

Include the Ten Commandments in Liturgy?

Why are Ten Commandments not in liturgy?

Something missing in siddur: The Ten Commandments

-Included in this week’s Torah portion, *Yitro*.

Why? Reason is in Talmud: They were included in Temple service, and recited before Shema, then were removed: [Berachot 12a; Mishna 5:1 in Tamid 32b]

-[The priests in the Temple] used to recite the Ten Commandments [followed by]

-The Shema [Deuteronomy 6:4–9], [and its three] sections:

-“*Vehayya im shamo’a tishm’u el mitzvotai* -- And it shall come to pass if you diligently follow [my commandments]”, [Deuteronomy 11:13–21] and

-“*Vayyomer Hashem el Moshe lemor: dabber el b’nei Yisrael* -- And the Lord said [to Moses saying: Speak to the Children of Israel]”, [Numbers 15:37–41] and

-“*Emet veyatsiv [venachon vekayam]* -- True and certain, [established and enduring]”, and

-The Avodah [Temple service proper, with sacrifices; now replaced by *amidah*], and

-The *birkat kohanim* [priestly blessing]. [Numbers 6:24-26]

-Rav Yehudah said in the name of Shmuel: [The Sages] sought to recite [the Ten Commandments] in this manner even [outside the Temple], but soon abolished them because of the arguments of the *minim* [heretics], [that the Ten Commandments were the only valid part of the Torah.]

-It was taught likewise in a Baraita: Rabbi Nathan said: [Later,] they wished to recite [the Ten Commandments even outside the Temple], but they had already abolished them because of the arguments of the heretics.

-[Later still,] Rabbah bar bar Chanah sought to reinstitute [the recitation of the Ten Commandments] in Sura [a great academy in Babylon], but Rav Chisda said to him: They already abolished their recitation because of the arguments of the heretics.

[Even later,] Amemar sought to reinstitute [the recitation of the Ten Commandments] in Nehardea, but Rav Ashi said to him, They already abolished them because of the arguments of the heretics.

The Jerusalem Talmud echoes this conclusion:

Rav Matana and Ranbi Shmuel bar Nahman said: It would be proper to read the Ten Commandments every day. And why don't we? Because of the zeal of the heretics, lest they say: These alone were given to Moses at Sinai. [Berakhot Y 1:3c]

So: Ten Commandments left out of service for fear that heretics might argue Jews need to observe nothing else.

- They might say: All Israelites received them directly from God at Mount Sinai, while the rest were communicated through Moses, who may have invented them, so they are not binding.

- A midrash [Yalkut Shimoni at Korach 752] has Korach tell Moses: "When the Ten Commandments were given, there was no mention of challah or terumah or tithes or tzitzit. You made this all up yourself."

- These "heretics" may have been Christians, Gnostics, Samaritans, Hellenizers (like Philo), etc.

Were they ever included?

Yes. Evidence:

- Talmud quote above.

- A halachic midrash [Sifrei Devarim 35:2-3] discusses including the Ten Commandments in the tefillin.

- Tefillin found with Dead Sea Scrolls included Ten Commandments (3rd century BCE – 1st century CE).

- Nash papyrus (~150 BCE), has Ten Commandments followed by Shema (found in Egypt in 1898)

Recite them outside services?

Allowed:

- Jews in Fostat, near Cairo, Egypt, in 10th-12th centuries, read the Ten Commandments after services [Jacob Mann, The Jews in Egypt and in Palestine under the Fatimid caliphs I, p 221].

- The Baal Ha-Turim (14th-century Spain): People should say them privately before services.

-Rabbi Joseph Karo (16th-century Israel) [Shulchan Arukh, Orach Hayyim 1:5]: The ban only applies to public recitation during services. They may be said privately after services. They are included for that purpose in many prayerbooks (e.g., Artscroll).

-Rabbi Moshe Isserles (16th-century Poland): One may recite them privately any time, but not in public.

(If they can be recited before and after services, who determines when a service begins or ends?)

Stand while the Ten Commandments are read?

Stand when they are read on Shavuot and when the parsha is Yitro [Exodus 20] or Vaetchanan [Deuteronomy 5]?

Point of dispute:

-Rambam disapproves:

[Some] think that the Torah contains different levels, and some parts are better than others, and this is very bad.

-But most congregations do it.

Should they be reinstated?

1-Yes.

-Does it make sense to eliminate a very important passage for fear that people will think it is the only valid part?

-Isn't it cutting off your nose to spite your face?

2-No.

-The ancient prohibition cannot easily be disposed of.

-Even liberal congregations do not include them in liturgy.

-Services are different from study sessions:

-Services are only for praise, thanks, petition. [Heart.]

-Study sessions are only for analysis and understanding of commandments. [Mind.]

-Since we don't rank commandments, which should be mentioned? All 613?

-Rabbi [Yehudah haNasi] said: Be as scrupulous in observing a [seemingly] minor commandment as a [seemingly] major commandment, because you do not know the value of each commandment. [Pirkei Avot 2:1]

-Tefillin, tzitzit, mezuzah *are* mentioned in liturgy, but they are part of the Shema, which Jews are biblically required to recite twice a day.