



## Deuteronomy - Chapter Five

### **II Deuteronomy 4:44-11:32 - Moses' Second Speech: General Covenant Stipulations (continues)**

#### Summary of Chapter Five

Speaking to all the people, Moses reminds them that the Sinai covenant that God made is not historic but with them, the current generation. He then goes on to repeat the Ten Commandments God had audibly given to the people. These, the Lord wrote on two stone tablets.

The experience of seeing the glory of God and hearing his voice scared the people and so they pleaded with Moses to be the only person to go before God to hear the rest of the law because they feared another personal encounter with God would kill them all. The Lord agreed and wished that the people would truly fear him sufficiently to always follow his statutes.

#### **II.b Deuteronomy 5:1-21 - The Ten Commandments**

As in Exodus Chapters 20-24, the Ten Commandments stand at the head of the law given at Mount Sinai, referred to here as Horeb; refer to Exodus 20:1-17. In many respects, the detailed laws of Deuteronomy Chapters 12-26 follow the general pattern of the Ten Commandments, suggesting that the Ten Commandments function as a summary of God's requirements for his people. All but the Sabbath commandment (vv.12-15) and the commandment against carved images (vv.8-10) are explicitly reinforced in the NT.

<sup>1</sup> Moses convened all Israel, and said to them:

Hear, O Israel, the statutes and ordinances that I am addressing to you today; you shall learn them and observe them diligently.

## Deuteronomy 5:1

Hear, O Israel often introduces new and important sections; refer to Deuteronomy 4:1, 6:4, 9:1 and 20:3. Israel was bound to the covenant that they had agreed to in Exodus 24:1-8, yet the covenant was made with the previous generation which perished in the wilderness. The present generation had to understand and embrace the covenant if they were to enjoy the blessings of the covenant.

The statutes and ordinances covers all the ethical teaching of Deuteronomy.

<sup>2</sup> The Lord our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. <sup>3</sup> Not with our ancestors did the Lord make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive today.

## Deuteronomy 5:2-3

The Lord our God made a covenant. Literally, this is to ‘cut a covenant.’ The idea of ‘cutting’ is associated with covenant because covenants were always sealed with sacrifice, the cutting of a sacrificial victim.

Not with our ancestors, but with us. In reality, the Horeb covenant recorded in Exodus Chapters 19-24 was made with the previous generation. However, generations are conflated to make a rhetorical point: the current generation is just as bound by the covenant at Horeb as their parents were. Refer to the comments made on Deuteronomy 1:20-21 and 1:29-31.

<sup>4</sup> The Lord spoke with you face to face at the mountain, out of the fire.

## Deuteronomy 5:4

This verse demonstrates that the term face to face does not mean ‘literal face to literal face,’ but is a Hebraic figure of speech meaning ‘intimate, free communication.’ Deuteronomy 4:12 specifically says that Israel saw no form; they only heard a voice. Yet they had a remarkably transparent communication with God, so the figure of speech face to face applies. This is why Exodus 33:11a states: <<*Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend*>>, and in Exodus 33:20b the Lord says: <<*you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live*>>. The use of face to face in Exodus 33:11 is a figure of speech, meaning Moses had free and unhindered communication with the Lord.

<sup>5</sup> (At that time I was standing between the Lord and you to declare to you the words of the Lord; for you were afraid because of the fire and did not go up the mountain.) And he said:

## Deuteronomy 5:5

At that time I was standing between the Lord and you. Israel could not bear such free and unhindered communication with the Lord, so they asked Moses to speak to God on their behalf. He was their intercessor: <<*Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring would come to whom the promise had been made; and it was ordained through angels by a mediator*>> (Galatians 3:19).

Although the Cross allows individual Christians to communicate directly with God through prayer, praise and worship, they still have intercessors working on their behalf: <<*And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God*>> (Romans 8:27), and: <<*Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us*>> (Romans 8:34).

You were afraid because of the fire. The fire represented the glory of God. The people were in the presence of God and had heard his voice, thus fearing their mortal bodies would not withstand such an experience and that they would perish.

<sup>6</sup> I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; <sup>7</sup> you shall have no other gods before me.

## Deuteronomy 5:6-7

I am the Lord your God. Before God commanded anything of man, he declared who he was and what he did for Israel, i.e. who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. The foundation was clear: because of whom God is and what he did for his people, he has the right to tell all people what to do, and they have the obligation to obey him, for he created them as David acknowledges: <<*The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it*>> (Psalm 24:1).

The Ten Commandments begin with a statement of a pre-existing relationship with the Lord your God and recognition of his prior action in saving Israel. Obedience to the Ten Commandments and laws in general therefore does not earn the relationship but is a response of faith to God's grace and mercy.

You shall have no other gods before me. The first commandment logically flows from understanding who God is and what he has done for all humankind. Nothing is to come before God and he is the only God anyone should worship and serve. Exclusive worship of the Lord is an obvious corollary of his incomparability: <<*To you it was shown so that you would acknowledge that the Lord is God; there is no other besides him*>> (Deuteronomy 4:35).

The Israelites were not the only monotheists in antiquity. The Egyptian Pharaoh Akhenaton or Amenophis IV, who ruled circa 1350-1334 BC, worshipped the Aton, i.e. the sun god, as the only God. However, this brand of monotheism is distinctly different: the Aton is personified in the sun, and he is impersonal and mechanistic. *Yahweh* is not part of creation; he is personal, ethical, and is in covenant with his people.

In the days of ancient Israel, there was great temptation to worship the gods of materialism, i.e. Baal, the god of weather and financial success, and sex, that is, Ashtoreth, the goddess of sex, romance, and reproduction, or any number of other local deities. There remains a temptation, even among Christians, to worship the same gods, but without the old-fashioned names and images. There are also the gods of wealth, status and power that cause many to stray from God: *<<For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains>> (1 Timothy 6:10).*

The statement: you shall have no other gods before me does not imply that it was permissible to have other gods, as long as they lined up behind the true God. Instead, the idea is that there are to be no other gods before the sight of the true God in a believer's life. Before me is literally, 'to my face.' This means God demands to be more than 'added' to a person's life. Christians do not just add Jesus to the life they already have. They must give him their entire life. Failure to obey this commandment is called idolatry. Christians are to distance themselves from all forms of idolatry: *<<Therefore, my dear friends, flee from the worship of idols>> (1 Corinthians 10:14).* Those lives marked by habitual idolatry will not inherit the Kingdom of God: *<<Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers – none of these will inherit the kingdom of God>> (1 Corinthians 6:9-10), <<But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, the murderers, the fornicators, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all liars, their place will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur, which is the second death>> (Revelation 21:8), and: <<Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practises falsehood>> (Revelation 22:15).* Idolatry is a work of the flesh: *<<Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God>> (Galatians 5:19-21), which marks the old life instead of the new: <<You have already spent enough time in doing what the Gentiles like to do, living in licentiousness, passions, drunkenness, revels, carousing, and lawless idolatry>> (1 Peter 4:3), and true believers are not to associate with those who*

call themselves Christians but who are actually idolaters: <<***But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother or sister who is sexually immoral or greedy, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber. Do not even eat with such a one***>> (1 Corinthians 5:11).

<sup>8</sup> You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. <sup>9</sup> You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and fourth generation of those who reject me, <sup>10</sup> but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

### Deuteronomy 5:8-10

Whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath. In that day as well as today, worship was tied closely with images, idealised images, or even images in the minds of people. God will not allow his people to depict him with any such image, nor replace him with another image. The second commandment did not forbid making an image of something for artistic purposes, such as those painted by Michelangelo. In fact, God himself commanded Israel make images of cherubim as part of the tabernacle: <<***You shall make two cherubim of gold; you shall make them of hammered work, at the two ends of the mercy-seat***>> (Exodus 25:18), and: <<***You shall make a curtain of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and of fine twisted linen; it shall be made with cherubim skilfully worked into it***>> (Exodus 26:31). It forbade the making of images as an 'aid' to worship.



The Creation of Adam is a fresco painting by Michelangelo, which forms part of the Sistine Chapel's ceiling, painted circa AD 1511-1512.

John 4:24 explains the rationale behind the second commandment: *<<God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth>>*. The use of images and other material things as a focus or aid to worship denies who God is, i.e. Spirit, and how Christians must worship him (in spirit and truth). Paul provides a reminder of the futility of trying to make God into one's own image: *<<Claiming to be wise, they became fools; and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles>>* (Romans 1:22-23).

You shall not make for yourself an idol. The second commandment prohibited not only idolatry regarding false gods, it also dealt with making an image of any created thing which one might then worship. The prohibition of images and likenesses derives from the argument of Deuteronomy Chapter 4 that at Horeb God's revelation was audible but not visible.

For I the Lord your God am a jealous God. How can it be said that God is a jealous God? God's jealousy is love in action. He refuses to share the human heart with any rival, not because he is selfish and wants his people all for himself, but because he knows that upon that loyalty to him depends one's very moral life.

Punishing children for the iniquity of parents. This is not God punishing innocent children for up to four generations: *<<Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who maintains covenant loyalty with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations, and who repays in their own person those who reject him. He does not delay but repays in their own person those who reject him>>* (Deuteronomy 7:9-10). Rather, up to four generations of those who hate and reject God may suffer the effects of their ancestors' sins or even continue in the same sins. The focus here is on idolatry, and this refers to judgement on a national scale, nations that forsake the Lord will be judged, and that judgement will have effects throughout generations. Refer also to Exodus 34:6-7. The view that innocent children suffer for their parents' sins is opposed in Jeremiah 31:29-30 and Ezekiel 18:2-4.

But showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me. But contrasts God's treatment of those who hate him with his treatment of those who love him. God's steadfast love far outlasts the effects of sin on subsequent generations.

Those who love me and keep my commandments. Other Scriptures refer to this concept: *<<I said, 'O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments; let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for your servants the people of Israel, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Both I and my family have sinned>>* (Nehemiah

1:5-6), and: <<*I prayed to the Lord my God and made confession, saying, 'Ah, Lord, great and awesome God, keeping covenant and steadfast love with those who love you and keep your commandments, we have sinned and done wrong, acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and ordinances*>> (Daniel 9:4-5).

<sup>11</sup> You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.

### Deuteronomy 5:11

To use the name of the Lord is to utter it as in an oath: <<*Those who choose another god multiply their sorrows; their drink-offerings of blood I will not pour out or take their names upon my lips*>> (Psalm 16:4); wrongful use or when used in vain indicates 'for a worthless purpose,' e.g. deceitfully. This commandment thus prohibits using God's name when making a vow or oath that is intentionally left unfulfilled. It also prohibits perjury, as well as the wrong attribution of character or motive to God, such as in Deuteronomy 1:27.

Jesus communicated the idea of this command in the disciple's prayer, when he taught his disciples to have a regard for the holiness of God's name: <<*Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name*>> (Matthew 6:9). He also taught against swearing oaths: <<*But I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King*>> (Matthew 5:34-35).

For the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name. The strength of this command has led to strange traditions among the Jewish people. Some go to extreme lengths in attempting to fulfil this command, refusing to even write out the name of God, in the fear that the paper might be destroyed and the name of God be written in vain, or that they may sin if they misspell it accidentally.

<sup>12</sup> Observe the sabbath day and keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. <sup>13</sup> For six days you shall labour and do all your work.

<sup>14</sup> But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work — you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns, so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you.

### Deuteronomy 5:12-14

Observe the sabbath day and keep it holy. This is an important principle that might be too easily passed over. Here God declared the essential humanity and

dignity of women, slaves, and strangers, and said they had the same right to a day of rest as the free Israeli man. This was certainly a radical concept in the ancient world.

Sabbath rest also applies to domestic animals and to the resident alien in your towns, i.e. foreigners who take up permanent residence in Israel and accept its rules but cannot own land. The principle of caring for foreigners is underscored by the fact that the Hebrews, although initially welcomed into Egypt, had become slaves and knew what it was like to be mistreated. They were not to act in the same way towards others.

Keep it holy. In their traditions, the Jewish people came to carefully quantify what they thought could and could not be done on the Sabbath day, in order to keep it holy. For example, in Luke 6:1-2, in the mind of the Jewish leaders, the disciples were guilty of four violations of the Sabbath every time they took a bite of grain out in the field because they reaped, threshed, winnowed, and prepared food. Jesus refutes their beliefs: <<*Then he said to them, 'The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath'*>> (Mark 2:27-28).

Ancient Rabbis taught that on the Sabbath, a man could not carry something in his right hand or in his left hand, across his chest or on his shoulder. However, he could carry something with the back of his hand, his foot, his elbow, or in his ear, his hair, or in the hem of his shirt, or in his shoe or sandal. Or, on the Sabbath, Israelites were forbidden to tie a knot except a woman could tie a knot in her girdle. So, if a bucket of water had to be raised from a well, an Israelite could not tie a rope to the bucket, but a woman could tie her girdle to the bucket and pull it up from the well. In observant Jewish homes today, one cannot turn on a light, a stove, or a switch on the Sabbath. It is forbidden to drive a certain distance or to make a telephone call, all carefully regulated by traditions seeking to spell out the law exactly.

You shall not do any work. The work prohibited is not defined here; refer to Exodus 34:21 and 35:3, and Numbers 15:32-36 for some of the things God actually prohibited on the Sabbath.

<sup>15</sup> Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day.

### Deuteronomy 5:15

Unlike the parallel in Exodus 20:11, which presents Sabbath keeping as imitating God's rest after the creation in Genesis 2:1-3, the motivation for the Sabbath rest

here is Israel's liberation from slavery. This is confirmed by Exodus 31:12-17, which brings together the themes of creation and Israel as God's special covenant people as the grounds for Sabbath observance.

Israel is frequently urged in Deuteronomy to remember their slavery in the land of Egypt as a spur to keeping the law. Remembering is often linked to obedience.

God established the pattern for the Sabbath at the time of creation. When he rested from his works on the seventh day, God made the seventh day a day of rest from all work: <<*So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation*>> (Genesis 2:3). However, the most important purpose of the Sabbath was to serve as a shadow of the rest Christians now have in Jesus. Some claim that Christians are required to keep the Sabbath today and traditionally this has become the first day of the week Sunday rather than the Jewish Sabbath on Saturday. The NT makes it clear, however, that Christians are not under obligation to observe a Sabbath day: <<*Now, however, that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and beggarly elemental spirits? How can you want to be enslaved to them again? You are observing special days, and months, and seasons, and years. I am afraid that my work for you may have been wasted*>> (Galatians 4:9-11), and: <<*Therefore do not let anyone condemn you in matters of food and drink or of observing festivals, new moons, or sabbaths. These are only a shadow of what is to come, but the substance belongs to Christ*>> (Colossians 2:16-17), because Jesus fulfilled the purpose and plan of the Sabbath for believers and in them: <<*So then, a sabbath rest still remains for the people of God; for those who enter God's rest also cease from their labours as God did from his. Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one may fall through such disobedience as theirs*>> (Hebrews 4:9-11). Galatians 4:10 reveals that Christians are not bound to observe days and months and seasons and years. The rest they enter into as Christians is something to experience every day, not just one day a week, the rest of knowing they do not have to work to save themselves, but that their salvation is accomplished in Jesus.

The Sabbath commanded here and observed by Israel was a shadow of things to come. Christians have rest in Jesus that is theirs to live each day. Therefore, since the shadow of the Sabbath is fulfilled in Jesus, Christians are free to keep any day, or no day, as a Sabbath after the custom of ancient Israel. However, although they are free from the legal obligation of the Sabbath, they dare not ignore the importance of a day of rest, God has designed people, and indeed most living things, so that they need one. Like a car that needs regular maintenance, people need regular rest, or they will not 'wear' well. Some people are like high mileage cars that have not been maintained well, and it shows. Some Christians are also dogmatic about observing Saturday as the

Sabbath as opposed to Sunday. However, because they are free to regard all days as given to God, it makes no difference. But in some ways, Sunday is more appropriate; being the day Jesus rose from the dead: <<Now after he rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons>> (Mark 16:9), and first met with his disciples: <<When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you'>> (John 20:19), a day when the first Christians gathered for fellowship so as not to violate Jewish laws and thus antagonise their fellow Jews: <<On the first day of the week, when we met to break bread, Paul was holding a discussion with them; since he intended to leave the next day, he continued speaking until midnight>> (Acts 20:7), and: <<On the first day of every week, each of you is to put aside and save whatever extra you earn, so that collections need not be taken when I come>> (1 Corinthians 16:2).

Under law, men worked towards God's rest; but after Jesus' finished work on the Cross, the believer enters into rest and goes from that rest out to work. Christians do not work for their salvation but should undertake such work because of their faith: <<We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labour of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ>> (1 Thessalonians 1:2-3), <<To this end we always pray for you, asking that our God will make you worthy of his call and will fulfil by his power every good resolve and work of faith>> (2 Thessalonians 1:11), and: <<But someone will say, 'You have faith and I have works.' Show me your faith without works, and I by my works will show you my faith>> (James 2:18).

<sup>16</sup> Honour your father and your mother, as the Lord your God commanded you, so that your days may be long and that it may go well with you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

### Deuteronomy 5:16

Honour your father and your mother. Honour for fathers and mothers is an essential building block for the stability and health of all society. If the younger generations are constantly at war with older generations, the foundations of society will be destroyed. Jesus used the way the Pharisees interpreted this commandment as an example of how one might keep the law with a limited interpretation, yet violate the spirit of the commandment: <<He answered them, 'And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? For God said, "Honour your father and your mother," and, "Whoever speaks evil of father or mother must surely die." But you say that whoever tells father or mother, "Whatever support you might have had from

*me is given to God”, then that person need not honour the father. So, for the sake of your tradition, you make void the word of God>> (Matthew 15:3-6).*

So that your days may be long. This did not merely mean a long life, but one that experienced God’s presence and favour: that it may go well with you: <<My child, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments; for length of days and years of life and abundant welfare they will give you>> (Proverbs 3:1-2). This motivation is absent in Exodus 20:12. In Ephesians 6:2 Paul repeated this command: <<‘Honour your father and mother’ – *this is the first commandment with a promise*>>, emphasising the promise stated here: that your days may be long in the land. Rebellion is costly, and many have paid a high price personally for their rebellion against their parents.

<sup>17</sup> You shall not murder.

### Deuteronomy 5:17

You shall not murder. The verb used here, Hebrew *ratsakh*, includes both the unlawful or immoral killing of another human being, the specific meaning of the English word ‘murder’, and also causing the death of another human being through careless or negligent behaviour, as in Numbers 35:22-25 and Deuteronomy 19:4-6. This verb is never used in the OT of killing in war. The exact opposite of murder is commanded in Leviticus 19:18b: <<*You shall love your neighbour as yourself*>>.

Some wonder how God can approve both capital punishment: <<*You shall set limits for the people all around, saying, “Be careful not to go up the mountain or to touch the edge of it. Any who touch the mountain shall be put to death”*>> (Exodus 19:12), and this prohibition of murder. The simple answer is that in Hebrew as well as English, there is a distinction between to kill and to murder. As opposed to killing, murder is the taking of life without legal justification, i.e. execution after due process of law, or moral justification such as killing in defence of oneself or another person, or even in the protection of property. Jesus carefully explained the heart of this commandment. He showed that it also prohibits Christians from hating someone else (Matthew 5:21-26), because they can wish someone dead in their hearts, yet never have the courage to commit the deed. Someone may not kill from a lack of courage or initiative, even though his or her heart is filled with hatred. God still sees this as an act of murder.

<sup>18</sup> Neither shall you commit adultery.

### Deuteronomy 5:18

Neither shall you commit adultery. This specific prohibition is against having sexual relations with a person who is married to someone else, but it implies a broader concern for sexual purity shown in the detailed laws about other kinds of

sexual sin; refer to Deuteronomy 21:10-23:14. Both v.21 below and Matthew 5:28 show that God was concerned not only with outward conformity to this law but also with purity of heart.

The NT clearly condemns adultery. But more than the act itself, Jesus carefully explained the heart of this commandment. It prohibits Christians from looking at a woman to lust for her, which is to commit adultery in the heart or mind, even though they may never actually commit the act (Matthew 5:27-30). They are not innocent just because they did not have the opportunity to sin the way they really wanted to.

<sup>19</sup> Neither shall you steal.

### Deuteronomy 5:19

**Neither shall you steal.** This command is another important foundation for human society, establishing the right to personal property. God has clearly entrusted certain possessions to certain individuals, and other people or states are not permitted to take that property without due process of law. This command requires each Israelite to respect a neighbour's property thus promoting honest labour as the means of earning wealth. A right to personal ownership of property is implied: the obligation not to steal a neighbour's animal (v.21) indicates that the neighbour has a right to keep the animal as personal property.

People can and do steal from God. Of course, this demands believers honour God by giving a proportion of their financial resources to the church, so they do not become guilty of robbing him (Malachi 3:8-10). This thought should be tempered with the words of Paul: *<<For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has – not according to what one does not have>>* (2 Corinthians 8:12), and that the offering: *<<may be ready as a voluntary gift and not as an extortion>>* (2 Corinthians 9:5b). Christians can also rob God by refusing to give him their obedience to his service, because he bought them and owns them: *<<For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body>>* (1 Corinthians 6:20), and: *<<You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish>>* (1 Peter 1:18-19). Paul gives the solution to stealing: *<<Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labour and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy>>* (Ephesians 4:28).

<sup>20</sup> Neither shall you bear false witness against your neighbour.

## Deuteronomy 5:20

Neither shall you bear false witness against your neighbour. Bearing witness suggests a legal trial in which false testimony could lead to punishment for the neighbour, so the command prohibits a deliberate and malicious lie. For detailed laws concerning false witness, refer to Deuteronomy 19:16-21 and 25:1-16; for a more general directive about truth-telling, refer to Leviticus 19:11.

The ninth commandment can be broken through slander, tale-telling, creating false impressions, by silence, by questioning the motives behind someone's actions, or even by flattery.

<sup>21</sup> Neither shall you covet your neighbour's wife. Neither shall you desire your neighbour's house, or field, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour.

## Deuteronomy 5:21

Neither shall you covet your neighbour's wife. Unlike the parallel in Exodus 20:17, the neighbour's wife is listed first, setting her apart as no mere possession. God requires purity of heart with regard to the seventh (v.18) and the tenth commandments, and, by implication, all ten; refer to Matthew 5:21-30.

All the first nine commands focus more on things a person does; the tenth deals straight with the heart and its desires. Literally, the word for covet here means 'to pant after.' Covetousness works like this: the eyes look upon an object, the mind admires it, the will goes over to it, and the body moves in to possess it. Just because a person has not taken the final step does not mean they are not in the process of coveting.

Covetousness can be expressed towards all sorts of things; it is the itch to have and to possess what someone else has. It speaks of a dissatisfaction with what one has, and a jealousy towards those who have something apparently better. Hebrews 13:5 puts it well: <<*Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, 'I will never leave you or forsake you'*>>.

This last commandment is closely connected with the first commandment against idolatry: <<*Be sure of this, that no fornicator or impure person, or one who is greedy (that is, an idolater), has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God*>> (Ephesians 5:5). Jesus gave a special warning about covetousness, which explained the core philosophy of the covetous heart: <<*And he said to them, 'Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions'*>> (Luke 12:15).

## II.c Deuteronomy 5:22-33 - Moses the Mediator of God's Will

Having heard the Ten Commandments audibly, Israel fears continuing to hear the Lord's voice and requests Moses to relay to them all the following laws, a request to which the Lord consents.

<sup>22</sup> These words the Lord spoke with a loud voice to your whole assembly at the mountain, out of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness, and he added no more. He wrote them on two stone tablets, and gave them to me.

### Deuteronomy 5:22

These words the Lord spoke with a loud voice to your whole assembly at the mountain, out of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness. The whole scene was indeed awesome: The Lord spoke; there was fire, a cloud, thick darkness, a loud voice; and it all made such an impression on Israel that they asked Moses to not have God speak to them so directly any more.

It is possible that each of the two stone tablets contained the full Ten Commandments, following ancient Near Eastern treaty practice. Both copies were later placed inside the Ark of the Covenant. The remainder of Israel's law was written by Moses in a book and kept beside the ark: <<*When Moses had finished writing down in a book the words of this law to the very end, Moses commanded the Levites who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord, saying, 'Take this book of the law and put it beside the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God; let it remain there as a witness against you'*>> (Deuteronomy 31:24-26).

<sup>23</sup> When you heard the voice out of the darkness, while the mountain was burning with fire, you approached me, all the heads of your tribes and your elders; <sup>24</sup> and you said, 'Look, the Lord our God has shown us his glory and greatness, and we have heard his voice out of the fire. Today we have seen that God may speak to someone and the person may still live. <sup>25</sup> So now why should we die? For this great fire will consume us; if we hear the voice of the Lord our God any longer, we shall die. <sup>26</sup> For who is there of all flesh that has heard the voice of the living God speaking out of fire, as we have, and remained alive? <sup>27</sup> Go near, you yourself, and hear all that the Lord our God will say. Then tell us everything that the Lord our God tells you, and we will listen and do it.'

### Deuteronomy 5:23-27

So now why should we die? For this great fire will consume us; if we hear the voice of the Lord our God any longer, we shall die makes it plain. The Mount Sinai experience was not one of sweet fellowship with God. The message of Mount Sinai was not ‘come unto me,’ but ‘stay away, for I am holy and you are not.’ This is exactly the message of the writer to the Hebrews in Hebrews 12:18-24: Christians, under the New Covenant, have not come to Mount Sinai and the message ‘stay away’; they have come to Mount Zion, where God’s message is ‘come unto me.’

We will listen and do it. Israel’s fear at hearing God’s voice is accompanied by their pledge of obedience. Israel was far too confident in their ability to keep the law of God. Their experience at Mount Sinai convinced them of God’s glory, but not of their own corruption and inability.

<sup>28</sup> The Lord heard your words when you spoke to me, and the Lord said to me: ‘I have heard the words of this people, which they have spoken to you; they are right in all that they have spoken. <sup>29</sup> If only they had such a mind as this, to fear me and to keep all my commandments always, so that it might go well with them and with their children for ever! <sup>30</sup> Go, say to them, “Return to your tents.” <sup>31</sup> But you, stand here by me, and I will tell you all the commandments, the statutes and the ordinances, that you shall teach them, so that they may do them in the land that I am giving them to possess.’

### Deuteronomy 5:28-31

They are right in all that they have spoken. God was pleased with Israel’s response. Their response was evidence that they took him seriously.

If only they had such a mind as this. The feeling is that God liked what he saw in Israel, but hoped, to use a figure of speech, because God does not ‘hope’ for things the way people do, that they would keep the same attitude of heart. In fact, Israel did not keep this heart; not forty days later they danced in worship around a golden calf.

God’s wish is that their holy and appropriate fear at the theophany of Horeb would become a permanent fear of the Lord in their hearts.

So that it might go well with them and with their children for ever! This is God’s motive in calling for obedience that it might be well with those who are obedient to him: <<*So now, Israel, give heed to the statutes and ordinances that I am teaching you to observe, so that you may live to enter and occupy the land that the Lord, the God of your ancestors, is giving you*>> (Deuteronomy 4:1).

Every command of God is rooted in love for his people, not some obsessive desire for control, or mean-spirited attitude towards them.

**But you, stand here by me, and I will tell you all the commandments.** Although the people had suggested that Moses be their intercessor with God, here the Lord shows that it was his decision that Moses alone should receive the law and then pass it on to the nation.

<sup>32</sup> You must therefore be careful to do as the Lord your God has commanded you; you shall not turn to the right or to the left. <sup>33</sup> You must follow exactly the path that the Lord your God has commanded you, so that you may live, and that it may go well with you, and that you may live long in the land that you are to possess.

### **Deuteronomy 5:32-33**

**You must therefore be careful to do as the Lord your God has commanded you.** Knowing the glory of God, as revealed at Mount Sinai, and the love of God, as revealed by his longing **that it may go well with** them, gave them all the more reason to obey God. When people have trouble obeying God, they are clearly lacking in one or both of these areas. Either they forget his glory or forget his love for them, or they forget both of them.

**You shall not turn to the right or to the left.** God's way is likened to a straight path: <<*With weeping they shall come, and with consolations I will lead them back, I will let them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they shall not stumble; for I have become a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn*>> (Jeremiah 31:9), <<*But Saul, also known as Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, 'You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord?'*>> (Acts 13:9-10).