

## “AS I COMMANDED YOUR FATHERS”: THE DECALOGUE IN JEREMIAH

E. COYE STILL IV\*

**Abstract:** *This paper argues that the Decalogue is foundational for Jeremiah’s preaching. At one point, scholars generally agreed that the Ten Commandments exerted an impact on prophetic literature. More recently, however, Daniel I. Block, Yair Hoffman, and others have denied that the Ten Words have a discernible impact on the Hebrew Bible outside the Pentateuch. To demonstrate the influence of the Decalogue on Jeremiah, this article engages in an analysis of the final form of the Ten Words and the final form of Jeremiah. In particular, it gives focused attention to Jeremiah 1:16, 7:9, 9:1–9, 16:11, 17:19–27, 31:33, and 32:18. Beyond exegesis of specific texts, this article catalogs indictments throughout Jeremiah that hint at the influence of the Ten Words. Along the way, implications are drawn regarding the history and theology of both the Decalogue and Jeremiah.*

**Key words:** *Decalogue, Ten Words, Ten Commandments, Jeremiah 7:9, Jeremiah 17:19–27, Torah, Hebrew Bible, Old Testament, prophets, inner-biblical exegesis*

The Decalogue is a foundational text in both Jewish and Christian tradition.<sup>1</sup> It occupies a prominent place in the Pentateuch (Exod 20:1–21; Deut 5:6–21),<sup>2</sup> early Jewish literature,<sup>3</sup> and early Christian writings (e.g., Matt 19:18–19; Rom 2:21–22; 7:7; 13:9; Eph 6:2–3).<sup>4</sup> Do, however, the Ten Commandments exert influence on the Hebrew Bible outside the Pentateuch? Engaging with that question, I will take the book of Jeremiah as a test case and argue that the Decalogue is founda-

---

\* E. Coye Still IV is a PhD student at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2825 Lexington Rd., Louisville, KY 40280. He may be contacted at ecstill4@gmail.com.

<sup>1</sup> In this article, I use “Decalogue,” “Ten Commandments,” and “Ten Words” interchangeably.

<sup>2</sup> Many writers recognize the prominence of the Ten Words in the Pentateuch. For example, see Daniel I. Block, “The Decalogue in the Hebrew Scriptures,” in *The Decalogue through the Centuries: From the Hebrew Scriptures to Benedict XVI*, ed. Jeffrey P. Greenman and Timothy Larsen (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 17–19; Cyril S. Rodd, *Glimpses of a Strange Land: Studies in Old Testament Ethics*, OTS (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001), 77; Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 5 (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 242; John I. Durham, *Exodus*, WBC 3 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 278.

<sup>3</sup> Philo asserted, “The Ten Words (οἱ δέκα λόγοι) are the heads of the laws” (*Decal.* 154 [LCL]); cf. 4 Macc 2:5; Ps.-Phoc. 3–8. For a survey of the reception of the Decalogue in early Judaism, see J. Cornelis de Vos, *Rezeption und Wirkung des Dekalogs in jüdischen und christlichen Schriften bis 200 n.Chr.*, AJEC 95 (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 87–214.

<sup>4</sup> For a survey of the Ten Words in the NT, see Craig A. Evans, “The Decalogue in the New Testament,” in Greenman and Larsen, *The Decalogue through the Centuries: From the Hebrew Scriptures to Benedict XVI*, 29–46. For a survey of the Decalogue in the NT Apocrypha, see Hermut Löhr, “The Decalogue in the New Testament Apocrypha: A Preliminary Overview and Some Examples,” in *The Decalogue and Its Cultural Influence*, ed. Dominik Markl, HBM 58 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2013), 57–71.

tional for Jeremiah's preaching. That is, Jeremiah regards it as authoritative, repeatedly references it, and uses it as a basis for indicting his audience.

### I. A CRUMBLING CONSENSUS

As recently as 1990, Meir Weiss wrote, "The majority of biblical scholars now agree that prophetic literature shows traces of the Decalogue."<sup>5</sup> Prior to Weiss, in 1942, Eustace J. Smith penned "The Decalogue in the Preaching of Jeremiah," in which he claimed, "The Decalogue is an undeniable factor in the preaching of Jeremiah."<sup>6</sup> To make his case, he surveyed passages throughout Jeremiah and drew attention to similarities between them and the Ten Commandments. Additionally, he cataloged Jeremiah's ethical indictments and proposed that seven out of ten directives from the Decalogue are represented in Jeremiah. Today, Smith's article remains the sole focused study of the influence of the Ten Words on Jeremiah.<sup>7</sup>

More recently, however, this near consensus has crumbled. Daniel I. Block, for example, speaks of "the absence of any unequivocal citations of the Decalogue in the Hebrew Bible and the paucity of allusions to it."<sup>8</sup> In his work, he examines texts in the Hebrew Bible that could be linked to the Decalogue. As he does, he systematically rejects each one by challenging the evidence for an allusion or proposing an alternate source.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Yair Hoffman forcefully asserts, "There is

<sup>5</sup> According to Weiss, prophetic literature shows evidence of the Ten Commandments; however, he significantly moderates by writing, "Thus we find that there are no more than slight traces of the Decalogue in prophetic literature, that these traces are not always entirely clear, and that they are confined to three of the prophetic books in all." Meir Weiss, "The Decalogue in Prophetic Literature," in *The Ten Commandments in History and Tradition*, ed. Ben-Tsion Segal and Gershon Levi, trans. Adina Ben-Chorin (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1990), 67.

<sup>6</sup> Eustace J. Smith, "The Decalogue in the Preaching of Jeremiah," *CBQ* 4.3 (1942): 202. In fact, one of the minor goals of this project is retrieving Smith's excellent, but frequently neglected, work.

<sup>7</sup> Although Smith stands alone in restricting his study to Jeremiah, many writers survey references to the Decalogue in the Hebrew Bible outside the Pentateuch, and some give attention to Jeremiah. Fishbane, for example, argues that later authors in the Hebrew Bible use the Decalogue. Michael Fishbane, "Torah and Tradition," in *Tradition and Theology in the Old Testament*, ed. Douglas A. Knight (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 275–300. Similarly, Weinfeld suggests that the Decalogue was a significant force in Jewish tradition, including prophetic literature. Moshe Weinfeld, "The Decalogue: Its Significance, Uniqueness, and Place in Israel's Tradition," in *Religion and Law: Biblical-Judaic and Islamic Perspectives*, ed. Edwin Brown Firmage, Bernard G. Weiss, and John W. Welch (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 3–47; Moshe Weinfeld, "The Uniqueness of the Decalogue and Its Place in Jewish Tradition," in Segal and Levi, *The Ten Commandments in History and Tradition*, 1–44. Freedman provocatively claims the Hebrew Bible consists of a coherent narrative in which Israel violates the Decalogue. David Noel Freedman, Jeffrey C. Geoghegan, and Michael M. Homan, *The Nine Commandments: Uncovering a Hidden Pattern of Crime and Punishment in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Astrid B. Beck (New York: Doubleday, 2000). As a final example, Garrett, when commenting on the Decalogue as it appears in Exodus, suggests, "The Ten Commandments is the primary basis for the indictment of Israel for their failure to observe the covenant." Duane A. Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus*, KEL (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014), 484.

<sup>8</sup> Block, "The Decalogue in the Hebrew Scriptures," 25–26. His claim should be understood in light of his challenging the idea that the Decalogue owned a privileged status in the Hebrew Bible. As he writes, "Apart from Deuteronomy 5 there is no evidence that the Decalogue was deemed to have exceptional authority in Israel" (25).

<sup>9</sup> For Block, the alternative source is the Deuteronomic Torah. Block, "The Decalogue in the Hebrew Scriptures," 21–25.

not even a single direct biblical reference to the Decalogue, except for its mention in Exod 20 and Deut 5 and 10.”<sup>10</sup> He examines potential references to the Decalogue in the Hebrew Bible by genre and type, excluding them as he goes.<sup>11</sup> By claiming, therefore, that the Decalogue is foundational to the preaching of Jeremiah, I am pushing against significant currents in contemporary scholarship.

## II. CLARIFYING THE QUESTION

Before moving forward, several clarifications are in order: In this project, I argue for the influence of the Ten Words on Jeremiah but do not directly engage with the history of composition of either text.<sup>12</sup> Instead, I examine the final form of both Jeremiah and the Decalogue (Exod 20:1–21; Deut 5:6–21).<sup>13</sup> To demonstrate my thesis, I point out allusions to the Ten Commandments in Jeremiah.<sup>14</sup> “Allusion,” as I use the term, refers to a subtle reference, made by an author or text, to

---

<sup>10</sup> He also suggests, “No biblical ethical code list nor any other biblical passage of a different genre alludes to the Decalogue.” Yair Hoffman, “The Status of the Decalogue in the Hebrew Bible,” in *The Decalogue in Jewish and Christian Tradition*, ed. Henning Reventlow and Yair Hoffman, LHBOTS 509 (New York: T&T Clark, 2011), 45. Also, Rodd claims the Decalogue is absent from the historical, prophetic, and poetic literature outside of the Pentateuch. Rodd, *Glimpses of a Strange Land*, 82–85. Revealingly, de Vos, in his monumental study of the reception of the Decalogue, devotes only two pages to the Hebrew Bible outside the Pentateuch. He concludes, “Wir können somit festhalten, dass es in der Hebräischen Bibel, wenn überhaupt, dann nur eine sehr geringe Dekalogrezeption gibt.” De Vos, *Rezeption und Wirkung des Dekalogs in jüdischen und christlichen Schriften bis 200 n.Chr.*, 16–17.

<sup>11</sup> Hoffman, “The Status of the Decalogue in the Hebrew Bible,” 36–45.

<sup>12</sup> For a brief discussion of questions related to the history of the Decalogue, see Hoffman, “The Status of the Decalogue in the Hebrew Bible,” 34–36. By necessity, Hoffman also limits himself to discussing the Decalogue without attention to its growth or development over time (49). In contrast to my approach, Maier examines Jeremiah’s use of Torah for the purpose of tracing the redaction history of the work. Christ M. Maier, “Jeremiah as Teacher of Torah,” *Int* 62.1 (2008): 22–32.

<sup>13</sup> Crouch surveys modern approaches to Jeremiah. Carly L. Crouch, *An Introduction to the Study of Jeremiah*, T&T Clark Approaches to Biblical Studies (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 39–75. Using her terminology, my approach is best identified as final form criticism or holistic (68). By taking this approach, I am consistent with Block’s tactic. Block, “The Decalogue in the Hebrew Scriptures,” 2–3. Additionally, I will be using the MT as the basis for my study, as opposed to the LXX. For a recent discussion of the relationship between the two versions, see Andrew G. Shead, “The Text of Jeremiah (MT and LXX),” in *The Book of Jeremiah: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation*, ed. Jack R. Lundbom, Craig A. Evans, and Bradford A. Anderson, VTSup 178 (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 255–79.

<sup>14</sup> While I look for allusions and influence, I am not primarily undertaking an intertextual study. As Sommer clarifies, “Intertextuality is concerned with the reader or with the text as a thing independent of its author, while influence and allusion are concerned with the author as well as the text and reader.” Benjamin D. Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40–66* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 8–9. For a survey of approaches and terminologies related to intertextuality in OT studies, see Geoffrey D. Miller, “Intertextuality in Old Testament Research,” *CurBR* 9.3 (2011): 283–309.

another author or text.<sup>15</sup> To demonstrate allusions, I largely rely on verbal, conceptual, and contextual parallels.<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, I will adopt the working hypothesis that the Ten Commandments existing in some form prior to Jeremiah is the best explanation for the material common to the two texts. Of course, other explanations for the shared material are possible. At the close of the investigation, therefore, I will reflect on the historical implications of this study and briefly argue for the plausibility of the historical priority of the Decalogue to Jeremiah.

In summary, I will be conducting an analysis of the effect of the final form of the Ten Commandments on the final form of Jeremiah.<sup>17</sup>

### III. EXEGESIS OF KEY PASSAGES

Turning to the evidence, we find that Jeremiah demonstrates an awareness of and dependence on the Decalogue throughout his preaching.<sup>18</sup> I focus on the clearest examples first and then additional examples in light of the clearest.

1. *Jeremiah 7:9*. Jeremiah is in the midst of accusing his audience when he asks, “Will you steal (הִגַּבְתָּ), murder (רָצַח), commit adultery (וְנִאֲמַרְתָּ), sacrifice to Baal, swear to deception (לְשֹׁקֵי וְקַטְרֵי), and walk after other gods (אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים) which you have not known?” (7:9). If these charges are separated, verbal parallels with the Ten Words are apparent:

---

<sup>15</sup> Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture*, 10–13. For Wetzsteon, an allusion is “a brief, indirect, and deliberate reference—in a poem or other medium—to a person, place, event (fictitious or actual), or by another work of art.” She also notes, “Allusion may be used by its author to enhance a work’s semantic and cultural density, topicality, or timelessness.” Rachel Wetzsteon, “Allusion,” in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Roland Greene et al., 4th ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 42.

<sup>16</sup> For a survey of criteria for establishing allusions, see Miller, “Intertextuality in Old Testament Research,” 294–98.

<sup>17</sup> As an additional clarification, although the ordering and counting of the Decalogue is contested, I will simply use the Protestant numbering for convenience. For a recent treatment of the counting of the Decalogue, see Jason S. DeRouchie, “Counting the Ten: An Investigation into the Numbering of the Decalogue,” in *For Our Good Always: Studies on the Message and Influence of Deuteronomy in Honor of Daniel I. Block*, ed. Jason S. DeRouchie, Jason Gile, and Kenneth J. Turner (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 93–125. On the ordering of the Ten Commandments, see Gregory R. Lanier, “Scriptural Inspiration and the Authorial ‘Original’ amid Textual Complexity: The Sequences of the Murder-Adultery-Steal Commands as a Case Study,” *JETS* 61.1 (2018): 47–81. Additionally, unlike Haihu, who studies the Decalogue in the prophets and concludes the version in Deuteronomy is older than the one in Exodus, I will be reading the versions in Exodus and Deuteronomy alongside one another. Haihu Tian, “Source of the Decalogue and Its Relation with the Prophets,” *Sino-Christian Studies* 13 (2012): 123–39.

<sup>18</sup> The survey below is not intended to be an exhaustive list. Instead, it consists of a variety of examples that demonstrate the range of ways the influence of the Decalogue can be detected in Jeremiah. For additional examples, see table 3 at the close of the article.

Table 1. Verbal parallels between Jeremiah 7:9 and the Decalogue

Jeremiah 7:9	The Decalogue
“Will you steal” (הַגְנוּב)	לֹא תִגְנוֹב (Exod 20:15; Deut 5:19)
“murder” (רָצַח)	לֹא תִרְצַח (Exod 20:13; Deut 5:17)
“and commit adultery” (וַנְּאָף)	וְלֹא תִנְאָף (Exod 20:14; Deut 5:18)
“and swear to deception” (וְהִשְׁבַּע לְשָׁקֶר)	עַד שָׁקֶר (Exod 20:16; Deut 5:20)
“and walk after other gods (אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים) which you have not known”	לֹא־אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים (Exod 20:3; Deut 20:7)

Jeremiah most likely alludes to the First, Sixth, Seventh, Eighth, and Ninth Commandments. Additionally, with the words “sacrifice to Baal” (וְקָטַר לְבַעַל), Jeremiah likely evokes the Second Commandment.<sup>19</sup> Isolated from their contexts, Jeremiah’s questions still point to the Ten Words. Taken together, however, the concentration of references to six injunctions from the Decalogue in one location is compelling.<sup>20</sup> For that reason, Jeremiah’s barrage of charges is a strong clue in favor of the influence of the Ten Commandments on his preaching.<sup>21</sup> Additionally, while Jeremiah does not seem concerned with preserving a specific ordering, he demonstrates an awareness of both tables of the Decalogue.<sup>22</sup>

The wider literary context of 7:9 further suggests the Decalogue is in view. Jeremiah references the departure from Egypt (7:22), the giving of Torah (7:23), and charges subsequent generations of Israelites with disregarding Torah (7:24–26).<sup>23</sup> When paired with verbal and conceptual parallels with the Ten Words in 7:9, the contextual evidence strongly suggests Jeremiah is pointing to the Decalogue.

<sup>19</sup> Jeremiah does not specifically reference physical idolatry, which may seem to suggest the Second Commandment is not in view. However, as Judge outlines, the relationship between the First and Second Commandments is often ambiguous in the Hebrew Bible. In particular, “Idol terminology is not only used specifically in reference to divine images but broadly in reference to alien deities.” Thomas A. Judge, *Other Gods and Idols: The Relationship between the Worship of Other Gods and the Worship of Idols within the Old Testament*, LHBOTS 674 (London: T&T Clark, 2019), 57–58. Since Jeremiah does reference Baal, therefore, the Second Commandment is most likely in view.

<sup>20</sup> Leslie C. Allen and Jennifer K. Cox, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 96; Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 21A (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 465; William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, Chapters 1–25*, ed. Paul D. Hanson, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 244–45; Peter C. Craigie, Page H. Kelley, and Joel F. Drinkard Jr., *Jeremiah 1–25*, WBC 26 (Dallas: Word, 1991), 121; J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 280; Terence E. Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, SHBC (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2002), 135.

<sup>21</sup> While Hoffman claims there are no allusions to the Decalogue in the Hebrew Bible outside of the Pentateuch, he admits 7:9 may be the lone exception. Hoffman, “The Status of the Decalogue in the Hebrew Bible,” 45–46. Likewise, Rodd admits that 7:9 may be an allusion to the Decalogue. Rodd, *Glimpses of a Strange Land*, 84.

<sup>22</sup> Smith, “The Decalogue in the Preaching of Jeremias,” 203.

<sup>23</sup> As Thompson rightly observes, 7:1–15 is a distinct literary unit. Therefore, the references to the exodus occupy the wider literary context. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 271–74.

Block, however, deploys three challenges to the idea that 7:9 is best understood as an allusion to the Decalogue. First, the order is different than the one preserved in the Pentateuch.<sup>24</sup> Second, the ethical emphasis in the context of 7:9 is on social and economic justice, which departs from the emphases of the Ten Commandments.<sup>25</sup> Third, influence “may be more easily attributed to the Deuteronomic rather than decalogue influence.”<sup>26</sup>

In response, Jeremiah’s ordering could be easily explained by a host of factors. To give one example, since Jeremiah was indicting an audience in a sermon, as opposed to directly quoting another text, exact reproduction was most likely not his aim. Instead, the reordering could have served some pragmatic purpose.<sup>27</sup> Second, Jeremiah may be appropriating the Decalogue as one aspect of a broader ethical critique; therefore, the presence of diverse ethical concerns in the context of 7:9 does not rule out the presence of the Ten Words.<sup>28</sup> Third, creating a binary choice between Deuteronomic and decalogue influence establishes an artificial dichotomy. If Jeremiah alludes to the Decalogue, he does so through a tradition which includes all of Deuteronomy. Block’s objections, therefore, are not strong enough to overcome the significant evidence for seeing an allusion to the Decalogue in 7:9.

To draw conclusions from this brief examination of 7:9, even though Jeremiah does not directly quote the Ten Words, its influence on his preaching is unmistakable. Furthermore, his use of the Decalogue in 7:9 strongly suggests his ethical indictments were formed, in part, by it. Since such charges play a significant role in Jeremiah, his usage of the Decalogue in 7:9 raises the possibility that he may have alluded to the Ten Words in other indictments also.

2. *Jeremiah 17:19–27*. God commands Jeremiah to deliver a message to the populace of Jerusalem (17:19). When he does, he focuses on the Sabbath.<sup>29</sup> At the outset of his address, Jeremiah states, “Thus says the Lord, ‘Guard your lives, and do not carry a load on the Sabbath day (בְּיוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת), and do not come in the gates of Jerusalem’” (17:21). The remainder of the sermon develops this idea. At the conceptual level, Jeremiah’s address connects to the Fourth Commandment (Exod 20:8–11; Deut 5:12–15), because he repeatedly references the importance of keeping the Sabbath day (17:21–22, 24, 27).

<sup>24</sup> Block, “The Decalogue in the Hebrew Scriptures,” 24.

<sup>25</sup> Block, “The Decalogue in the Hebrew Scriptures,” 24. Similarly, Rodd, although acknowledging that a link between the Decalogue and 7:9 is plausible, suggests that the ethical context of 7:9 is concerned with issues beyond the Decalogue. Rodd, *Glimpses of a Strange Land*, 85. De Vos prefers to remain agnostic about the influence of the Decalogue on 7:9, because he remains open on the question of the historical priority of the composition of the Decalogue to Jeremiah. De Vos, *Rezeption und Wirkung des Dekalogs in jüdischen und christlichen Schriften bis 200 n.Chr.*, 17.

<sup>26</sup> Block, “The Decalogue in the Hebrew Scriptures,” 24.

<sup>27</sup> Also, as de Vos observes, the order of the prohibitions of the Decalogue was often fluid in its history of reception. De Vos, *Rezeption und Wirkung des Dekalogs in jüdischen und christlichen Schriften bis 200 n.Chr.*, 17n58.

<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, as noted above, the wider context of 7:9 references the complex of ideas making up the exodus (7:22–26).

<sup>29</sup> Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1–25*, 238.

However, beyond conceptual similarities, verbal similarities can be identified. Of course, Jeremiah’s use of the term **יְיָוָה הַשְּׁבֵת** (17:21–22, 24, 27) parallels the use of the expression in the Decalogue (Exod 20:8, 10–11; Deut 5:12, 14–15). However, Jeremiah also makes three key statements that strongly suggest the influence of the Ten Words on his sermon:

**וְקִדְשְׁתֶּם אֶת־יְיָוָה הַשְּׁבֵת** (17:22)

**וְלִקְדַּשׁ אֶת־יְיָוָה הַשְּׁבֵת** (17:24)

**לְקַדֵּשׁ אֶת־יְיָוָה הַשְּׁבֵת** (17:27)

With these expressions, Jeremiah closely parallels the language of the Fourth Commandment: “to keep it holy [לְקַדְּשׁוֹ]” (Exod 20:8; Deut 5:12). Therefore, while Jeremiah stops short of directly quoting the Decalogue, his wording strongly suggests dependence on it.<sup>30</sup>

Furthermore, in quoting God, Jeremiah identifies the command that he references throughout his sermon as having historical roots. After saying, “Keep the Sabbath day holy,” he recalls, “as I commanded your fathers [אֶת־אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם]” (17:22). Jeremiah, therefore, was consciously indicting his audience for neglecting a rule that God had given in the past; specifically, one given to the ancestors of Jeremiah’s audience.<sup>31</sup> Since Jeremiah repeatedly demonstrates an awareness of the exodus and the giving of Torah (2:6; 7:23–23, 25; 11:3–4, 8; 15:1; 16:14; 23:7; 32:21; 34:13), this is most likely referencing a command given at Sinai.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, in light of conceptual and verbal similarities to the Fourth Commandment, Jeremiah’s preaching in 17:19–27 should be understood as alluding to the Decalogue.<sup>33</sup>

Of course, however, Jeremiah’s use of the Fourth Commandment is contextualized and interpreted for his audience. His references to Jerusalem (17:21, 24, 27) are obvious expansions and applications. Also, he elaborates on the Fourth Commandment by referencing different, although related, activities. As Jack R. Lundbom explains, “This is Jeremiah’s interpretation of the Fourth Commandment, having a specificity not found in either Exod 20:8–11 or Deut 5:12–15.”<sup>34</sup> Therefore, while Jeremiah’s dependence on the Fourth Commandment is clear, he does not simply quote it.<sup>35</sup> Instead, he expands and applies it to his context.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, 806; Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 510; Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 428–29; Allen and Cox, *Jeremiah*, 207.

<sup>31</sup> Nehemiah 13:22 shares some similarities with Jeremiah 17:19–27, which raises the question of the Decalogue in the preaching of the prophets more broadly.

<sup>32</sup> As Lundbom asserts, “The fathers here are the Exodus generation.” Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, 806.

<sup>33</sup> Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 263. As Achenbach observes, the influence of the Decalogue further emphasizes the presentation of Jeremiah as Moses’s successor. Reinhard Achenbach, “The Sermon on the Sabbath in Jeremiah 17:19–27 and the Torah,” in *The Formation of the Pentateuch: Bridging the Academic Cultures of Europe, Israel, and North America*, ed. Jan Christian Gertz et al., FAT 111 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 884–85.

<sup>34</sup> Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, 806.

<sup>35</sup> Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 427–30.

<sup>36</sup> Fishbane calls this passage “a remarkable instance of inner-biblical exegesis. In it the general Pentateuchal prohibition of Sabbath work is expanded in new ways, and the entire result is presented as Sinaitic in origin!” Fishbane sees Jeremiah as exegeting Deuteronomy rather than Exodus. Michael A. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 132. Gladson

In summary, Jeremiah charges his audience to avoid the mistakes of their ancestors and keep the fourth commandment from the Decalogue.<sup>37</sup> When his usage in 17:19–27 is considered along with 7:9, Jeremiah demonstrates an awareness of seven commandments from the Decalogue in these two passages alone.<sup>38</sup>

#### IV. ADDITIONAL EVIDENCE

Beyond 7:9 and 17:19–27, additional passages in Jeremiah suggest the influence of the Decalogue.

1. *Jeremiah 31:33*. Jeremiah's new covenant prophecy (31:31–34) also seems to evoke the Ten Words: "I will put my law [אֲתִתְּנֶנּוּ] inside of them, and I will write [אֶכְתְּבֶנּוּ] it on their hearts" (31:33).<sup>39</sup> Contextually, as Jeremiah announces a new covenant (31:31), he also contrasts it with the old covenant (31:32). Therefore, Jeremiah's words in 31:33 invite comparison.<sup>40</sup>

According to the Pentateuch, God wrote aspects of Torah himself (Exod 31:18; Deut 9:10). Crucially, the Decalogue is identified as the specific product of God's authorship (Exod 34:28; Deut 4:13; 5:22).<sup>41</sup> In Jeremiah 31:33, the implied point of contrast is the divine authorship of Torah, as described in the Pentateuch.<sup>42</sup> Since the Ten Commandments are identified as the primary subject of God's authorship, they are invoked through the comparison. While Jeremiah

goes further than Fishbane and suggests Jeremiah is quoting from Deuteronomy while adding expansions. Jerry A. Gladson, "Jeremiah 17:19–27: A Rewriting of the Sinaitic Code?," *CBQ* 62 (2000): 37–38.

<sup>37</sup> If the Decalogue influenced Jeremiah, as I have argued, there is explanatory benefit. For example, Drinkard admits, "Why the keeping of Sabbath was of such great concern to Jeremiah is unclear." Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1–25*, 239. If, however, Jeremiah was impacted by the Ten Commandments, it is actually quite clear why the Sabbath mattered to Jeremiah.

<sup>38</sup> Unfortunately, Block, Hoffman, and Rodd do not engage with this passage. In fact, out of the evidence presented in this paper, they engage only with 7:9. Block, "The Decalogue in the Hebrew Scriptures"; Hoffman, "The Status of the Decalogue in the Hebrew Bible"; Rodd, *Glimpses of a Strange Land*.

<sup>39</sup> Goshen-Gottstein helpfully surveys Jewish reception of Jeremiah 31:31–34. Alon Goshen-Gottstein, "The New Covenant—Jeremiah 31:30–33 (31:31–34) in Jewish Interpretation," *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 15.1 (2020): 1–31.

<sup>40</sup> Carr argues that writing on the heart refers in ancient Judaism to memorizing Torah. David M. Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). For a study that builds on Carr's conclusions, see Joachim J. Krause, "'Writing on the Heart' in Jeremiah 31:31–34 in Light of Recent Insights into the Oral-Written Interface and Scribal Education in Ancient Israel," *ZAW* 132.2 (2020): 236–49. Schmid responds to Krause and questions whether or not writing on the heart refers to memorizing Torah. Konrad Schmid, "'Writing on the Heart' (Jer 31:31–34): An Allusion to Scribal Training? A Response to Joachim J. Krause," *ZAW* 132.3 (2020): 458–62.

<sup>41</sup> As Block summarizes, "While the Decalogue was not the only part of the Pentateuch associated with the covenant, it was recognized as the original and official covenant document, announced to the people by YHWH himself and written by his own hand (Exod. 24:12; 31:18; Deut. 10:1–4)." Block, "The Decalogue in the Hebrew Scriptures," 13; Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21–36: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 21B (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 468; Gerald L. Keown, Pamela J. Scalise, and Thomas G. Smothers, *Jeremiah 26–52*, WBC 27 (Dallas: Word, 1995), 133; William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, Chapters 26–52*, ed. Paul D. Hanson, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 198; Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 581.

<sup>42</sup> Allen and Cox, *Jeremiah*, 356. Rossi argues that Jeremiah 31:33 recalls the giving of Torah at Sinai, specifically Exodus 24:12 and Deuteronomy 31:9. Benedetta Rossi, "Conflicting Patterns of Revelation: Jer 31,31–34 and Its Challenge to the Post-Mosaic Revelation Program," *Bib* 99.2 (2018): 208–14.

should not be understood as referencing the Decalogue to the exclusion of other aspects of Torah, he does seem to use an image associated especially with it.<sup>43</sup>

Jeremiah, therefore, seems to demonstrate an awareness of the traditions surrounding the giving of the Decalogue. In this case, he does not reference a specific directive from the Ten Commandments. Instead, he harnesses an idea associated with the authorship of the Decalogue for the purpose of comparison.

2. *Jeremiah 1:16*. Charges of idolatry are pervasive throughout Jeremiah. To take the first example, Jeremiah records God saying, “I will speak my judgments against them on all their evils when they forsook me and they sacrificed to other gods [לְאֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים] and bowed down [וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ] to the works of their hands” (לְמַעֲשֵׂי יְדֵיהֶם; 1:16). God’s charges against Israel intersect conceptually with the First and Second Commandments of the Decalogue. Additionally, while Jeremiah does not quote or explicitly reference the Ten Words, there are notable verbal similarities.<sup>44</sup> For one, God indicts his people for devoting themselves to “other gods” (לְאֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים; 1:16). In the First Command of the Decalogue, God prohibits his people from displacing him in favor of “other gods” (אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים; Exod 20:3; Deut 20:7). Also, God accuses his people of worshiping “the works of their hands” (לְמַעֲשֵׂי יְדֵיהֶם; 1:16).<sup>45</sup> Specifying the object of worship as something made with hands recalls the prohibition of the Second Commandment against creating idols.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, using the root חוה, God says that the people are bowing down to images, and this recalls the prohibition against bowing down to idols in the Second Commandment, which uses the same root (Exod 20:5; Deut 5:9). Therefore, Jeremiah’s words in 1:16 have significant verbal resonance with the Ten Words.

Since 1:16 is the first reference to Israel’s sin in Jeremiah, it functions as a helpful test case. It occurs at the beginning of the work, helps establish the message for the remainder, and bears similarities to additional passages throughout the work. In addition to 1:16, Jeremiah uses the phrase אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים eighteen times (7:9; 7:9; 7:18; 11:10; 13:10; 16:11; 16:13; 19:4, 13; 22:9; 25:6; 32:29; 35:15; 44:3; 44:5; 44:8; 44:15), which demonstrates its importance in his thought. Of course, the presence of the expression אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים alone does not necessitate an allusion to the Decalogue. However, 11:10, 16:11, and 22:9 explicitly identify the pursuit of foreign

<sup>43</sup> Smith, “The Decalogue in the Preaching of Jeremias,” 205–6.

<sup>44</sup> The expression אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים is found several times in Deuteronomy, which could raise the question of whether or not Jeremiah is drawing from the Ten Words specifically or from Deuteronomic tradition generally. Taking a synchronic perspective on Deuteronomy, however, the descriptions of Israel’s unfaithfulness that use the expression אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים (e.g., Deut 29:24–26; 32:15–22) are not disconnected from the Decalogue. Also, the First Commandment certainly plays a formative role in shaping the overall message of Deuteronomy regarding exclusive worship of God. Therefore, although the expression is echoed in other places in Deuteronomy, the Decalogue is logical background for Jeremiah 1:16. Of course, 1:16 should not be understood as a reference to the Decalogue to the exclusion of other passages in Deuteronomy, even if the Ten Commandments are primary. As argued above, sharply distinguishing between Deuteronomic and decalogue influence can be an artificial distinction.

<sup>45</sup> In addition to 1:16, Jeremiah uses the phrase אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים seventeen times (7:6, 9, 18; 11:10; 13:10; 16:11, 13; 19:4, 13; 22:9; 25:6; 32:29; 35:15; 44:3, 5, 8, 15). Therefore, Jeremiah seems to use the expression consistently as a term referring to idolatrous creative activity.

<sup>46</sup> Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 42.

deities as a violation of a covenant or law.<sup>47</sup> That is, Jeremiah seems to understand the worship habits of his audience as in violation of an established covenant document associated with the exodus. Therefore, good reason exists for taking Jeremiah to be repeatedly calling attention to Israel's violation of the Ten Commandments.

To summarize, God's description of Israel's unfaithfulness (1:16), as Jeremiah records it, intersects with the First and Second Commandments of the Decalogue at both the conceptual and verbal levels.<sup>48</sup> Beyond 1:16, Jeremiah repeatedly indicts Israel for worshipping foreign deities and practicing idolatry.

3. *Jeremiah 9:1–9*. A possible example of the impact of the Decalogue on the indictments of Jeremiah is found in Jeremiah 9:1–9. As Jeremiah grieves for his people (9:1), he catalogues their wrongs.<sup>49</sup> In particular, he indicts them for dishonesty and adultery, which may hint toward the influence of the Decalogue. Jeremiah primarily targets the pervasive falsehood among his audience.<sup>50</sup> As he vividly describes Israel's dishonesty in various ways, he notes, "All men deceive [יְהַתְּלִין] their neighbor [בְּרֵעֵהוּ]" (9:4). Beyond the conceptual similarities this charge bears to the Ninth Commandment, there is a slight verbal parallel: Jeremiah notes that a "neighbor" (רֵעַ) is the object of deception, which recalls the Ninth Commandment (Exod 20:16; Deut 5:20). Also, when it comes to the Seventh Commandment, Jeremiah claims, "They are all adulterers" (מְזַנְּפִים; 9:1).<sup>51</sup> Since Jeremiah uses the term זָנָה, the Ten Commandments (Exod 20:17; Deut 5:18) may be in view.<sup>52</sup>

Two factors suggest the Decalogue is influencing the prophet in 9:1–9. First, his pairing of dishonesty and adultery heightens the possibility, at the conceptual level, that the Ten Commandments may be in the background. Second, Jeremiah employs limited, but specific, wording that hints at the influence of the Ten Words.

4. *Jeremiah 32:18*. After Jeremiah purchases land at God's direction (32:1–15), he prays (32:16) and describes God with these words: "You do kindness to thousands, but you repay the iniquity of fathers to the sons who come after" (32:18), which parallel statements from the Decalogue:

<sup>47</sup> Smith recognizes the influence of the Ten Words on 16:11 and draws attention to the identification of the prohibition from the Decalogue as an aspect of Torah. Smith, "The Decalogue in the Preaching of Jeremiah," 200.

<sup>48</sup> Allen and Cox, *Jeremiah*, 30; Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 53; Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, 44; Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 42.

<sup>49</sup> Scholars debate the identity of the speaker in 9:1–9. However, the majority believe Jeremiah is the speaker in at least the first part of the passage. Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1–25*, 143.

<sup>50</sup> Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1–25*, 144–45; Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 302.

<sup>51</sup> Jeremiah may be speaking metaphorically of Israel's idolatrous activity, which would decrease the likelihood that the Ten Commandments were influencing him. Allen and Cox, *Jeremiah*, 115. However, the surrounding context strongly suggests Jeremiah is speaking of literal adultery.

<sup>52</sup> An identical phrase is found in Hosea 7:4, so Jeremiah may be drawing from it. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 300. If he is, Jeremiah may still be influenced by the Ten Words mediated through prophetic tradition.

Table 2. Parallels between Jeremiah 32:18 and the Decalogue

Jeremiah 32:18	The Decalogue
עֲשֵׂה חֶסֶד לְאֵלִים (32:18)	וְעֲשֵׂה חֶסֶד לְאֵלִים (Exod 20:6; Deut 5:10)
וּמִשְׁלֵם עֹן אָבֹת אֶל־חֵיק בְּנֵיהֶם אַחֲרֵיהֶם (32:18)	פָּקֵד עֹן אָבֹת עַל־בָּנִים עַל־שְׂלֵשִׁים וְעַל־רִבְעִים (Exod 20:5; Deut 5:9)

Jeremiah’s prayer is paralleled in other locations in the Pentateuch (Exod 34:7; Deut 7:9).<sup>53</sup> However, the first clause parallels the Decalogue exactly. Additionally, when Jeremiah’s prayer is interpreted in light of his usage of the Decalogue in other contexts, it would not be surprising for him to be influenced by the Ten Words in this case also.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, while allowing for the influence of other traditions, Jeremiah’s prayer seems to demonstrate the impact of the Decalogue on his thought.<sup>55</sup>

5. *Summary.* Close attention to a variety of passages in Jeremiah demonstrates that the Decalogue was foundational to Jeremiah’s preaching. Notably, he references a variety of injunctions from the Ten Words. Furthermore, he appropriates its wording and applies it to his context, employing a variety of tactics. Additionally, he demonstrates an awareness of the traditions surrounding the giving of the Decalogue and the descriptions of God contained within it, not just its specific injunctions. Therefore, although Jeremiah’s use of the Ten Commandments ranges from more to less explicit, their impact on his preaching is unmistakable.<sup>56</sup>

### V. IMPLICATIONS

As I have argued, the Decalogue is foundational to the preaching of Jeremiah. In light of this conclusion, several implications arise.

First, writers can only exposit texts that already exist; therefore, the Ten Words must have existed in some form prior to Jeremiah. While the common material between Jeremiah and the Decalogue could be explained in other ways, the

<sup>53</sup> Outside the Pentateuch, 1 Kings 8:23 is an example of a similar prayer.

<sup>54</sup> When reflecting on Jeremiah’s sources, George Fischer notes in passing, “Jer 7,9 hat ebenso wie Jeremias Gebet in Jer 32,18 den Dekalog (Ex 20) im Hintergrund.” George Fischer, “Lebendige Erinnerung im Jeremiabuch,” in *Tradition(en) im alten Israel: Konstruktion, Transmission und Transformation*, ed. Ruth Ebach and Martin Leuenberger, FAT 127 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 172.

<sup>55</sup> As Holladay notes, however, Jeremiah’s words are “found identically in Exod 20:6 and Deut 5:10, and with variation of wording in Exod 34:7 and Deut 7:9.” Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 217. Similarly, Thompson notes that the expression recalls the Decalogue primarily and other passages by extension. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 591n6; Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21–36*, 512. Fretheim sees language recalling Exodus 34:6–7 and Exodus 20:5 and Deuteronomy 5:9. Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 461–62. Scalise, on the other hand, primarily emphasizes Exodus 34:6–7 as the background of Jeremiah’s prayer. However, although she does not mention them, she does not exclude the Ten Words as a possible background. Keown, Scalise, and Smothers, *Jeremiah 26–52*, 156. Similarly, Allen points to Exodus 34:7 and Deuteronomy 10:17. Allen and Cox, *Jeremiah*, 368.

<sup>56</sup> In addition to the examples discussed, Jeremiah’s indictments suggest a pervasive influence of the Decalogue on his preaching. For suggested cases in which Jeremiah may have been influenced by the Ten Commandments, see table 3.

best explanation is that Jeremiah is looking to the Decalogue. For one, Jeremiah explicitly asserts that he is pointing back to a historic standard of ethical behavior and demonstrates an awareness of traditions surrounding the giving of the Decalogue (17:22; 31:33). Additionally, he seems to expand, develop, and apply the Decalogue (17:19–27). While it is conceivable that a normative list of commands could be distilled from contextual ethical indictments, it is more reasonable to assume the reverse. Finally, his indictments would have been most compelling if he was pointing to an established standard of authority known to his listeners.

Second, despite claims to the contrary,<sup>57</sup> the Decalogue occupied a prominent place in at least one part of the Hebrew Bible outside the Pentateuch. Scholarship, therefore, should not proceed without acknowledging the significant impact of the Ten Commandments on Jeremiah.<sup>58</sup>

Third, Jeremiah is understood with additional clarity. When Jeremiah charged his audience, he was not referring to a general sense of right and wrong. Instead, he charged his audience with violating God's law, and the Ten Words were foundational to those indictments.<sup>59</sup> Additionally, he was calling his audience back to the Decalogue as an expression of the covenant. He was concerned with idolatrous worship, murder, and disregard of the Sabbath, because those actions violated the fundamental covenant document.<sup>60</sup>

Fourth, Jeremiah's use of the Ten Words suggests his audience would have been familiar with it. Since he repeatedly refers to the Decalogue without directly identifying it, he must have believed his audience could have easily identified it. Assuming Jeremiah was correct, the Ten Commandments must have been widely recognized as an authoritative ethical standard.

Fifth, and finally, if the Decalogue is foundational to the preaching of Jeremiah, it may also exert an influence on other prophetic writings.<sup>61</sup> While Jeremiah's

<sup>57</sup> Block, "The Decalogue in the Hebrew Scriptures," 25; Hoffman, "The Status of the Decalogue in the Hebrew Bible," 45; Rodd, *Glimpses of a Strange Land*, 82–85.

<sup>58</sup> De Vos, for example, could enrich his treatment of the reception of the Decalogue by acknowledging its impact on Jeremiah. De Vos, *Rezeption und Wirkung des Dekaloges in jüdischen und christlichen Schriften bis 200 n.Chr.*, 16–17.

<sup>59</sup> As Smith wrote, "One cannot help but sense the figure of Moses and the Decalogue in the background, inspiring the preaching of the great prophet of Anathoth, who, in turn, addresses his audience with the conviction of approval from this highest and ultimate authority." Smith, "The Decalogue in the Preaching of Jeremias," 200.

<sup>60</sup> As an additional observation, an ongoing conversation engages with the question of whether Jeremiah is presented as a prophet like Moses. For example, see Georg Fischer, "Jeremiah—'The Prophet Like Moses?'," in Lundbom, Evans, and Anderson, *The Book of Jeremiah: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation*, 45–66; Achenbach, "The Sermon on the Sabbath in Jeremiah 17:19–27 and the Torah"; Reinhard Achenbach, "'A Prophet like Moses' (Deuteronomy 18:15)—'No Prophet like Moses' (Deuteronomy 34:10): Some Observations on the Relation between the Pentateuch and the Latter Prophets," in *The Pentateuch: International Perspectives on Current Research*, ed. Thomas B. Dozeman, Konrad Schmid, and Baruch J. Schwartz, FAT 78 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011). If the Decalogue is foundational for Jeremiah's preaching, a stronger case is made for Jeremiah being presented as a prophet like Moses.

<sup>61</sup> Of course, as Sweeney observes, "Jeremiah is in dialog ... with the other prophetic books of the HB." Marvin A. Sweeney, "Jeremiah among the Prophets," in Lundbom, Evans, and Anderson, *The Book of Jeremiah: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation*, 42.

use of the Ten Words does not necessitate the use of it by other authors, some passages in the prophetic writings bear similarities to the Decalogue (e.g., Neh 13:22; Hos 4:1–2; 7:1–4; Zech 5:3–4). This study, therefore, should lead to considering the potential impact of the Ten Words on other prophetic writings.<sup>62</sup>

Table 3. The Decalogue in the indictments of Jeremiah<sup>63</sup>

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1:16	1:16		17:19–27		2:30, 34	5:7–8	7:9	5:2	
2:11	2:27–28				7:6, 9	7:9	21:12	7:9	
5:19	7:18				11:21	9:2		9:3–6,	
7:6, 9, 18	8:19				18:23	23:10, 14		8	
8:2	16:18, 20				19:4	29:23			
9:14	17:2				22:3, 17				
11:9–13	25:6–7				26:15				
13:10					38:1–				
16:11					13				
18:15									
19:4, 13									
22:9									
25:6–7									
32:29									
35:15									
44:3, 5, 8,									
15, 17–19,									
23–25									

<sup>62</sup> For a survey of texts that may fit this description, see Weiss, “The Decalogue in Prophetic Literature,” 67–81.

<sup>63</sup> With this table, I intend to draw attention to the significant overlap between the ethical indictments of Jeremiah and the Decalogue. Smith includes a table of the Decalogue in the ethical indictments of Jeremiah. Smith, “The Decalogue in the Preaching of Jeremias,” 202. While this table and the table offered by Smith overlap, the two also differ, as I disagree with his judgments at points.