5. The Decalogue: Numerical Features of the Two Versions

The purpose of the present survey is to detect and define the formal differences and correspondences between the two versions of the Decalogue with regard to their numerical features. This may shed new light on their individual characteristics.

The Exodus Version

20:1 Introduction to the Decalogue 7 words
20:1-17 The entire text of the Decalogue pericope 17 verses
20:2-17 The Decalogue as such 172 words
20:7 The Third Commandment: the holy Name 17 words
20:7 The 17 words have altogether 51 (3 x 17) letters
20:11 Motivation for the Fourth Commandment 26 words
20:12-16 The Fifth has 15 words, the Sixth-Ninth have 11 26 words ¹
20:17 The Tenth Commandment 15 words
20:13-17 The Sixth-Tenth Commandments (11 + 15) 26 words
These 26 words divide into 15a and 11b
20:18-21 Epilogue to the Decalogue 60 words
20:22-23 YHWH tells Moses to convey a message 26 words
20:22b-23 YHWH’s prohibition of graven images 17 words
20:24-26 YHWH ordains the building of an altar 47 words
20:22-26 Two commandments regarding the cult 73 words
20:1-26 The Decalogue passage as a whole 26 verses

Contrary to what one would expect, the First and Second Commandments are not specifically given prominence by means of one of the divine name numbers. However, this is largely compensated by the extra commandment in 20:22b-23, which is highlighted by the number 17. See further below.

The Third Commandment is given prominence by the use of 17 words, which are further highlighted by the fact that they have 51 (3 x 17) letters. This technique is reminiscent of Exod. 3:14, the revelation of YHWH’s name: 7 words in 14a, with 26 letters, and 8 words in 14b, with 34 (2 x 17) letters. See my analysis of Exodus 1-4.

The Fourth Commandment is also given prominence, in this case, by the fact that 26 words are used in the motivation for the Sabbath Commandment, v. 11.

A conspicuous feature of this Commandment is the use of 7 categories to which the prohibition applies:

You
Your Son
Your Daughter
**Your Slave**
Your Slave-Girl
Your Cattle
Your Alien within your gates.²

¹ The numbers 15 and 11 represent the numerical values of YH and WH respectively.
² For the series of 7 possessive pronouns, compare Psalm 8.
The category most likely to be set to work on the Sabbath, the slave, is positioned at the centre. See the discussion of the Deuteronomy version below.

The Tenth Commandment exhibits the same feature: 7 'objects' belonging to the neighbour. Here, the category most prone to be coveted, the slave-girl, is positioned at the centre:

- The House of your neighbour
- The Wife of your neighbour
- His Slave
- His Slave-Girl
- His Ox
- His Ass
- Anything that belongs to your neighbour.

Note the inclusion function of 'your neighbour' at the beginning and end.

The Sixth-Tenth Commandments are highlighted by the use of 26 words (vs. 13-17).

Finally, the message regarding YHWH's prohibition of graven images, which Moses had to convey to the people (vs. 22b-23) is given prominence by the fact that it comprises 17 words.

But there is more: the number 47, the words in 20:24-26 about YHWH ordaining the building of an altar, is highly significant. It occurs not only here, but also in Exodus 14:2-4, 33:1-3, and 33:12-13, and has everything to do with the fact that Moses is YHWH's messenger. In fact, the number 47 represents the numerical value of יֵ֖עָלֶ֧ם, 'my angel' (13+12+1+11+10), occurring explicitly in Exod. 23:23 (compare also 32:34). See my analysis of Exodus 33.3

### The Deuteronomy Version

- 5:6-21 Total number of words in the Decalogue: 189, i.e., 17 more than in Exodus
- 5:1-5 Prologue to the Decalogue 72 words
- 5:1-4 Introduction and Moses' reference to the covenant 52 (2 x 26) words
- 5:6-10 First and Second Commandments (16 + 27) 43 words
- 5:7-8 No other gods and no graven images! 23 words
- 5:11 Third Commandment: the holy Name 17 words
- 5:11 The 17 words have altogether 51 (3 x 17) letters, as in Exodus
- 5:12-15 The Sabbath Commandment as a whole 64 (2 x 32) words
- 5:13-14 Commandment: work six days and observe the Sabbath 32 (6 + 26) words
- 5:15 Motivation for observing the Sabbath: YHWH freed you 23 words
- 5:13-15 Commandment and Motivation 55 (32 + 23)4
- 5:16 Fifth Commandment (7 words more than Exodus) 22 words
- 5:17-21 Sixth-Tenth Commandments 27 words
- 5:17-22 Sixth-Tenth Commandments and the Epilogue 51 (3 x 17) words
- 5:24 First part of the people's speech: God's glory and voice 23 words
- 5:25-26 Second part: the people's fear that they might die 32 words
- 5:24-26 Words dealing with YHWH's awesome glory and voice 55 words5
- 5:28 Moses tells the people that YHWH understands their fear 23 words

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3 The angel in Num. 20:16 has a different role: he brings the Israelites out of Egypt. It is interesting to note that in Isa. 63:9 the angel is denied the role of saviour attributed to him in Num. 20:16. The angel in Mal. 3:1 (‘my angel’) is to prepare the way for God.

4 For the double kabod formula (55 = 32 + 23), which represents the two numerical values of kabod, ‘glory’, see the General Introduction, under Special Patterns. This compositional formula is also used in 5:24-26.

5 There can be no doubt that the use of the double kabod formula is intentional, because kabod, ‘glory’, occurs in the text (v. 24a).
YHWH appreciates Israel’s mind to fear him

YHWH promises to reveal the statutes and Moses exhorts the people to conform to all YHWH commands them

The settlement of the problem of hearing God’s voice

Moses urges the people: if you obey, you’ll prosper

Moses’ address to the people after the Epilogue

The key-word ‘fire’ occurs 7 times: vs. 4, 5, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26.
The key-word ‘voice’ likewise occurs 7 times: vs. 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 28a, 28b.

YHWH occurs 10 times in the Decalogue: vs. 6, 9, 11a, 11b, 12, 14, 15a, 15b, 16a, 16b.
The divine name occurs in total 14 (2 x 7) times: 5x in the Prologue (vs. 2, 3, 4, 5a (2x)), 10x in the Decalogue, and 9x in 5:22-33 (vs. 22, 24, 25, 27a, 27b, 28a, 28b, 32, 33).

In the Leningrad Codex the text of the Decalogue (5:6-21) is divided in 10 sections by means of the parashah setumah (S): after vs. 5, 10, 11, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21a, 21b. See BHS. Note the remarkable S within v. 21, between 21a and 21b. See further below.

The specification of the prohibition on labour on the sabbath in Deuteronomy is significantly different from the Exodus version. Instead of the 7 categories of Exodus, Deuteronomy has no less than 9: you, your son, your daughter, your slave, your slave-girl, your ox, your ass, any of your cattle, the alien residing among you.

In order to create a compositional centre containing the most vulnerable category, the author has devised a clever numerical arrangement of the 26 words, in a perfect symmetric pattern.

Now the slave and the slave-girl are positioned at the focal point.

I present this beautiful text in translation. The 9 categories are underlined:

The seventh day is a sabbath to YHWH your God; on it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, or your slave, or your slave-girl, or your ox, or your ass, or any of your cattle, or the alien within your gates so that your slave and slave-girl may rest as you do.

The text is structured throughout by the number 7. There are no less than six pairs having 7 words together: the 1st branch of the menorah, like its counterpart the 7th, together with the mathematical centre have 5+2=7 words; the 2nd branch and its counterpart the 6th, like the 2nd and 3rd, and the 5th and the 6th have 4+3=7 words; the 3rd branch and its counterpart the 5th have 3+4=7 words. The 2 words at the centre are flanked by 12 words on either side.

The mentioning of the slave and slave-girl at the centre of the menorah is of special importance for the interpretation of the text. As the focal point, this category receives specific emphasis, which should not surprise us, since the slave and slave-girl were the most vulnerable members of the household and subject to being called upon first to carry out chores or run errands on the Sabbath. No wonder that they are explicitly mentioned once again in the last line!

The Tenth Commandment is also significantly different. First, instead of one (which is used a second time in v. 21b), two verbs are used: ‘covet’ in 21a and ‘crave for’ in 21b. Second, as indicated by the S after 21a, this commandment is split in two: the coveting of the neighbour’s wife, and the craving after his possessions.6

6 Regarded as two different commandments in the Roman Catholic and Lutheran tradition.
Moreover, whereas in Exodus the *house* is mentioned first, here it is the *wife*. In this way the Deuteronomic author clearly differentiates between the *wife* and the *material possessions*. At the same time, he maintains (with Exodus) a series of 7 possessions, but differently, because he adds the *land*:

- The House of your *neighbour*
- His Land
- His Slave
- **His Slave-Girl**
- His Ox
- His Ass
- Anything that belongs to your *neighbour*.

The Decalogue pericope, 5:1-22, can be outlined in a perfectly symmetric menorah pattern:

| 5:1-5 | Prologue |
| 5:6-11 | Prohibitions |
| 5:12-14 | Commandments |
| **5:15** | **Motivation for observing the Sabbath** |
| 5:16 | Commandment |
| 5:17-21 | Prohibitions |
| 2:22 | Epilogue |

This symmetric menorah pattern resembles the overall structure of the book as a whole, in which the **Lawcode** has pride of place at the centre of the menorah:

- Deut. 1-3 Opening narrative: Moses looks back
- Deut. 4 :1-40 Opening prophetic sermon
- Deut. 4 :44-11:32 The Horeb covenant
- **Deut. 12-26** The Lawcode: statutes and stipulations
- Deut. 27-29 The Moab covenant
- Deut. 30 Concluding prophetic sermon
- Deut. 31-34 Concluding narrative: Moses looks forward


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