹
 הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֶת־הַיָּם וְאֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־בָּם וַיִּנַּח בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי
 עַל־כֵּן בִּרְךָ יְהוָה אֶת־יּוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת וַיְקַדְּשֶׁהוּ: ס ¹² כִּבֹּד אֶת־
 אָבִיךָ וְאֶת־אִמְךָ לְמַעַן יֵאָרְכוּן יָמֶיךָ עַל הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר־יְהוָה
 אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לָךְ: ס ¹³ לֹא תִרְצָח: ס ¹⁴ לֹא תִנְאָף: ס
¹⁵ לֹא תִגְזֹב: ס ¹⁶ לֹא־תַעֲנֶה בְּרַעְיֶךָ עַד שִׁקֹּר: ס ¹⁷ לֹא
 תִחַמַּד בֵּית רַעְיֶךָ לֹא־תִחַמַּד אִשְׁתְּ רַעְיֶךָ וְעַבְדּוֹ וְאִמְתּוֹ וְשׁוֹרְוֹ
 וְחִמְרוֹ וְכָל אֲשֶׁר לְרַעְיֶךָ: פ

The Ten Words

1A

I the Lord am your God who brought you out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods beside Me. You shall not make for yourself a sculptured image, or any likeness, of what is in the heavens above, or on the earth below, or in the waters under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them. For I the Lord your God am an impassioned God, visiting the guilt of the fathers upon the children, upon the third and fourth generations of those who reject Me, but showing kindness to the thousandth generation of those who love Me and keep My commandments.

1B

You shall not swear falsely by the name of the Lord your God; for the Lord will not clear one who swears falsely by His name.

2A

Remember the sabbath day and keep it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the Lord your God: you shall not do any work-you, your son, or daughter, your male or female slave, or your cattle, or the stranger who is within your settlements. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth and sea, and all that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it.

2B

Honour your father and thy mother, that you may long endure on the land which the Lord your God is giving you.

3A

You shall not murder.

3B

You shall not commit adultery.

4A

You shall not steal.

4B

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour

5A

You shall not covet your neighbour's house;

5B

You shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or his male or female slave, or his ox, or his ass, or anything that is your neighbour's