EXODUS 20 · HEBREW AND ENGLISH

The Ten Commandments in Hebrew

עֲשֶׂרֶת הַדְּבָרִים aseret ha-devarim, “the ten words” (Exodus 34:28)

VERSE	HEBREW	TRANSLITERATION AND LITERAL MEANING	HOW EACH TRADITION COUNTS IT		
			JEWISH	CATHOLIC, LUTHERAN	PROTESTANT, ORTHODOX
20:2	אָנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ	*anokhi Adonai eloheikha* I am the LORD your God.	1	1	—
20:3	לֹא יִהְיֶה־לְךָ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים עַל־פָּנָי	*lo yihyeh lekha elohim acherim al panai* You shall have no other gods before my face.	2	1	1
20:4	לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה־לְךָ פֶסֶל	*lo ta’aseh lekha pesel* You shall not make for yourself a carved image.	2	1	2
20:7	לֹא תִשָּׂא אֶת־שֵׁם־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לַשָּׁוְא	*lo tisa et shem Adonai eloheikha la-shav* You shall not carry the name of the LORD your God for nothing.	3	2	3
20:8	זָכוֹר אֶת־יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ	*zakhor et yom ha-shabbat le-kadsho* Remember the Sabbath day, to make it holy.	4	3	4
20:12	כַּבֵּד אֶת־אָבִיךָ וְאֶת־אִמֶּךָ	*kabbed et avikha ve-et imekha* Give weight to your father and your mother.	5	4	5
20:13	לֹא תִרְצָח	*lo tirtsach* You shall not murder.	6	5	6
20:14	לֹא תִנְאָף	*lo tin’af* You shall not commit adultery.	7	6	7
20:15	לֹא תִגְנֹב	*lo tignov* You shall not steal.	8	7	8
20:16	לֹא־תַעֲנֶה בְרֵעֲךָ עֵד שָׁקֶר	*lo ta’aneh ve-re’akha ed shaker* You shall not answer against your neighbor as a lying witness.	9	8	9
20:17	לֹא תַחְמֹד בֵּית רֵעֶךָ	*lo tachmod beit re’ekha* You shall not covet your neighbor’s house.	10	9–10	10

Eleven clauses, ten “words”: the Hebrew has no numbers, so traditions divide the same verses differently. Hebrew reads from right to left. Text: the Leningrad Codex (about AD 1008). Glosses are literal, not a Bible translation. In 20:17 Catholics count the neighbor’s wife (9) and goods (10) separately, following Deuteronomy 5:21.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS IN HEBREW

Learn them in Hebrew

Start small. Three of the commandments are only two words each, and the rest follow the same pattern: lo, "not," plus a verb.

Start with the three shortest

לֹא תִרְצָח

lo tirtsach
You shall not murder.

לֹא תִנְאָף

lo tin'af
You shall not commit adultery.

לֹא תִגְנֹב

lo tignov
You shall not steal.

How to read the transliteration

- **kh** and **ch**: the rough sound at the end of Scottish *loch* or German *Bach*, never the "ch" of *church*.
- **ts**: the sound at the end of *cats*.
- **'** (apostrophe): a short break, as between the two vowels of *ta'aseh*.
- **Vowels**: pure, as in Spanish or Italian: a as in *father*, e as in *bed*, i as in *machine*, o as in *more*, u as in *rule*.
- **Example**: *lo tirtsach* sounds like "lo teer-TSAKH."
- **God's name** (יְהוָה, verses 2 and 7) is not pronounced; Jewish readers say *Adonai*, "my Lord."

Then learn the Shema

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד

Shema Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai echad
Hear, Israel: the LORD is our God. The LORD is one. (Deuteronomy 6:4)

A line a day

Say one line a day, aloud, pointing at the Hebrew as you go: in under two weeks you can read the whole sheet. Keep the three short ones as a warm-up every day.