

# Deuteronomy 10:1-5

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*After God answered Moses' intercessory prayer by agreeing to spare the lives of the Israelites, God disciplines the people and replaces the broken tablets, this time placing them in an ark.*

In chapter nine, we saw that the Israelites provoked the LORD to anger soon after they had agreed to the terms of the covenant at Mount Sinai. Moses, Israel's leader and covenant mediator, went up to Mount Sinai (Horeb) and remained there forty days and nights without food or drink. At the end of the forty days and nights, the LORD gave Moses the two tablets of stone and asked him to descend from Mount Sinai quickly because the Israelites had acted corruptly in Moses' absence. The Israelites had turned away from following the LORD's command and had "made a molten image for themselves" ([Deuteronomy 9:12](#)). Moses prayed interceding on behalf of the people and the LORD spared their lives ([Deuteronomy 9:7-24](#)).

In [Deuteronomy 10](#), Moses recalled the words of the LORD to him and began with the phrase *At that time*, which links the following passage to the intercession (9:25-29). *At that time, the LORD* spoke to Moses and said to him, *cut out for yourself two tablets of stone like the former ones.*

The Suzerain God forgave the Israelites for their sinful act and relented of executing their just due. He asked Moses to *cut out* for himself two tablets of stone, because Moses had broken the former ones, as Israel had violated the laws they contained. In the previous chapter, we saw that while Moses was with the LORD on Mount Sinai, the Israelites had made a molten calf as their god. When Moses descended with the two tablets of the covenant in his hands, he noticed that the covenant was already broken because one of its most important terms — the command not to worship idols — was violated ([Exodus 20:4](#)).

So, Moses smashed the two tablets of stone in the sight of all the Israelites. Afterwards, Moses interceded on behalf of the Israelites to ask for God's mercy so that He would not destroy the stubborn people. Because of His grace and mercy, the LORD spared the people and asked Moses to come up to Mount Sinai again to receive the revelation that was on the former tablets. So, after asking Moses to *cut out* for himself *two tablets of stone like the*

*former ones*, God further said, *Come up to Me on the mountain, and make an ark of wood for yourself.*

The word “ark” means a “chest,” a strong container made of wood and used for storage. This is the kind of ark the Suzerain God asked Moses to make in order to protect the tablets of stone from any damage or any loss, and to preserve the law in a known place. Moses also reminded the Israelites that he obeyed God’s command and *made an ark of acacia wood and cut out two tablets of stone like the former ones, and went up on the mountain with the two tablets in his hand.* It seems that Moses did not take the ark he had made up onto the mountain.

Likely, the ark Moses made is different than the ark where the tablets were later placed. Exodus describes the ark of the covenant as designed by God in [Exodus 25:9](#), where God tells Moses “According to all that I am going to show you, as the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furniture, just so you shall construct it.” The text then proceeds to describe the blueprint for the ark in the next verse. However this ark was not constructed until [Exodus 37](#), and then it was constructed by skilled workers. In between, the incident of the molten calf takes place in [Exodus 32](#), and the Ten Commandments are rewritten in [Exodus 34](#). So it seems probable that Moses built a temporary ark in which to keep the *two tablets* until the permanent ark was built.

God did as He promised to Moses in verse two. *He wrote on the tablets, like the former writing, the Ten Commandments which the LORD had spoken to Israel.* These commands were spoken directly by God *on the mountain from the midst of the fire on the day of the assembly.* Now the same commands are inscribed on the *two tablets* of stone.

The Suzerain God did not write a different text on the new tablets. He *wrote on the tablets* the same Ten Commandments *that were on the former tablets* which Moses had *shattered*. These were the same words He had *spoken* to the people when He assembled them at the mountain to let them hear His words so that they might learn to fear Him all the days of their lives ([Deuteronomy 4:9-14](#)). So, after writing the same commandments on the new tablets, *the LORD gave the stone tablets to Moses.*

God gave Moses many instructions in addition to the Ten Commandments. It is likely that Moses wrote these down while on the mountain, and much of what we read of the laws and commands for Israel in the Bible came directly from what Moses wrote down there. But the Bible tells us that God

Himself *wrote the Ten Commandments* ([Exodus 31:18](#); [Deuteronomy 4:13](#); [Deuteronomy 9:10](#)). It was given directly to them by their Suzerain God.

We are not told why God wrote these commands onto stone with His own finger, but it seems reasonable to consider that God wanted to convey the enduring nature of His law by writing the law on stone, as well as to emphasize that the law came directly from Him. God is the ultimate lawgiver, and no human has authority to supersede the law of God. Even in the age of grace, after the cross, the Apostle declared that when believers walk in the Spirit, they fulfill the righteous requirement of the law ([Romans 8:4](#)). God's law is His design for human flourishing.

Finally, Moses reminded the people of Israel that he *turned and came down from the mountain and put the tablets in the ark which he had made*. To this point, Moses is recounting an incident that had occurred forty years earlier. Many of the people hearing his voice would have been young or perhaps not yet born during the episode of the molten calf. But now Moses brings his story directly into their experience. At this point he probably pointed to the tabernacle, in which stood the ark containing the Ten Commandments and said *and there they are, as the LORD commanded me*. Moses told the Israelites that the very same *two tablets* of stone containing the Ten Commandments were still in the ark (chest), where he had put them some forty years earlier. He did *as the LORD commanded* him.

### **Biblical Text:**

**“At that time the Lord said to me, ‘Cut out for yourself two tablets of stone like the former ones, and come up to Me on the mountain, and make an ark of wood for yourself. <sup>2</sup>I will write on the tablets the words that were on the former tablets which you shattered, and you shall put them in the ark.’ <sup>3</sup>So I made an ark of acacia wood and cut out two tablets of stone like the former ones, and went up on the mountain with the two tablets in my hand. <sup>4</sup>He wrote on the tablets, like the former writing, the Ten Commandments which the Lord had spoken to you on the mountain from the midst of the fire on the day of the assembly; and the Lord gave them to me. <sup>5</sup>Then I turned and came down from the mountain and put the tablets in the ark which I had made; and there they are, as the Lord commanded me.”**