

Tony Tomasino, Ten Commandments, Session 1: The Ten Commandments and the Law NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Briefing Document, 3) Study Guide, and 4) FAQs

1) Abstract:

Dr. Anthony J. Tomasino's **Session 1** explores the **Ten Commandments** within the broader context of **biblical law**. He discusses their **practicality** for modern Christians, emphasizing understanding them within both **ancient Near Eastern** and contemporary society. Tomasino distinguishes between **apodictic** ("thou shalt") and **casuistic** ("if...then") laws, noting the unique, **unenforceable nature** of some commandments due to their focus on **internal thought** rather than outward actions. He posits that the Ten Commandments function more as **covenant vows** outlining a relationship with God, rather than rigid rules, and addresses scholarly debates about their **origin, form, and interpretation**, including whether Christians are still **obligated to follow them** in light of Jesus' teachings.

2) Detailed Briefing: The Ten Commandments and the Law

This briefing summarizes Dr. Anthony J. Tomasino's first session on "The Ten Commandments and the Law," drawing insights from his book "Written Upon the Heart, the Ten Commandments for Today's Christian." Tomasino explores the historical, cultural, and theological contexts of the Decalogue, differentiating it from other ancient Near Eastern law codes and discussing its relevance for contemporary Christians.

1. The Ten Commandments as a Foundational Document of Christian Faith

Dr. Tomasino highlights that the Ten Commandments, also known as the Decalogue, are considered one of the "three foundational documents of Christian faith" alongside the Lord's Prayer and the Apostles' Creed.

- **Ethical Foundation:** The Ten Commandments provide the "ethical foundation."

- **Practical Guidance:** Tomasino emphasizes their practical nature, stating they "still give us guidance for how to live if we understand them, if we appreciate them, if we apply them in our own lives and situations."
- **Not a Universal Panacea:** He challenges the notion that the Ten Commandments are a "panacea" for societal ills or "the basis of any just society." Instead, he argues they are "made for a specific society, a society that worships the Lord, the God of Israel, not for any society."
- **Wisdom, Not Magic:** While not "magic," Tomasino asserts that the commandments are "wise," containing "wisdom and the knowledge which are embedded in these commandments."
- **Public Understanding:** Despite their perceived importance, a survey indicated that "most people are woefully uninformed about what they actually say," with the average Christian only able to name four of the ten.

2. Understanding "Law" in Ancient Near Eastern and Biblical Contexts

Tomasino delves into the concept of "law," contrasting modern absolute interpretations with the more flexible understanding in the ancient Near East and the nuanced meaning of "Torah."

2.1. Ancient Near Eastern Law Codes: Context and Characteristics

- **Ancient Origins:** Law codes existed even before writing, as "oral law codes have existed from probably as soon as people started getting together and forming groups."
- **Assertion of Authority:** Kings and rulers, known as suzerains, used law codes to "establish their authority over local powers," imposing their rules on conquered tribes.
- **Divine Origin Claim:** Kings often "claimed they got the laws from the gods," as seen with Hammurabi receiving laws from Shamash, the god of justice, to legitimate their authority.
- **Covenant Relationship:** Law in the ancient Near East existed within a "covenant relationship" between the king and his people, outlining mutual rights and responsibilities.

- **Apodictic vs. Casuistic Laws:**
- **Apodictic:** "Thou shalt, thou shalt not" – direct pronouncements (e.g., "Do not cause any of your children to pass over to Molech").
- **Casuistic:** "If...then..." case law, forming the "vast majority of the laws" (e.g., Hammurabi's law regarding an accused leaping into a river).
- **Flexibility in Enforcement:** Remarkably, ancient law codes like Hammurabi's were "mostly symbolic" and "weren't enforced" rigidly. Judges often exercised "grace or lenience or simple discretion," indicating laws were "more like guidelines, not in the way we typically think of laws today." Penalties had "a great deal of variation."

2.2. Israelite Law: Torah and its Nuances

- **Torah as "Teaching" or "Instruction":** The Hebrew word "Torah" is usually translated as "law" but more accurately means "teaching or instruction." It carries connotations of "wisdom tradition" and can refer to parental teaching or prophetic instruction, making it a "much broader concept" than simply rules.
- **Huqqah (Statute):** Refers to an "immutable principle," such as "it is an immutable principle that people do not commit adultery," while allowing for "wisdom involved in how one deals with a case" and "a great deal of variation that was permitted."
- **Mitzvot (Commands/Good Deeds):** Derived from "tzavah" (to command), "mitzvot" in Judaism also conveys a sense of "good deeds" (e.g., giving money to the poor is a "mitzvah").
- **Nomos (Greek):** In the New Testament, "nomos" can mean both "tradition" and "law," encompassing concepts like the "law of the stars" (immutable principles) and "those things which are normally done."

3. Origins and Development of Israelite Law

Tomasino parallels the development of Israelite law with ancient Near Eastern practices, emphasizing its covenantal nature and dynamic evolution.

- **Analogy to Ancient Kings:** Just as kings imposed new codes on diverse groups, God "exerting his authority" over the existing tribal regulations of Israel.
- **Growth through Court Proceedings:** While tradition asserts Moses received all laws on Sinai, Tomasino notes that the Torah itself shows "provision for the extension, for the building, for the expansion of the law beyond just what is written or what was given to Moses on the mountainside," citing cases like the blasphemer.
- **Ezra's Role:** The theory that laws were "codified under Ezra" holds significant weight, as he "gathered the various law codes" and "promulgated them," enforcing them with Persian Empire authority. This suggests a formalization of traditions that existed but were often ignored.

4. Characteristics of the Ten Commandments

Tomasino highlights the unique aspects of the Decalogue that set it apart from other law codes.

- **Apodictic Form:** The Ten Commandments are primarily "apodictic" ("Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not commit adultery.").
- **Lack of Penalties:** Uniquely, "none of them include any penalties." This contrasts sharply with casuistic laws that explicitly state consequences.
- **Ambiguity:** The commandments can be "rather ambiguous" (e.g., "honor your father and mother," "remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy"), leading to various interpretations and rabbinic attempts to define them.
- **Unenforceable (as Rules):** The command against coveting ("You shall not want what somebody else has got") is "totally unique in the ancient world" and "unenforceable" if viewed as a literal rule, requiring self-policing.
- **Covenant Stipulation, Not Rules:** The Ten Commandments are best understood as "covenant stipulation," "obligations that the people of Israel have been called to accept as part of that covenant relationship with their God." Tomasino prefers to view them "more as vows than as rules."

5. Structure and Interpretation of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20)

Tomasino argues for the authenticity and intentional structure of the Exodus 20 version of the Decalogue.

- **Structure:**
 - **1-3:** "Obligations to God" (e.g., no other gods, no idols, don't misuse God's name).
 - **4:** "Obligation not only to God but to to creation in the Sabbath day," encompassing good for society, fellow human beings, nature, and animals.
 - **5:** "Honor your father and mother," marking "the beginning of our obligations to other human beings."
 - **6-9:** "Obligations to other people and kind of descending order of severity" (murder, adultery, stealing, false testimony).
 - **10:** "About our inner life" – coveting, ordering our thought life.
- **Severity of Sins:** Tomasino explicitly states, "Every sin is the same. No, that's not true," contrasting murder with stealing as demonstrably different in severity.
- **Historical-Cultural Context:** It is crucial to "read them in their historical cultural context" to understand their original meaning (e.g., adultery in the ancient world, "bearing false witness").
- **Theocracy vs. Modern America:** The commandments "are designed for ancient Israel not for modern America," a theocracy ruled by God, which is distinct from modern political entities.
- **Harbinger of Failures:** The Ten Commandments serve as a "litany which foretells the failures of Israel," particularly regarding the first commandment.
- **Literary and Theological Context:** They are part of the "Hebrew Bible canon," fulfilled and fleshed out in other Old Testament books, and for Christians, read "in the light of what is taught by Jesus," especially in the Sermon on the Mount.

6. Historical Critical Issues and Different Versions

Tomasino addresses scholarly debates about the Decalogue's origins, historicity, and textual variations.

- **Skepticism towards Miraculous:** Historical criticism often "denies the possibility of the miraculous," leading to skepticism about Moses receiving laws directly from God.
- **Existence of Moses:** While some scholars deny Moses' existence, Tomasino argues that details like his Egyptian name (meaning "born of," e.g., Ramesses) support his historicity.
- **Original Form and Length:**
 - Some argue the commandments were originally shorter and all negative (e.g., "do not dishonor your father and mother"). Tomasino finds this "not likely, necessarily."
 - The exact number "Ten" is mentioned elsewhere (Exodus 34, Deuteronomy 5) but not explicitly in Exodus 20 itself.
- **Capital Offenses:** The argument that all Ten Commandments were originally capital offenses is challenged. Tomasino points out that in the Old Testament, "nobody was ever put to death for committing adultery, even though the law says to stone adulterers to death," citing cases like David and Gomer.
- **Multiple Decalogues?:**
 - **Exodus 34:10-26 (Ritual Decalogue):** Scholars often cite this passage, which mentions "the Ten Commandments" in verse 28, as a separate, more ritualistic Decalogue. However, Tomasino contends that the list of commands in Exodus 34 does not add up to ten and instead views it as a "compendium of laws" distinct from the core Ten Commandments.
 - **Deuteronomy 5:** This version is "very, very similar to the ones in Exodus 20," but with key differences.
 - **Sabbath Rationale:** Exodus 20 roots the Sabbath in creation ("God made the heavens and the earth... rested on the seventh day"); Deuteronomy 5 roots it

in deliverance from slavery in Egypt ("Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and the Lord your God brought you out from there"). Tomasino sees Deuteronomy 5 as a "later and more reflected version," providing a "moral reason" based on Israel's experience.

- **Coveting Command:** Deuteronomy 5 lists "neighbor's wife" first and then "house or field or male servant or female servant or ox or donkey or anything that belongs to the neighbor." Tomasino suggests moving the wife to the front might reflect a tradition that "does not identify the wife with household property." He believes Exodus 20 "does represent the original form of the Ten Commandments."

7. Christian Obligation to the Ten Commandments

Tomasino addresses the ongoing debate about the Decalogue's relevance for Christians today.

- **Not Abrogated:** He argues against the view that "the Ten Commandments have been totally abrogated" and "have no bearing on the Christian life today."
- **Saved by Grace, Not Works:** While Christians are "not saved by keeping the laws" ("By works of the law shall no flesh be justified"), neither was ancient Israel.
- **Jesus' Fulfillment:** Jesus stated, "I have not come to abolish the law or the prophets I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them." Tomasino interprets this fulfillment as occurring "when his kingdom comes in its fullness," not solely at his death and resurrection.
- **Intention over Letter:** For Christians, the approach to the law, as seen in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, is to "observe the intention of the laws rather than the letter of the laws." Paul's teaching that "The letter kills, but the spirit makes alive" reinforces this, emphasizing the "spirit of the laws" that guides pleasing God.

3) Understanding the Ten Commandments and the Law: A Study Guide

I. Overview of the Ten Commandments

- **Author and Background:** Dr. Anthony J. Tomasino, author of "Written Upon the Heart, the Ten Commandments for Today's Christian." This teaching is a reflection of years of study, moving from sermons to Sunday school classes, lectures, and finally a book.
- **Purpose and Practicality:** Tomasino emphasizes the practicality of the Ten Commandments, highlighting their enduring guidance for living in contemporary society, despite originating 3,000 years ago.
- **Contextual Understanding:** The commandments must be understood both in their original Ancient Near Eastern context and in our current societal context. This involves a "merging of horizons."
- **Foundation of Biblical Law:** The Ten Commandments are considered the foundation of the biblical law code found in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.
- **Church Tradition:** In church tradition, the Ten Commandments (Decalogue) are one of three foundational documents of Christian faith:
- **Ten Commandments:** Ethical foundation.
- **Lord's Prayer:** Spiritual foundation.
- **Apostles' Creed:** Theological foundation.
- **Misconceptions and Wisdom:** Tomasino challenges the idea that the Ten Commandments are a "panacea" for societal ills or the sole basis for any just society. He argues they are specific to a society that worships the God of Israel. He stresses that they are not magic but embody wisdom and knowledge.
- **Public Understanding:** A survey revealed that most Christians are woefully uninformed about the Ten Commandments, often remembering only four out of ten and failing to recall them in order.

II. The Concept of Law

- **Defining Law: Cambridge Dictionary Definition:** "A rule usually made by a government that is used to order the way in which a society behaves."
- **Modern vs. Ancient Understanding:** Modern society often views law in absolute terms (e.g., speed limits). Tomasino argues biblical laws are more flexible.
- **Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) Law: Oral Law Codes:** Existed even before writing, essential for preventing conflict and defining societal roles.
- **Imposition by Lords/Kings:** Law codes were used by rulers (suzerains) to establish authority over conquered groups, asserting their "higher authority."
- **Divine Origin Claim:** Kings like Hammurabi claimed their laws were received from gods (e.g., Shamash, the god of justice), providing a source of their authority.
- **Covenant Relationship:** ANE law existed within a covenant relationship between the king and his people, where the people accepted responsibilities in exchange for benefits of being part of the kingdom.
- **Types of ANE Law (Albrecht Alt's Terms): Apodictic Law:** Direct pronouncements, "Thou shalt/shalt not" (e.g., Ten Commandments).
- **Casuistic Law:** Case law, "If...then..." (e.g., if a man's ox gores someone, then...). This form constitutes the vast majority of ANE law codes.
- **Enforcement in ANE:** Hammurabi's code, while well-designed, was often not strictly enforced by judges. Penalties varied, and leniency/discretion was common (e.g., Middle Assyrian law codes regarding adultery). ANE laws were often more like "guidelines."

III. Israelite Law (Torah)

- **Meaning of "Torah":** While often translated as "law," *Torah* more broadly means "teaching" or "instruction." It connects to wisdom tradition and can refer to parental teaching or prophetic instruction.

- **Appearance in Genesis 26:** Abraham "obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws," indicating a pre-Mosaic understanding of divine instruction.
- **Other Hebrew Terms:***Huqqah*: Statute; an immutable principle (e.g., adultery is wrong).
- **Mitzvot:** Commands; also, in Judaism, has a sense of "good deeds."
- **Greek Term "Nomos":** In the New Testament, *nomos* can mean both "law" (like physics) and "tradition" or "things normally done."
- **Origins and Development of Israelite Law: Analogy to ANE:** Like ANE kings, God (through Moses) imposed a new law code on the diverse Israelite tribes, who previously had their own regulations. This asserted God's authority in a covenant relationship.
- **Growth and Expansion:** Laws developed through court proceedings and specific cases (e.g., blasphemy case in the Torah). This shows an expansion of the law beyond the initial Sinai revelation.
- **Ezra's Role:** The theory suggests Ezra codified and promulgated the Pentateuch (the first five books of Moses) after the exile, bringing together existing traditions and enforcing them as the law of the land with Persian authority. This explains why some laws might not have been widely practiced before Ezra.
- **Characteristics of Old Testament Law: Predominantly Casuistic:** Like ANE codes, most are "if...then..." statements.
- **Presence of Apodictic Laws:** (e.g., Leviticus 18:21, "Do not cause any of your children to pass over to Molech").
- **Ten Commandments Unique: Apodictic:** "Thou shalt not..."
- **No Explicit Penalties:** The commandments themselves do not state punishments for violations (e.g., murder, adultery). Penalties are found elsewhere in the law code.

- **Ambiguity:** Some commands are open to interpretation (e.g., "Honor your father and mother," "Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy" – defining "work").
- **Unenforceable Commands:** The tenth commandment, "You shall not covet," is unique in its unenforceability by human authorities, requiring self-policing.
- **Ten Commandments as Vows/Covenant Stipulations:** Rather than absolute rules, Tomasino views the Ten Commandments as covenant stipulations or "vows" Israel took upon themselves in their relationship with God, similar to marriage vows. This emphasizes personal commitment and self-policing. The first commandment ("You shall have no other gods") highlights the exclusivity of this "monogamous" relationship with God.

IV. Historical-Critical Issues Regarding the Ten Commandments

- **Skepticism about Miraculous Origin:** Historical criticism often rejects the miraculous aspect of God giving laws on a mountaintop.
- **Existence of Moses:** Some scholars question Moses' historicity, viewing him as a "made-up character." Tomasino counters that his Egyptian name actually supports his authenticity. Others believe Moses existed but attribute the laws to later periods.
- **Original Form of the Decalogue: Multiple Versions:** Differences between Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 suggest different traditions or developments in the wording.
- **Shorter Original?** Some argue commands were originally shorter and negative (e.g., "Do not dishonor your father and mother"). Tomasino finds this unlikely.
- **"Ten" Commandments?** While called "Ten Commandments" elsewhere (Exodus 34, Deuteronomy), Exodus 20 itself doesn't use "ten."
- **Capital Offenses?** The argument that all Ten Commandments were originally capital offenses is challenged by Tomasino, who notes that many capital offenses (like adultery or Sabbath breaking) were not consistently enforced with death penalties in the Old Testament narrative.

- **"Ritual Decalogue" (Exodus 34:10-26):** Scholars propose this as another version of the Ten Commandments, containing laws about feasts and sacrifices. Tomasino disagrees, arguing that the passage simply mentions the Ten Commandments *among* other laws, not as the entirety of that list.
- **Differences in Exodus 20 vs. Deuteronomy 5: Sabbath Rationale:** **Exodus 20:** Roots Sabbath in Creation (God rested on the 7th day).
- **Deuteronomy 5:** Roots Sabbath in the Exodus (Israel was freed from slavery; therefore, they should give rest to others). Tomasino sees Deuteronomy 5 as a later, more "reflected" version, emphasizing social justice and empathy.
- **Coveting Command: Exodus 20:** Lists "neighbor's house, wife, male or female slave, ox, donkey, anything that belongs to your neighbor."
- **Deuteronomy 5:** Separates "neighbor's wife" to the front and adds "field," possibly to reach a list of seven items (number of completion) and to distinguish the wife from mere "household property." Tomasino believes Exodus 20 is the original form.

V. Structure and Interpretation of the Ten Commandments

- **Structure (Exodus 20):** Tomasino believes the order is intentional, not random.
- **Commandments 1-3:** Obligations to God (Exclusivity, Idolatry, Name).
- **Commandment 4 (Sabbath):** Obligation to God and to Creation (human beings, nature, animals).
- **Commandment 5 (Honor Parents):** Beginning of obligations to other human beings.
- **Commandments 6-9:** Obligations to other people, in descending order of severity (Murder, Adultery, Stealing, False Witness). He refutes the idea that "every sin is the same."
- **Commandment 10 (Coveting):** Obligation to our inner life/thought life.
- **Principles of Interpretation: Historical-Cultural Context:** Crucial for understanding their original meaning (e.g., ancient understanding of adultery,

false witness). They were designed for ancient Israel, a theocracy, not modern America.

- **Harbinger of Israel's Failures:** The Ten Commandments foreshadow Israel's consistent failures throughout its history (e.g., worshipping other gods).
- **Literary and Theological Context:** Understood as part of the Hebrew Bible canon, fulfilled in other Old Testament books, and for Christians, re-interpreted through Jesus' teachings.
- **Jesus' Fulfillment:** Jesus did not abolish the law but came to "fulfill" it, meaning it will be fully realized when his kingdom comes in its fullness and the law is "written upon our hearts."
- **Intention vs. Letter:** Christians are obligated to keep the *intention* or *spirit* of the laws, as emphasized in the Sermon on the Mount, rather than merely the literal "letter" which "kills."

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. According to Dr. Tomasino, what are the three foundational documents of Christian faith, and what type of foundation does each provide?
2. Why does Tomasino disagree with the common argument that the Ten Commandments are the basis of any just society?
3. Explain the difference between apodictic and casuistic law, providing an example of each type mentioned in the text.
4. How did Ancient Near Eastern kings, like Hammurabi, claim authority for their law codes?
5. What is the broader meaning of the Hebrew word "Torah" beyond simply "law," and where is this broader meaning exemplified in the Bible?
6. Describe Ezra's theoretical role in the codification and promulgation of the Pentateuch, according to the text.

7. What unique characteristics distinguish the Ten Commandments from most other laws found in Ancient Near Eastern law codes and even other parts of the Torah?
8. Identify one significant difference between the Sabbath commandment in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, and explain Tomasino's reasoning for this variation.
9. How does Tomasino categorize the structure of the Ten Commandments (1-3, 4, 5, 6-9, 10), and what kind of obligation does each section represent?
10. According to Tomasino, how should Christians approach the Ten Commandments today, considering Jesus's teaching on "fulfilling the law"?

Answer Key

1. According to Dr. Tomasino, the three foundational documents of Christian faith are the Ten Commandments, providing an ethical foundation; the Lord's Prayer, offering a spiritual foundation; and the Apostles' Creed, which lays out a theological foundation. These are often presented in a series of sermons when he starts at a new church.
2. Tomasino argues that the Ten Commandments were made for a specific society, one that worships the God of Israel, not for "any" society. He believes presenting them as a universal panacea for all societal problems misunderstands their specific context and purpose.
3. Apodictic law refers to direct pronouncements, like "Thou shalt not kill," without conditions. Casuistic law, on the other hand, is case law, using "If...then..." statements, such as "If a man has an ox that he knew would gore people... then that man shall be put to death." Most Ancient Near Eastern laws are casuistic.
4. Ancient Near Eastern kings claimed to receive their laws directly from the gods. For instance, Hammurabi is depicted receiving a tablet of laws from Shamash, the god of justice, which served as the source of his authority and legitimacy to impose these laws on his conquered peoples.
5. Beyond "law," "Torah" more broadly means "teaching" or "instruction," arising from the wisdom tradition. This broader sense is exemplified in the book of

Proverbs, where it is used for parental teaching, and in Genesis 26, where Abraham is said to have kept God's "laws" long before Moses, referring to general instructions.

6. The theory suggests Ezra gathered and codified various law codes, promulgating them as the Pentateuch after the exile. He had the authority of the Persian Empire to enforce these laws, making them the law of the land, which explains why certain traditions might have been ignored or unknown before his time.
7. The Ten Commandments are unique in being apodictic and lacking explicit penalties within the commands themselves. They also contain ambiguities (e.g., defining "work" for the Sabbath) and include the uniquely unenforceable commandment against coveting, which requires self-policing rather than external enforcement.
8. The Sabbath commandment in Exodus 20 is rooted in Creation, stating that God rested on the seventh day. In contrast, Deuteronomy 5 roots the Sabbath in the Exodus event, reminding Israel that they were slaves in Egypt and God delivered them, thus they should provide rest for others. Tomasino views Deuteronomy as a later, more reflected version emphasizing moral and social reasons.
9. Tomasino structures the Ten Commandments as follows: 1-3 address obligations to God; 4 (Sabbath) involves obligations to God and all of creation; 5 (Honor Parents) begins obligations to other human beings; 6-9 are obligations to others in descending order of severity; and 10 (Coveting) focuses on obligations to one's inner thought life.
10. Christians should approach the Ten Commandments by observing the *intention* or *spirit* of the laws, rather than merely the literal letter, as taught by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus came to fulfill the law, meaning it will be fully realized when his kingdom comes in its fullness and the law is "written upon our hearts."

Essay Format Questions

1. Discuss Dr. Tomasino's argument regarding the flexibility of biblical laws compared to modern understandings of law. How does he use examples from

Ancient Near Eastern legal traditions to support this claim, and what implications does this have for interpreting the Ten Commandments?

2. Analyze the role of "covenant relationship" in both Ancient Near Eastern law codes and Israelite law, according to Tomasino. How does this concept redefine the purpose and nature of laws like the Ten Commandments, moving them beyond simple "rules"?
3. Compare and contrast the two major versions of the Ten Commandments found in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, focusing on their differences in rationale and wording. What insights does Tomasino draw from these variations regarding the development and interpretation of the Decalogue?
4. Evaluate Tomasino's structural analysis of the Ten Commandments (obligations to God, creation, others, inner life). How does this proposed structure contribute to his understanding of the commandments' wisdom and their relevance for different aspects of human existence?
5. Based on Tomasino's lecture, what does it mean for Christians to be "obligated to keep the Ten Commandments" in light of Jesus's teaching about fulfilling the law? Discuss the distinction between the "letter" and the "spirit" of the law and its practical implications for Christian living.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Abrogate:** To repeal or do away with (a law, right, or formal agreement).
- **Albrecht Alt:** A biblical scholar credited with coining the terms "apodictic" and "casuistic" to describe different forms of ancient law.
- **Ancient Near East (ANE):** The region and cultures of Southwest Asia (including Mesopotamia, Egypt, and the Levant) from antiquity through early classical times, where many early law codes originated.
- **Apodictic Law:** A type of law expressed as an absolute and unconditional command or prohibition, often in the form of "Thou shalt" or "Thou shalt not." The Ten Commandments are primary examples.
- **Asherah Poles:** Sacred poles or trees, often associated with the Canaanite goddess Asherah, condemned in the Hebrew Bible as symbols of idolatry.

- **Casuistic Law:** A type of law that sets out specific conditions and consequences, typically in an "if...then..." format, addressing particular cases or scenarios. Most ANE law codes are casuistic.
- **Covenant Relationship:** A formal, binding agreement between two parties, often involving mutual obligations and promises. In the context of the lecture, it describes the relationship between kings and their subjects, and God and Israel, as the basis for law.
- **Decalogue:** Another name for the Ten Commandments, derived from Greek words meaning "ten words."
- **Deuteronomy 5:** One of the two primary biblical passages where the Ten Commandments are listed, presenting a slightly different version from Exodus 20, particularly in the rationale for the Sabbath.
- **Exodus 20:** The primary biblical passage where the Ten Commandments are listed, traditionally seen as the original giving of the commandments on Mount Sinai.
- **Exodus 34:10-26 (Ritual Decalogue):** A passage in Exodus sometimes identified by scholars as a "ritual decalogue" or another version of the Ten Commandments, focusing on feasts and sacrifices. Tomasino disputes this interpretation.
- **Ezra:** A Jewish scribe and priest mentioned in the biblical books of Ezra and Nehemiah, traditionally credited with a significant role in collecting and promulgating the Pentateuch after the Babylonian exile.
- **Hammurabi:** A king of Babylon (c. 1792-1750 BC) famous for his comprehensive law code, one of the earliest and best-preserved written law codes from ancient Mesopotamia.
- **Historiography:** The writing of history; the study of historical writing. Tomasino uses this to distinguish how ancient texts present history versus modern historical inquiry.
- **Huqqah:** A Hebrew term typically translated as "statute," implying an immutable or engraved principle.

- **Intention of the Laws / Spirit of the Laws:** Refers to the deeper purpose, moral principle, or underlying meaning of a law, as opposed to its literal wording or "letter." Emphasized by Jesus.
- **Letter of the Laws:** The strict, literal interpretation and application of a law, without regard for its underlying purpose or spirit.
- **Lent:** A period of fasting, abstinence, and penitence observed by Christians in preparation for Easter.
- **Mashach:** A Hebrew word meaning "to draw out," often associated with the folk etymology of Moses' name.
- **Middle Assyrian Law Codes:** A collection of laws from the Middle Assyrian period (c. 1400-1100 BC), notable for their explicit discussions of judicial discretion and varying penalties.
- **Mitzvot:** A Hebrew term meaning "commands" or "commandments." In Judaism, it also often refers to "good deeds."
- **Molech:** An ancient Near Eastern deity associated with child sacrifice, mentioned in apodictic laws in Leviticus.
- **Nomos:** A Greek word used in the New Testament, meaning "law," but also capable of meaning "tradition" or "what is customarily done."
- **Panacea:** A solution or remedy for all difficulties or diseases; a cure-all. Tomasino rejects the idea that the Ten Commandments are a panacea for society.
- **Pentateuch:** The first five books of the Hebrew Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, traditionally attributed to Moses. Also known as the Torah.
- **Rabbinic Teachings:** The body of Jewish religious and legal scholarship developed by rabbis, particularly after the biblical period.
- **Ramesses:** An Egyptian pharaoh whose name means "begotten of Ra," demonstrating the "born of" or "son of" meaning in Egyptian names like "Moses."
- **Sabbatarians:** Christians who observe Saturday as the Sabbath.

- **Sermon on the Mount:** A collection of sayings and teachings of Jesus, found in the Gospel of Matthew, which includes his interpretations and expansions on several of the Ten Commandments.
- **Shamash:** The Mesopotamian sun god, often associated with justice, from whom Hammurabi claimed to have received his laws.
- **Stela:** An upright stone slab or pillar bearing an inscription or design, often used for legal codes or monuments (e.g., Hammurabi's stela).
- **Suzerain:** A sovereign or state exercising political control over a dependent state or people. In ANE treaties, the suzerain established laws for their vassals.
- **Theocracy:** A system of government in which priests rule in the name of God or a god. Tomasino notes ancient Israel was a theocracy, unlike modern America.
- **Thutmoses:** An Egyptian pharaoh whose name means "begotten of Thoth," another example illustrating the Egyptian meaning of "Moses."
- **Torah:** (See "Meaning of 'Torah'")
- **Ur-Nammu:** An ancient Sumerian king (c. 2100 BC) known for one of the earliest extant law codes, predating Hammurabi.
- **Yahwistic Tradition:** One of the proposed source documents or traditions in the Documentary Hypothesis, often associated with the use of the divine name Yahweh (Lord).

4) FAQs

1. What is the significance of the Ten Commandments in Christian faith?

The Ten Commandments, also known as the Decalogue, are considered one of the three foundational documents of Christian faith. They provide an ethical framework, while the Lord's Prayer offers a spiritual foundation, and the Apostles' Creed gives a theological one. Dr. Anthony J. Tomasino emphasizes their practical guidance for living, applicable even today, despite the different challenges faced over millennia.

He views them as the foundation of the biblical law code, particularly for ancient Israel, and not necessarily a universal basis for any just society.

2. How does the concept of "law" in the ancient Near East differ from modern understandings, and where do the Ten Commandments fit in?

In modern society, law is often seen as absolute rules enforced by governments (e.g., a 55 mph speed limit). However, in the ancient Near East, laws were more flexible guidelines, often imposed by powerful kings (suzerains) to assert their authority over various conquered tribes, with the claim that these laws originated from the gods. These ancient law codes, like Hammurabi's, were primarily "casuistic" (case law: "If this happens, then you do this"). The Ten Commandments, in contrast, are "apodictic" ("thou shalt" or "thou shalt not") and notably lack prescribed penalties, making their enforcement unique. They were more akin to covenant stipulations or vows, representing the obligations undertaken by Israel in their relationship with God, rather than rigid rules.

3. What is the meaning of "Torah" and other related terms in the context of Israelite law?

The Hebrew word "Torah" is commonly translated as "law," but its deeper meaning is "teaching" or "instruction." This broader sense is seen in its use for parental teaching in Proverbs or prophetic instruction. Other terms include "huqqah," meaning "statute" or an immutable principle, and "mitzvot," meaning "commands," which in Judaism has also come to signify "good deeds." This indicates that Israelite law was not just a set of rigid rules, but a comprehensive body of instruction and principles.

4. How did Israelite law, particularly the Ten Commandments, develop and come into written form?

Israelite law is seen as analogous to ancient Near Eastern law codes, where a sovereign (God) imposed a new code on diverse existing tribal groups. While rabbinic tradition suggests God gave everything to Moses on Mount Sinai, the biblical text itself shows a growth of legal traditions through court proceedings, where new laws were established based on specific cases. Many laws found in the Torah likely originated from later periods but were gathered and promulgated by figures like Ezra, a legal scholar who had the authority of the Persian Empire to enforce these codes, making them the law of the land.

5. What are the key differences between the versions of the Ten Commandments found in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5?

While Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 present very similar versions of the Ten Commandments, there are notable differences. For example, the rationale for observing the Sabbath differs: Exodus 20 bases it on God's rest during creation, while Deuteronomy 5 grounds it in Israel's deliverance from slavery in Egypt. The commandment against coveting also shows slight variations in wording and order, with Deuteronomy 5 listing "wife" first and adding "field," potentially to emphasize the wife's distinct status from mere property and to complete a list of seven items, signifying completion. Dr. Tomasino believes Exodus 20 represents the original form due to its clear structure.

6. How are the Ten Commandments structured, and what is the significance of this order?

The Ten Commandments exhibit a well-designed, non-random structure. The first three commandments focus on obligations to God, establishing the foundation of Israel's relationship with their Creator. The fourth commandment, concerning the Sabbath, bridges obligations to God and to creation, emphasizing rest for humanity, animals, and even the land itself. The subsequent commandments begin with "honor your father and mother," marking the start of obligations to other human beings. The remaining commandments (six through nine) then follow a descending order of severity, from murder to adultery, stealing, and false testimony, leading to the final commandment about coveting, which addresses one's inner thought life.

7. How should the Ten Commandments be interpreted and applied today, especially for Christians?

The Ten Commandments should be read within their historical and cultural context, understanding that they were designed for ancient Israel, a theocracy. While they are not a "magic" solution for modern societal problems, they contain embedded wisdom. For Christians, the Ten Commandments are also read in light of Jesus' teachings, particularly the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus' approach emphasized the *intention* or *spirit* of the laws rather than just the literal "letter," which can "kill." Christians are not justified by keeping the law, but the law remains relevant as a guide for living in ways that are pleasing to God, with its full fulfillment anticipated in the coming of God's kingdom.

8. What is the unique nature of the Tenth Commandment, "You shall not covet"?

The Tenth Commandment, "You shall not covet," is unique among ancient laws because it is inherently unenforceable by external means. Unlike prohibitions against murder or theft, coveting is an internal desire or thought. This highlights that the Ten Commandments are not merely a set of rules to be policed but rather "covenant stipulations" or "vows" that individuals are called to accept and police themselves. This command underscores the personal responsibility inherent in Israel's covenant relationship with God, much like wedding vows require an internal commitment from the individuals involved.