

The Story of the Two Stone Tablets

By Jim Myers

I created an handout that presents you with three versions of the *Ten Sayings of Torah* and two versions of the *Christian Ten Commandments* ([CLICK HERE](#)). My goal was to simply make you aware of them and let you observe the differences. Bible readers can learn a lot of things by simply seeing and thinking about the words on the page they have before them and asking two questions:

1. *Am I seeing the things I expected to see in this story?*
2. *Are there things in this story that I did not expect to see?*

Did you see the things you expected to see in my emails, or did you discover things you didn't expect to see? One of the key points made in those emails is "*the importance of talking about the things we see, don't see, expected to see, and didn't expect to see*" when we read the words of the Bible. Obviously, talking requires speaking, listening, and the freedom to openly discuss those things while reading the Bible.

In this email I want to share some of my personal observations with you. I grew up hearing the *Story of the Ten Commandments* being read from Exodus 20:1-17. As I listened to the story, I could picture God speaking the words of the *Ten Commandments* to Moses, writing them on **two tablets of stone** and giving the tablets to Moses who carried them down to the people waiting at the foot of the mountain.

I knew the *Story of the Ten Commandments* as well as I knew other stories, like the *Story of Columbus Discovering America* and the *Story of the Alamo* (Texans will understand this). All of those stories were part of my reality. But the stories in the Bible were like God was speaking to us and we were supposed to do what God commanded!

Many years later, after taking courses in the Hebrew language and learning how to translate Hebrew, I was translating part of Exodus, which included *Exodus 20:1-17*. As I followed the flow of the story from one Hebrew word to the next, I was literally dumbfounded when I realized that there were no stone tablets in the story! *I was not seeing something I expected to see* (question #1 above). Moses was not on the top of the mountain with God either!

“So **Moses went down** to the people and spoke to them.
And God spoke all these words, saying”
(Exodus 19:25-20:1)

Moses was standing at the foot of the mountain with the other people listening to God speak words I had always called the *Ten Commandments* – words written on the two stone tablets.

Absolutely no stone tablets are in this story. My next project was to look for the first appearance of “two stone tablets” and I found it in Exodus 24:12.

*Then Yahweh said to Moses, “**Come up to Me on the mountain** and be there; and I will give you **tablets of stone, and the law and commandments** which I have written, that you may teach them.”*

So I followed Moses up the mountain in Exodus 24:15-18 and discovered this -- Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights. Seven chapters later, Exodus 31:18, the forty days and nights ended.

*And when God made an end of speaking with him on Mount Sinai, **He gave Moses two tablets of the Testimony, tablets of stone,** written with the finger of God.*

Moses began his journey down the mountain in Exodus 32:15-16.

*And Moses turned and went down from the mountain, and **the two tablets of the Testimony were in his hand.**
The tablets were written on both sides;
on the one side and on the other they were written.
Now the tablets were the work of God,
and the writing was the writing of God engraved on the tablets.*

After all of the time Moses spent listening to God teaching him about the words written on the two stone tablets, the unthinkable happened in Exodus 32:19.

*As soon as Moses came near the camp, he saw the (golden) calf and the dancing.
And Moses' anger became hot! **He threw the tablets** and **broke them.***

God told Moses to “**cut two tablets of stone** like the first ones, and He will write the words that were on the first tablets on the new tablets of stone” (Exodus 34:1). Moses did it and took the tablets of stone back to God on the mountain.

*The words written on the stone tablets are recorded in Exodus 34,
and they are different from what I read in Exodus 20.*

Moses brought the two tablets of stone down the mountain to the people (Exodus 34:29). After the Tabernacle of Moses was completed, Moses “**placed the stone tablets in the Ark of the Covenant.**” Then he placed the Ark of the Covenant in the Tabernacle and hung the inner curtain to shield it from view, just as Yahweh had commanded him (Exodus 40:20-21). That ends the story of the two stone tablets in the book of Exodus.