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The Ten Commandments in the Book of Mormon

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The Ten Commandments in the Book of Mormon

The Ten Commandments are an integral part of the covenants the Lord has made with his children throughout history and are found in various forms in the Old and New Testaments, the Book of Mormon, and the Doctrine and Covenants.¹ In the Old Testament they are called the "ten words" (ἑξήκοντα Exod. 34:28; Deut. 4:13; 10:4)--rendered in anglicized Greek as "declogue." Outside of the Old Testament they are never called the "ten commandments"--Jesus simply calls them "the commandments" (Matt. 19:17-19) and Abinadi, in the Book of Mormon, refers to them as "the commandments of God" (Mosiah 12:33; 13:11). This set of commandments can be broken into ten units, though there are at least three different traditional ways of dividing them.² In this paper I will examine the role of the Ten Commandments as they occur in the text of the Book of Mormon.

The Ten Commandments in the Bible

For many years biblical scholars have examined the commandments found in the Ten Commandments and how they function, individually and as a corpus, in the

¹ The Ten Commandments are found in their entirety in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. Jesus referred to the commandments against killing, adultery, and forswearing in Matthew 5 and cited several of the commandment in Matt. 19:17-19; Mark 10:19; Luke 18:20. In the Book of Mormon they are found cited by Abinadi in Mosiah 12:33-13:23. In the Doctrine and Covenants the commandments against killing, stealing, false witness, and adultery are found in 42:18-27; love the Lord, stealing, adultery, and killing are found in 59:5-6. The rest of the ten, with the notable exception of honouring parents, are found elsewhere in the Doctrine and Covenants:

1 no other gods before me	59:5 love the Lord thy God
2 no images	1:16 after image of own God
3 take Lord's name in vain	63:62; 136:21
4 keep Sabbath holy	59:9-13; 68:29; 77:12
5 honor father and mother	(not found)
6 murder	42:18-19, 79; 59:6
7 adultery	42:24-25; 59:6; 66:10
8 steal	42:20; 59:6
9 false witness	42:21
10 covet	19:25-26; 88:123; 136:20

² See Appendix A for a breakdown of the three traditional divisions of the Ten Commandments.

Old and New Testaments. Because the descendants of Lehi were well founded on the laws found on the Brass Plates--which contained much of the same material in our Old Testament--some of these scholarly observations may prove useful to Book of Mormon studies: first, providing a definition of the significance of the Ten Commandments in the Old and New Testaments and, second, providing points of comparison both in terms of similarities and differences by which the Ten Commandments in the Book of Mormon can be more sharply defined.

One Old Testament scholar, Moshe Weinfeld, has defined the Ten Commandments in the Old Testament as follows: "The Decalogue is to be seen, then, as a basic list of concrete imperatives applicable to every individual Israelite. They represent a distillation, so to speak, of the core demands made by the God of Israel on those covenanted to him."¹ He goes on to point out these imperatives are concrete and absolute because they deal with injunctions that are not tempered by time, space, or circumstance--as are for example the complex laws of purity whose observance are dependent on varying time periods, circumstances and places.² The Ten Commandments are applicable to each individual because they were the words of God himself to mankind, not through Moses as a mediator, but are directed to each individual Israelite (Exod. 20:1, 15, 18; Deut. 4:12; 5:4, 12) in the imperative--the second person singular--"thou shalt" or "thou shalt not." To remind the people of the the centrality of these commandments the Lord wrote them with his finger on tablets of stone which were then placed in the Ark of the Covenant (Exod. 31:18;

¹ Moshe Weinfeld, "The Uniqueness of the Decalogue and Its Place in Jewish Tradition," 11. Pages 1-44 in The Ten Commandments in History and Tradition, English version ed. by Gershon Levi (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1990).

² "By contrast with many laws and commands, the performance of which depends on special circumstances in the life of an individual or his social group; for example sacrifice, which depends on the obligations of the person (a vow to fulfill, a sin to expiate) or of the community (maintenance of the sanctuary), or other laws that flow from the incidence of certain events, like the laws of ritual purity and impurity . . . by contrast the commands in the Decalogue obligate everyone." Weinfeld, "The Uniqueness of the Decalogue," 4.

32:16; 34:1, 28; Deut. 4:13; 5:19; 9:10; 10:1-4). These commandments, accepted by the people by covenant, thus define the covenant community and membership in it. They embody what the Lord demands of his people; and those that disobey these commandments exclude themselves from the covenant community.

From ancient times commentators have seen a natural division in the Ten Commandments between the first five and the last five--presumably based on the assumption that there were five commandments inscribed on each of the two stone tablets. The first five deal with the relationship between God and man, and the second five with the relationship between man and man. In addition to this division some have found a hierarchy within each set, as described by Moshe Greenberg: "Even within each set of five there is a specific hierarchy: the obligation to worship God precedes the duty to honor His name, and both of these injunctions precede honoring His holy day. Finally in the first set, one must also honor one's parents. There is also a hierarchy among the five ethical Commandments: the value of life, the marriage bond (in the Masoretic version), the right to possession, reliability of public testimony, and finally the prohibition of guilty desires, which aims at safeguarding the previous four superior values." ¹

The Ten Commandments as a group and as individual commandments play a very important part in the text of the Old Testament. They are found in a group in

¹ Moshe Greenberg, "The Decalogue Tradition Critically Examined," 114. Pages 83-119 in The Ten Commandments in History and Tradition, English version ed. by Gershon Levi (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1990). The neatness of this scheme is somewhat complicated by #5 "honor thy father and thy mother," because this is clearly an injunction in the realm of the relationship of man to man. Commentators have explained this by noting "this commandment is the one best suited to be the transition from those 'between man and God', and those 'between man and his fellow'. After all, parents are in a position of superior authority, like God and the King." Weinfeld, "The Uniqueness of the Decalogue," p. 11 n. 37.

Exodus 20:1-17 and Deuteronomy 5:6-21 with several significant differences.¹ Each of the commandments, except #10 against coveting, are attested several times in the Pentateuch as an essential part of the Mosaic Law (Lev. 19:3-4, 11-13; Deut. 27:15-26). In addition these commandments are cited, individually or as a group, in the prophetic literature as indictments against Israel for breaking the covenant, and the reason for which she will be punished and destroyed (see especially Hosea 4:1-2; Jer. 7:9; Ezekiel 18, 22).²

One scholar, David Noel Freedman, has noted that the text of the Primary History (the continuous historical narrative from Genesis through 2 Kings) contains a specific incident of the breaking of each of nine of the Ten Commandments. He suggests this may have been a deliberate attempt by a prophetic editor of this work to emphasize the systematic breaking of each of the Commandments thus further justifying the Lord's eventual destruction of Israel for breaking the covenant.³ Indeed this is one of the major themes of this unit of history in the Old Testament. Interestingly enough Freedman does not identify an example of the Tenth Commandment "thou shalt not covet"--a sin present in several episodes of biblical history: Achan, David and Bathsheba, and Ahab and Naboth's vineyard. He does not count these episodes because they do not focus in detail on that particular sin but rather focus respectively on stealing, adultery, and false witness. Freedman notes "the tenth commandment is distinctive. Its emphasis is on

¹ The two major differences are found in the commandments regarding the sabbath (Exod. 20:8-11 and Deut. 5:13-15) and coveting (Exod. 20:17 and Deut. 5:21).

² For discussion see Moshe Weinfeld, "The Decalogue: Its Significance, Uniqueness, and Place in Israel's Tradition," pp. 3-47 in Religion and Law: Biblical-Judaic and Islamic Perspectives, ed. Edwin B. Firmage, Bernard G. Weiss, and John W. Welch (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990). See also a popular version of this same article "What Makes the Ten Commandments Different?", Bible Review (VII:2, April 1991), pp. 35-41.

³ David Noel Freedman, "The Nine Commandments: The Secret Progress of Israel's Sins," Bible Review (V:6 Dec. 1989) pp. 28-37, 42.

motivation or attitude, rather than action, as is clearly the case with the other commandments. It functions therefore as a complement or supplement to several of the preceding commandments--stealing, murder, adultery and false swearing--providing the motivation clause or explanation of the mental or emotional process behind the commission of crime."¹

In the New Testament Jesus acknowledged the Ten Commandments as the foundation of the law when he recited them to the rich man seeking eternal life (Matt. 19:17-19; Mark 10:19; Luke 18:20), and in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5) where he referred to murder, adultery, and forswearing. When Jesus was asked, "Master, which is the great commandment in the law?"; he answered, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matt. 22:36-40). Jesus' pronouncement reflects the Rabbinic tradition which also taught the whole Torah could be summarized by two commandments, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God", found in Deut. 6:5, covering all those commandments between God and man, and "thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself", found in Leviticus 19:18, covering those commandments between man and man.² Some have argued Jesus is summarizing not just the entire law but more specifically the Ten Commandments into two commandments.³

Paul also cited the last five of the Ten, and summarized them into one commandment: "Owe no man anything, but to love one another: for he that loveth

¹ Freedman, "The Nine Commandments," p. 37. The mention of only nine commandments further fits the scheme that Freedman sees in the editing of the nine books of the Primary History (Samuel and Kings are undivided in the Hebrew Bible)--one commandment for each book.

² For a full discussion see David Flusser, "The Decalogue in the New Testament," pp. 228-30. Pages 219-46 in The Ten Commandments in History and Tradition, English version ed. by Gershon Levi (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1990).

³ See Flusser, "The Decalogue in the New Testament," 228-30.

another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbor: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law." (Rom. 13:8-10).

Occurrences in the Book of Mormon

It is logical to assume that the Ten Commandments were extant on the Brass Plates as part of the Law of Moses (1 Ne. 4:15-16; 5:11) which the descendants of Lehi were to follow. Nephi specifically mentioned one of the reasons for going back to Jerusalem for the Brass Plates was to obtain a written record of the law noting "they could not keep the commandments of the Lord according to the law of Moses, save they should have the law" (1 Ne. 4:15). Constant references to the Law of Moses in the Book of Mormon (2 Ne. 25:20, 24, 30; Jacob 4:5; Alma 25:15-16; Hel. 13:1; 3 Ne. 1:24) indicate the people were aware of the law throughout their history due to the fact that they had brought this record with them--as opposed, for example, to the Mulekites who because they had brought no records lost a knowledge of God (Omni 1:17; see 1 Ne. 4:15).

When Abinadi was brought before the priests of Noah to be examined he asked them, "If ye teach the law of Moses why do ye not keep it?" (Mosiah 12:29), and proceeded to recite to them the Ten Commandments. The version that Abinadi quoted is virtually identical to the KJV of Exodus 20:2-17 with a few significant variations. For example, whereas the version in the OT reads "thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Exod. 20:3 // Mosiah 12:35) Abinadi quoted, "thou shalt have no other God before me."¹

¹ In addition Abinadi leaves off a phrase known from Exod. 20:4 in Mosiah 12:36. Abinadi first cited what is found in Exod. 20:2-4 (Mosiah 12:34-36). In quoting the passage from Exod. 20:4 he left off the final phrase "or that is in the water under the earth." He then said to the priests of Noah "have ye done

Abinadi's sermon to the priests of Noah affirms that the Ten Commandments were known to the Book of Mormon people in essentially the same form as we know them from Exodus 20. As he read the commandments the texts says he was endowed with the spirit "for the Spirit of the Lord was upon him; and his face shone with exceeding luster, even as Moses' did while in the mount of Sinai, while speaking with the Lord" (Mosiah 12:5). The description of the Spirit of the Lord upon him as it was on Moses (Mosiah 13:5) adds to his prophetic stature and the authority of his words--beginning with his recitation of the Ten Commandments.

Here I would like to take a look at each of the Ten Commandments as they are represented in the Book of Mormon either by direct reference or by allusion. The passages cited for each demonstrate, just as in the Old Testament, the Ten Commandments represent the warp and woof of Book of Mormon religious understanding and practice both in regards to the Law of Moses as well as the higher law. I will proceed by first discussing each of the Ten Commandments

all this? I say unto you, Nay, ye have not." (Mosiah 12:37). King Noah was so angry at this rebuke he ordered the priests to take Abinadi away. Abinadi assured the priests of Noah that they would not be able to touch him until he finished his message. He then told them, "And now I read unto you the remainder of the commandments of God" indicating that he had a text of the scriptures from which to read the rest of the commandments. He started with the verse in Exod. 20:4 which he had already cited, but he read it differently from Mosiah 12:36. It is possible that in the first passage Abinadi is citing from memory and in the second case he is reading which may explain why it retains the phrase missing in the first case from Exod. 20:4 and why the wording is different between the two Abinadi citations. The italics are those from the KJV.

<u>Exod. 20:4</u>	<u>Mosiah 12:36</u>	<u>Mosiah 13:12</u>
Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of <i>anything</i> that is in heaven above,	Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing _____ in heaven above,	Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of <u>things</u> <u>which are</u> in heaven above
or that is in the earth beneath,	or <u>things which are</u> in the earth beneath	or <u>which are</u> in the earth beneath,
or that <i>is</i> in the water under the earth	_____	or <u>which are</u> in the water under the earth

individually and summarizing some of the important references to each--then I will turn to some significant broad generalities that emerge from these occurrences. For the sake of comparison I have included a prominent Old Testament example of the breaking of each commandment.¹ The citations in the Book of Mormon break down into two categories. For the first five commandments there are individual passages wherein they are quoted and/or developed. The last five commandments are found primarily in lists of laws or sins either as the reasons for the judgments of God on the Book of Mormon peoples or as reasons for his judgments in the latter days.

I will quote each commandment as it occurs in Mosiah 12 from the mouth of Abinadi.

Commandment #1: I am the Lord thy God, who hath brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other God before me² (Mosiah 12:34-35 = Exod. 20:2-3).

An Old Testament example of the breaking of this commandment is the incident of the Golden Calf at Mount Sinai described thus, "And they said, 'These are thy gods, O Israel, who brought thee up from the land of Egypt.'" (Exod. 32:4)

While the Book of Mormon does not contain a precise quotation of this commandment apart from the quotation of Abinadi, the Lord alludes to this commandment in similar language--associating the obligation to honor the Lord God with his deliverance from Egypt for all of Israel and more specifically from the destruction of Jerusalem for the Lehites when he tells Nephi, "After ye have arrived in the promised land, ye shall know that I, the Lord, did deliver you from

¹ These follow Freedman's list from, "The Nine Commandments."

² For the sake of convenience we follow the Greek/Reform tradition in dividing the commandments. Because Abinadi repeats verse 4, which is right in the middle of a commandment according to any division, the Book of Mormon citation of the Ten Commandments does not help in determining how the commandments should be divided to get exactly ten.

destruction; yea, that I did bring you out of the land of Jerusalem" (1 Ne. 17:14-15). It is interesting to note that Nephi, elsewhere, interprets their experience in the wilderness and their journey to the Promised Land as a type of the Exodus and Moses leading his people to the Promised Land (1 Ne. 4:2-3; 17:13-14; Alma 36:28). Furthermore Nephi teaches his brothers that the relationship prescribed in the is based on love, "And he loveth those who will have him to be their God. Behold, he loved our fathers, and he covenanted with them, yea, even Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (1 Ne. 17:40). (See also 2 Ne. 25:20; Mosiah 7:19; 12:34-35; and Alma 36:28-30.)

Abinadi introduced the Ten Commandments in Mosiah 12 thus: "I know if ye keep the commandments of God ye shall be saved, if ye keep the commandments which the Lord delivered unto Moses in the mount of Sinai, saying; I am the Lord thy God, who hath brought thee out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other God before me" (Mosiah 12:33-34). The survival in the land of the Israelites as well as the Lehites depends on their strict adherence to the . A very similar juxtaposition of the with obedience is found in Alma's talk with his son Helaman: "for he has brought our fathers out of Egypt, and he has swallowed up the Egyptians in the Red Sea; and he led them by his power into the promised land; yea, and he has delivered them out of bondage and captivity from time to time. Yea, and he has also brought our fathers out of the land of Jerusalem; . . . But behold, my son, this in not all; for ye ought to know as I do know, that inasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God, ye shall prosper in the land" (Alma 36:28-30; see also 36:1-2).

If we are to interpret the essence of this commandment, as did Jesus, as loving God there are several Book of Mormon scriptures that echo this. King Benjamin called his people together to "give thanks to the Lord their God, who had brought them out of the land of Jerusalem, and who had delivered them out of the hand of their enemies, . . . that they might rejoice and be filled with love towards God and all

men" (Mosiah 2:4). Also Moroni admonished us in the latter days, to "love God with all your might, mind, and strength" (Moroni 10:32; see also Moroni 7:13).

Commandment#2 Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image . . . Thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them (Mosiah 13:12-13 = Exod. 20:3).

A biblical example of the breaking of this commandment is the incident of the Golden Calf where it says, "they have made them a molten calf, and have worshipped it, and have sacrificed therunto, and said, These be the gods, O Israel, which have brought them up out of the land of Egypt."

There is no single passage in the Book of Mormon that quotes this commandment, but idolatry is an important part of apostasy throughout. For example, several passages from Isaiah and Micah about idolatry are included in the Book of Mormon in Nephi's quotations of Isaiah in 1 and 2 Nephi and in the Savior's quotation of Micah in 3 Nephi 21 (1 Ne. 20:5 = Isa. 48:5; 2 Ne. 12:7-8, 18, 20 = Isa. 2:7-8, 18, 20; 2 Ne. 20:10-11 = Isa. 10:10-11; and 3 Nephi 21:17 = Micah 21:17). One of the signs of Lamanite degradation and apostasy was idolatry in Enos 1:20; Mosiah 9:12; Alma 17:15; Mormon 4:14, 21. It was also a sign of Nephite apostasy most notably the Nephites under King Noah (in Mosiah 11:6-7)—a people addressed by Abinadi who read this commandment; also it is noted in the time of Alma the Younger (Mosiah 27:8) in particular the Zoramites who were led "to bow down to dumb idols" in Alma 31:10;¹ and at the time of the Jaredites in Ether 7:23.

Of particular interest are several passages addressed to the times of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon: Jacob warned in 2 Nephi 9:37, "Yea, wo unto those

¹ Zoram led his people "to bow down to dumb idols" (Alma 31:10). While we have no other discussion about this issue in the narrative it is interesting to note the Zoramites cast out Alma and Amulek's converts from their midst because "they were angry because of the word, for it did destroy their craft." This same phrase occurs in the New Testament when Paul's missionary efforts threatened the idol makers in Ephesus who were mad because their "craft is in danger to be set at nought" (Acts 19:27). Perhaps part of the priestcraft of the leaders of the Zoramites involved the making and selling of idols.

that worship idols, for the devil of all devils delighteth in them" (2 Nephi 9:37); and Mormon addressed our time, "and repent of your evil doings, of your lyings and deceivings, and of your whoredoms, and of your secret abominations, and your idolatries" (3 Nephi 30:2).

Commandment #3: "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain (Mosiah 13:15 = Exod. 20:7) A biblical example is the episode of the blasphemer stoned to death in Lev 24:15-16.

Solemn oaths in the Old Testament were sworn invoking the name of the Lord. An oath that was made falsely or without intent would thus categorize "taking the name of the Lord in vain."¹ Of course this commandment also applies to any profane usage of the name of God.² The solemnity of oaths is well illustrated in the Book of Mormon in instances such as Zoram who swore "as the Lord liveth" (1 Ne. 4:32).

In a legal setting, if perjury was committed in the name of God this commandment would be related to Commandment #9 "bearing false witness," and this is probably the commandment addressed by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount about "foreswearing," where he taught that an oath ought to be valid based simply on a person's word "yea, yea or nay nay" (3 Ne. 12:33-37 = Matt. 5:33-37). Jesus also read to the Nephites a passage from Malachi regarding this commandments, "I will be a swift witness . . . against false swearers" (3 Ne. 24:5 = Mal. 3:5).

Nephi warned the latter-day readers of the Book of Mormon of their obligation to this commandment when he said, "the Lord God has commanded that men . . . should not take the name fo the Lord their God in vain" (2 Ne. 26:32).

¹ See D&C 63:61-62 which further includes those who use the name of the Lord without proper authority.

² It is interesting that much profanity using the name of God in English is actually remnants of oaths of condemnation.

Commandment #4 Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy (Mosiah 13:16 = Exod 20:8-11)

An Old Testament example is the story of the Israelite stoned for gathering sticks on the Sabbath (Num. 15:32-36).

For some reason there are only two references to this commandment in the Book of Mormon. Both, however, judged by their language, are direct references to this commandment. Jarom said about the Nephites in Jarom 1:5: "they observed to keep the Law of Moses and the sabbath day holy unto the Lord" (Jarom 1:5). And Alma, when he organized the Church at the waters of Mormon instructed the members "that they should observe the sabbath day, and keep it holy, and also every day they should give thanks to the Lord their God" (Mosiah 18:23).

Commandment #5 "Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee (Mosiah 13:20 = Exod. 20:12)

An example of the breaking of this commandment in the Bible is the hypothetical case of the execution of a disobedient son in Deut. 21:18-21.

The only reference to this commandment is found in Nephi's sermon to his brothers Laman and Lemuel in the episode where they were commanded to build a ship. Nephi quoted the commandment in full: "wherefore, worship the Lord thy God, and honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God shall give thee" (1 Ne. 17:55). The reference to the land here is undoubtedly the promised land in the New World which was promised to the posterity of Lehi, as descendants of Joseph (3 Ne. 15:12-13), just as Canaan was promised to the children of Israel.

Apart from this reference the Book of Mormon is full of narratives that wonderfully illustrate the significance of this commandment graphically illustrated by good sons such as Nephi, Jacob, Enos, Mosiah, Helaman, Shiblon, Helaman's stripling warriors, and Moroni and bad sons such as Laman, Lemuel,

Alma the Younger, the sons of Mosiah, and Corianton. It is interesting that several of these "bad examples" repented through the efforts of their parents.

Commandment #6 Thou shalt not kill (Mosiah 12:21 = Exod. 20:13)

While there are many biblical examples of the breaking of this commandment Freedman cites the episode in Judges 9 when a group of Benjaminites kill the Levite's concubine.

The Hebrew term used here for "kill" (Heb. rāṣah) does not distinguish between the English terms "kill" and "murder." In fact the translators of the King James Version translated the Hebrew term rāṣah as "kill" as well as "murder." See for example the reference in Jer. 7:9 "will ye steal, murder (rāṣah), and commit adultery" which is clearly a reference to the Ten Commandments.

The commandment against killing is found throughout the Book of Mormon in contexts ranging from premeditated murder and secret combinations to war. Satan, is the author of secret combinations, who "hath caused man to commit murder from the beginning" (Ether 8:25; see also 2 Ne. 26:22), and murder is at the very base of the secret combinations which led to the downfall of the Jaredites and the Nephites. There is a clear reference to this commandment in Nephi's list in 2 Nephi 26 where he cites six of the ten commandments together, "the Lord God hath commanded that men should not murder" (2 Nephi 26:32). Alma reminded his son Corianton that the worst two sins are "the shedding of innocent blood" and denying the Holy Ghost (Alma 39:5). While the common term for secret combinations is Gadianton "robbers" the term "murder" is almost always associated with them.¹

Jesus cited this commandment when he said "it is also written before you, that thou shalt not kill, and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment of God" (3 Ne. 12:21).

¹ The terms "rob" and "murder" are found together in Mosiah 10:17; Alma 1:18; 16:18; Hel. 6:17; 4 Ne. 16-17; Mormon 8:31.

In addition the seriousness of this sin is emphasized in several passages advocating capital punishment for murders: the story of Nehor who was killed because he "shed the blood of a righteous man" in Alma 1:13-14, as well as similar injunctions found in Alma 34:11-12 and 42:19.

In lists of laws or sins in the Book of Mormon, relating to two or more of the Ten Commandments, which we will discuss as a group below, the term "kill" only occurs twice while the term "murder" occurs 20 times.

Commandment #7 Thou shalt not commit adultery (Mosiah 13:22 = Exod. 20:14)

The classic biblical example of adultery is the tragic story of David and Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 11-12.

The phrase "commit adultery" occurs six times outside of Abinadi's quotation of the commandments and the passage in the Sermon on the Mount that Jesus teaches to the Nephites (3 Ne. 12:27-32). The English word "adultery" does not occur on the Small Plates at all. On the Small Plates the term for immorality is most often "whoredoms,"¹ For example see Jacob's sermon to the Nephites, "Wo unto them who commit whoredoms" (2 Ne. 9:36); and later to his people: "For I the Lord God, delight in the chastity of women. And whoredoms are an abomination before me" (Jacob 2:28; see also v. 33), and Nephi's warning to those in the latter days in 2 Nephi 26: "that they should not commit whoredoms" (2 Ne. 26:32). While the term "commit whoredoms" covers a broad range of immorality it often occurs in contexts suggesting it to be synonymous with adultery.²

¹ In one passage Jacob refers to "fornication" and "lasciviousness" (Jacob 3:12).

² While a systematic study of the different semantic fields of the two English terms (a precarious process considering we do not know how precise the translation intended to be) may reveal some fine distinctions between the two terms, it is certain that they have a great deal of overlap and refer to immorality outside of marriage covenants.

The occurrences of the term "adultery" and "whoredoms" are found in the lists of laws and sins that we will deal with below. In these lists the term "whoredom" occurs 11 times and "adultery" 7 times.

Chapter #8 Thou shalt not steal (Mosiah 12:22 = Exod. 20:15)

A biblical episode of stealing is the story of Achan who was stoned for stealing the sacred booty in Joshua 7.

The commandment against stealing is specifically referred to by Nephi in the passage in which he refers to six of the Ten Commandments directed towards the Gentiles in 2 Nephi 26: "And again, the Lord God hath commanded that men should not steal" (2 Ne. 26:32).

In the Book of Mormon lists of sins there are words from four different English roots used for stealing: "steal," "thieve," "rob," and "plunder." Usually the word "steal" is accompanied by the term "plunder" (Mosiah 2:13; 29:14, 36; Alma 16:18; 23:3; Hel. 4:12; 6:23; 7:21), and in at least two passages the words "steal" and "rob" occur together (Alma 1:18; Alma 16:18). It is difficult to tell in lists like this whether two words with similar meanings are terms with significant differences or are simply synonymous word pairs.

Working from comparative evidence an LDS scholar, John Welch, has convincingly demonstrated that there is a distinction in the Book of Mormon, just as in biblical and ancient Near Eastern law, between stealing (or theft) and robbery--stealing being a crime committed by an individual against his neighbor--treated in court--and robbery involving outsiders who attack in groups--most often dealt with militarily.¹ In several passages the term "plunder" is used with "rob" in the context of the secret combinations (Mosiah 10:17; Hel. 6:17-18; 11:25) suggesting that plunder is more closely associated with a group of outsiders rather than the

¹ See John W. Welch, "Theft and Robbery in the Book of Mormon and in Ancient Near Eastern Law," (Provo: F.A.R.M.S., 1989).

above definition of stealing. It is unclear, however, whether the terms are always used with such precise distinctions.

In the lists of laws and sins the terms deriving from "steal" and "plunder" each occur 10 times; "rob" 7 times; and "thieve" twice.

#9 Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor (Mosiah 12:23 = Exod. 20:16)

The well-known example of bearing false witness in the Old Testament is the story of Ahab and Jezebel and Naboth's vineyard in 2 Kings 21.

The phrase to "bear false witness against your neighbor" is only attested once in the Book of Mormon when Nephi, son of Helaman, called his people to repentance (Hel. 7:21). Technically the phrase "bearing false witness" in the Old Testament probably refers specifically to perjury in a formal legal proceeding, specified in the commandment "against one's neighbor." However its application probably was not confined to such formal proceedings but extended to any untruth told which would injure one's fellow.

Eleven times in the lists of laws and sins that are found throughout the Book of Mormon we find the English terms "lie" or "lying" (2 Ne. 26:32; Alma 1:18; 16:18; Hel. 4:12; 3 Ne. 16:10; 21:19; 30:2; Ether 8:16; Morm. 8:31), and in 5 of these cases "lie" is accompanied with "deceive" (Alma 16:18; 3 Ne. 21:19; 30:2; Mormon 8:31). The term "lying" admittedly represents a larger category of sins than "bearing false witness against one's neighbor," but it is likely that this term, as it is found in the lists including others of the Ten Commandments, represents the ninth commandment in the Book of Mormon.

Commandment #10 Thou shalt not covet (Mosiah 13:24 = Exod. 20:17)

Biblical examples of this commandment include the story of Achan in Joshua 7 where the word "covet" actually occurs (Josh. 7:21) as well as the episode of Ahab coveting Naboth's vineyard, and David coveting Bathsheba.¹

The Book of Mormon only contains one occurrence of the word "covet." King Benjamin instructing his people how to be charitable warned that even those who have not should be charitable in their hearts saying "I give not because I have not, but if I had I would give" (Mosiah 4:24) otherwise they are condemned because "ye covet that which ye have not received" (Mosiah 4:25).²

A review of the occurrences of the lists of sins in which others of the Ten Commandments are found suggests that the Book of Mormon word for "covet" is "envy." The English words are virtually synonyms and the term "envy" is a good translation of Heb. hāmād. The best evidence is 2 Nephi 26:32 which lists in explicit language five of the Ten Commandments (murder, lie, steal, take the name of the Lord their God in vain, and whoredoms). Included in this list is "that they should not envy." This term occurs in nine other passages where one or more of the Ten Commandments are mentioned (Alma 1:32; 4:9; 5:29; 16:18; Hel. 13:22; 3 Ne. 21:19; 30:2; 4 Ne. 1:16) supporting the idea that "envy" is synonymous with "coveting".

Book of Mormon Lists of Laws and Sins

While all of the Ten Commandments are represented in the Book of Mormon in one form or another there is no evidence that there is a conscious effort to include an historical example of the breaking of each as occurs in the Old Testament. The most dramatic way the Ten Commandments are represented are in series of laws or lists of sins. Besides the passage in Mosiah 12-13 where Abinadi reads the Ten

¹ See Hershel Shanks, "Nine or Ten Sins?", Bible Review (VI:2, Apr. 1990), p. 9. Freedman argues there are only nine examples in passages that use the exact terminology found in the Commandments—one for each of the nine books in the Primary History. Freedman, "The Nine Commandments," 37.

² This usage of the term "covet" is much like the one in D&C 19:25-26; 117:8; 136:20 where it applies to an attitude towards ones own possessions.

Commandments there are at least 24 passages in the Book of Mormon where two or more of the Ten Commandments are specifically referred to together.¹ For example Nephi referred to six of the Ten in his address to the latter-day readers of the Book of Mormon in 2 Nephi 26:

And again, the Lord God hath commanded that men should not murder; that they should not lie; that they should not steal; that they should not take the name of the Lord their God in vain; that they should not envy; that they should not have malice; that they should not contend one with another; that they should not commit whoredoms; and that they should do none of these things; for whoso doeth them perish. (2 Nephi 26:32)

King Benjamin reminded his people at the end of his reign:

Neither have I suffered that ye should be confined in dungeons, nor that ye should make slaves one of another, nor that ye should murder, or plunder, or steal, or commit adultery; not even have I suffered that ye should commit any manner of wickedness, and have taught you that ye should keep the commandments of the Lord, in all things which he hath commanded you-- (Mosiah 2:13).²

The time of Alma and Amulek is described:

Now those priests who did go forth among the people did preach against all lyings, and deceivings, and envyings, and strifes, and malice, and revilings, and stealing, robbing, plundering, murdering, committing adultery, and all manner of lasciviousness, crying that these things ought not so to be. (Alma 16:18)

The Nephites at the time of Alma who were destroyed for their iniquity were described:

And we see that these promises have been verified to the people of Nephi; for it had been their quarrelings and their contentions, yea, their murderings, and their plunderings, their idolatry, their whoredoms, and their abominations, which were among themselves, which brought upon them their wars and their destructions. (Alma 50:21).

¹ As a criteria for selecting these lists the sins are dealt with either in the same verse or in adjacent verses. Many extended passages in the Book of Mormon include these same sins but are not included here. See the attached Appendix for a full listing: 2 Nephi 9:27-38; 26:32; Mosiah 2:13; 10:17; 29:14, 36; Alma 1:18, 32; 16:18; 23:3; 50:21; Hel. 4:12; 6:17; 6:23; 7:5, 21; 13:22; 3 Nephi 12:21-37 16:10; 21:19; 24:5 = Malachi 3:5; 30:2; 4 Nephi 1:16-17; Mormon 8:31.

² His son Mosiah, at the end of his reign echoed similar words, "I have labored with all the power and faculties which I have possessed . . . that there should be no wars nor contentions, no stealing, nor plundering, nor murdering, nor any manner of iniquity" (Mosiah 29:14).

Several interesting observations can be made about these lists. In the 24 lists the terms "murder" or "kill" occur 22 times, "commit adultery" or "whoredoms" 18 times, and "steal," "rob" or "plunder" 17 times, "lie" or "bear false witness" 12 times, and "envy" 7 times. The commandment against idolatry occurs 5 times in these lists and the commandment against taking the Lord's name in vain, foreswearing, and false swearing 3 times. These statistics are not surprising considering the propensity of humans to sin in these ways and the gravity of unrighteousness these commandments represent.

The frequency of these occurrences, however reinforces the traditional division between the first and second sets of five commandments known elsewhere in scripture. In addition, the idea that there is a hierarchy in the order of the commandments is also reinforced. For example the commandment against murder is almost always accompanied by those against adultery and stealing, and often, but less frequently, by lying and envying. These lists demonstrate the knowledge and importance of the Ten Commandments in Book of Mormon theology in many periods of their history.¹

Professor Welch has also noted the occurrence of "series of laws" in the Book of Mormon in a recent article.² He examined nine passages in which a series of laws occurs in the Book of Mormon. Because the lists of laws in the Book of Mormon contain more than just the Ten Commandments Welch has attempted to create a composite list from these passages of all of the laws and commandments known in

¹ John Welch has noted that Jacob makes ten statements in his sermon in 2 Ne. 9:27-38 all of which begin with the word "wo." John W. Welch, "Jacob's Ten Commandments," F.A.R.M.S. Update March 1985. He suggests Jacob was deliberately imitating the Decalogue setting forth ten of the basic tenet of Nephite religion. In this list are included "Wo unto the liar" (9:34); "Wo unto the murderer who deliberately killeth (9:35); "Wo unto them who commit whoredoms (9:36); and, "Wo unto those that worship idols" (9:37).

² John W. Welch, "Series of Laws in the Book of Mormon," F.A.R.M.S. Preliminary Report, 1987. Welch discusses nine passages that include series of laws: 2 Ne. 26:32; Mosiah 2:13; 29:36; 29:33; 30:10; Hel. 3:14; 6:23; 7:21; Ether 8:16.

the Book of Mormon. Interestingly enough almost all of these can also be found in the so-called Covenant Code in Exodus 20-23. Welch's conclusion, supported by the evidence of this paper, is that the Nephite law lists demonstrate a relationship with the biblical law codes undoubtedly contained on the Brass Plates that persists throughout the Book of Mormon. At the same time the occurrences of these laws demonstrate a distinctive pattern as various Book of Mormon prophets apply these law codes to their contemporary situations.

The Book of Mormon thus reflects the same emphasis in terms of the Ten Commandments found elsewhere in scripture. The same specific commandments found in the prophetic passages of the Old Testament: Hosea: "swearing, lying, killing, stealing, and committing adultery (Hosea 4:1-2) and Jeremiah: "will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal [idolatry]" (Jer. 7:9)¹ are found in the Book of Mormon series of laws and lists of sins.

The emphasis on these five commandments is prominent in the rabbinical tradition as summarized by the phrase "love thy neighbor as thyself" and commonly called by them the "Golden Rule."² Jesus cited to the man who sought eternal life in the New Testament these same commandments: in Matthew 19:17-19 murder, adultery, stealing, false witness, and the parallel passage in Mark 10:19 includes "honour thy father and thy mother." In addition Paul's list in the letter to the Romans includes all five of these: adultery, kill, steal, bear false witness, and covet (Rom. 3:8-10). (See also 1 Cor. 6:9-10 and James 2:10-11). The list of commandments in Section 42 of the D&C also includes four of these five commandments: killing, stealing, false witness, and adultery (D&C 42:18-27).

¹See also Ezekiel 18 and 22.

² From the time of Jesus, for example, see the teachings of Rabbis Hillel and Akiba. See Flusser, "The Decalogue in the New Testament," pp. 226-29.

The second five commandments are more often mentioned together as the sins of the people that bring judgment.¹ But considering the importance of the first five commandments why is this the case? First of all it is clear that these are very basic and serious sins. Furthermore, in ancient Israel religious law, the Law of Moses, was to be the law of the land. It is not always clear how all of these commandments were enforced anciently in the Old or the New World, but there are several allusions in the Book of Mormon that many of these five of the Ten Commandments were enforced. King Benjamin, for example, specifically mentioned in Mosiah 2:13 that he did not condone murder, plundering, stealing, or committing adultery (Mosiah 2:13). His son Mosiah stated in Mosiah 29:14, 36 that he sought to eliminate stealing, plundering, and murdering (Mosiah 29:14, 36). At the time of Nehor it is clearly stated in Alma 1:32 that those convicted of lying, stealing, robbing, or murder were punished (Alma 1:32). Also at the time of Korihor, as indicated in Alma 30:10, the murderer, robber, thief, and adulterer were punished. Finally, murder, plunder, stealing, and committing whoredoms are "contrary to the laws of the country and also the laws of their God" at the time of Nephi in 3 Ne. 6:23. From these lists it appears that murder, plundering, stealing, robbing, and adultery were sins that were crimes that were legislated against and enforced. Perhaps the

¹ The importance of the Ten Commandments to covenant Israel is emphasized by a threat and a promise attached to the second commandment but apparently applied to all of them: "I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments" (Exod. 20:5-6). This same promise applied to the Book of Mormon (Mosiah 13:13-14). The point of the literary figure comparing the third and fourth generations to the thousands is to emphasize that the Lord's mercy is greater than his judgment. The metaphor may be literal as well. The "third and fourth generation of those that hate me" may refer to the fact that the Lord allows his children their agency but when successive generations demonstrate unrighteousness and an unwillingness to repent judgment then comes. In the Book of Mormon the wickedness of the Nephites began in 201 A.D. and final destruction occurred in 385--approximately the third or fourth generation of rebellion.

prominence of these sins in the lists is because these are the sins most able to be enforced and punished, and therefore the society that tolerates them becomes accountable for their consequences. Also it seems clear that issues of belief, perhaps including several of the first five commandments, were not dictated or enforced. See for example Alma 30:7-9 "Now there was no law against a man's belief; . . . Now if a man desired to serve God, it was his privilege; . . . but if he did not believe in him there was no law to punish him." In other words it is easier to legislate and enforce the relationships between man and man than between man and God. The Lord does not coerce men to love him.

In addition, maybe the emphasis on these commandments regulating man's relationship to man, over the commandments to love the Lord has further spiritual implications. In the parable of the sheep and goats in Matthew 25 Jesus taught, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matt. 25:40). In the laboratory of life our relationships with each other are basic, and constitute a first step towards our relationship with our God. This same concept is eloquently described in 1 John in such statements as "he that loveth his brother abideth in the light . . . but he that hateth his brother in darkness" (1 John 2:10-11) and "if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another" (1 John 4:11).

These lists acquire added significance when we read a couple of them addressed to us the modern readers of the Book of Mormon.

Jesus described the latter days:

At that day when the Gentiles shall sin against my gospel, and shall reject the fulness of my gospel, and shall be lifted upon in the pride of their hearts above all nations, and above all the people of the whole earth, and shall be filled with all manner of lyings, and of deceits, and of mischiefs, and all manner of hypocrisy, and murders, and priestcrafts, and whoredoms, and of secret abominations; and if they shall do all those things, and shall reject the fulness of my gospel, behold, saith the Father, I will bring the fulness of my gospel from among them. (3 Ne. 16:10)

Moroni likewise described the latter days:

Yea, it shall come in a day when there shall be great pollutions upon the face of the earth; there shall be murders, and robbing, and lying, and deceivings, and whoredoms, and all manner of abominations . . . (Mormon 8:31)

The precepts in the Ten Commandments form the backbone of religion in the Book of Mormon--both before and after the coming of Christ. They are not attached just to the Law of Moses. Each is specifically referred to at least once besides their reading by Abinadi. The breaking of these commandments--particularly murder, adultery, and stealing--are cited as the reasons for the destruction of the covenant people in the Book of Mormon (Alma 50:21; Hel. 6:23; 7:21; 13:22), just as they were cited in the Old Testament (Hosea 4:1-2; Jer. 7:9; Ezekiel 18, 22). When Nephi, Jesus, Mormon, and Moroni include a list of these commandments to us in the latter days, they understand the spiritual and actual historical consequences of living in a society that breaks and tolerates the breaking of these laws.

In the New Testament Jesus acknowledged the Ten Commandments as the foundation of the law when he recited them to the rich man seeking for eternal life (Matt. 19:17-19; Mark 10:19; Luke 18:20), and in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 12) where he referred to murder, adultery, and forswearing. In both cases however Jesus taught that obedience to these commandments was not enough. To the man seeking eternal life, who had obeyed all of the Ten Jesus taught, "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor . . . and come and follow me" (Matt. 19:21), and in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus taught that in order to become perfect we need to conquer anger, lust, and become perfectly honest.

Along these lines Abinadi taught the priests of Noah that salvation does come by obedience to the commandments of God (Mosiah 12:33) but reminded them that "salvation doth not come by the law alone; and were it not for the atonement, which God himself shall make for the sins and iniquities of his people, that they must

unavoidably perish, notwithstanding the law of Moses" (Mosiah 13:28). The Book of Mormon emphasizes the Ten Commandments throughout, but constantly reminds us salvation comes not just through obedience to the Law but through the Atonement. In the words of Nephi, "it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do" (2 Ne. 25:23).

Appendix A

The Traditional Divisions of the Ten Commandments

Following the versification of Exodus 20 here are the three traditional divisions of the Ten Commandments.

<u>Rabbinical Tradition</u>	<u>Greek/Reform</u>	<u>Latin/Lutheran</u>
1. 2 I am the Lord	1. 2-3 I am/no other gods	1. 2-6 I am/no other/images
2. 3-6 no other/images	2. 4-6 images	2. 7 name in vain
3. 7 name in vain	3. 7 name in vain	3. 8-11 Sabbath
4. 8-11 Sabbath	4. 8-11 Sabbath	4. 12 Honour father
5. 12 Honour father	5. 12 Honour father	5. 13 kill
6. 13 kill	6. 13 kill	6. 14 adultery
7. 14 adultery	7. 14 adultery	7. 15 steal
8. 15 steal	8. 15 steal	8. 16 false witness
9. 16 false witness	9. 16 false witness	9. 17a covet house
10. 17 covet	10. 17 covet	10. 17b covet wife

Appendix B

Lists of Sins in the Book of Mormon that contain two or more of the Ten Commandments

	#6 kill	#7 commit adultery	#8 steal	#9 false witness	#10 covet
2 Ne. 9:27-38 murder (#2 idols)		commit whoredoms		liar	
2 Ne. 26:32 (#3 name in vain)	murder	commit whoredoms	steal	lie	envy
Mosiah 2:13	murder	commit adultery	steal plunder		
Mosiah 10:17	murder		rob plunder		
Mosiah 29:14, 36 murder			steal plunder		
Alma 1:18	murder		steal rob	lie	
Alma 1:32 (#2 idolatry)	murder	whoredom	thieving rob	lie	envy
Alma 16:18 (#2 idolatry)	murder	commit adultery lasciviousness	stealing robbing plundering thieving	lie deceive	envy
Alma 23:3	murder	commit adultery	steal plunder		
Alma 50:21 (#2 idolatry)	murder	whoredom	plunder		
Hel. 4:12	murder	commit adultery	stealing plunder	lie	
Hel. 6:17	murder		rob plunder		
Hel. 6:23	murder	commit whoredom	steal plunder		
Hel. 7:5	kill	commit adultery	steal		

Hel. 7:21	murder		steal plunder	bear false witness	
Hel 13:22	murder				envy
3 Ne. 12:21-37	kill	commit adultery			
	(#3 foreswear)				
3 Ne. 16:10	murder	whoredom		lie deceive	
3 Ne. 21:19		whoredom		lie deceive	envy
3 Ne. 24:5		adultery			
	= Mal. 3:5				
	(#3 false swearing)				
3 Ne. 30:2	murder	whoredom		lie deceive	envy
	(#2 idolatry)				
4 Ne. 1:16-17		whoredom	rob		envy
	murder	lasciviousness			
Morm. 8:31	murder	whoredom	rob	lie deceive	
Ether 8:16	murder	whoredom	plunder	lie	

22x	18x	17x	12x	7x
20x murder	11x whoredom	10x steal	11x lie	7x envy
2x kill	7x adultery	11x plunder	1x false witness	
	2x lasciviousness	7x rob	5x deceive	
		2x thief		

Also #2 idolatry occurs 5x
#3 false swearing 3x